

“Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise from the ends of the earth.”

The Lord would send His judgment upon Judah, but it would not end there. When the Lord unleashes “Law,” whether it is on their heads or ours, this is only His “alien” work. He does it so that we will receive His “proper” work, the Gospel of forgiveness and salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Do a little extra reading today: go back and read Isaiah 42:1-4. Clearly this chapter is a prophecy of Christ! And as His salvation is revealed, His praises are sung well beyond the borders of Israel.

We are now 13 days out from Easter. We have heard the good news of the death and resurrection of our Lord, and the promise this gives us that we are loved by God, made faithful and forgiven by Him, and able to look forward to the everlasting life that Christ has won for us. The Law has been fulfilled, kept perfectly for us by Jesus. And we now live in a freedom that goes beyond what even the faithful in the Old Testament knew. So then, sing to the Lord a new song. Declare His saving mercies “from the ends of the earth.” And may God use our praises so that many others would know the salvation of Christ in which we live.

We pray: Most merciful heavenly Father, we thank and praise You that You have given us eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus. Grant that the words of our mouths and the actions of our lives would so clearly praise You, that others would be drawn to Christ also. Amen.

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The Calendar

April 7	Lent 5—Judica
April 14	Lent 6-Palmarum
April 18	<i>Maundy Thursday</i>
April 19	<i>Good Friday</i>
April 21	Easter—The Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord
April 25 (R)	<i>St. Mark, Evangelist</i>
April 28	Easter 1—Quasimodogeniti
May 1 (W)	<i>St. Philip and St. James, Apostles</i>

2019 SYNOD AND COLLOQUIUM

The annual Synod and Colloquium are scheduled to last from Tuesday, April 30, through the morning of Friday, May 3. The diocese will meet for synod at Salem Lutheran Church in Malone, Texas. Among the items under consideration are improvements to the Theses on Justification, scheduling of pastoral care for Faith Lutheran Church (Beaverton, Oregon), discussion of the curriculum for St. Ignatius Lutheran Theological Seminary, work on devotions for *The Lutheran Herald*, and discussion of plans for further work on the Church Order for our diocese.

The Colloquium is, by tradition, a ‘free conference,’ offering theological papers and presentations on topics edifying to Church.

The Colloquium and portions of the Synod are open to laity and non-ELDoNA clergy, as approved by the bishop. Those who wish to attend should send their request by email to “info@eldona.org”.

FRIDAY, MAY 3: ISAIAH 33:2-6

QUASIMODOGENITI

“O Lord, be gracious to us; we have waited for You. Be their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble.”

Judah had fallen into a horrific error. Call it “ex opere operato,” the doctrine that God’s saving gifts work “automatically” according to man’s sinful assumptions, rather than according to His Word and will. The sons of Judah seemed to believe that, because the ark of the covenant was in the temple in Jerusalem, God would never let Judah fall. Isaiah spends no small amount of effort to tell them that not only can they fall, but on account of their impenitence, they will fall.

When the calamity arrives, of course, it will befall all of Jerusalem, the repentant and the unrepentant alike. In such days the faithful wait. They implore the Lord to be gracious; they lean on Him for salvation in the time of trouble.

Might God judge our nation? Who can possibly imagine that the nation does not deserve it? And in the day of a national calamity, will we resent that we too must suffer? Will we cry out, “Oh God, that’s not fair!”? Be careful of that; what if He were “fair”? Wait for the Lord. He will be gracious to you. He will be your salvation in the time of trouble.

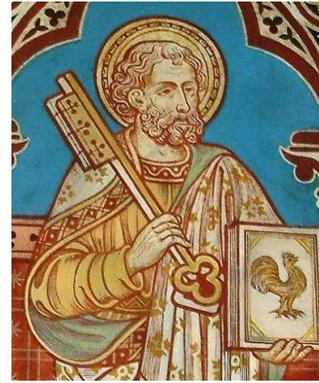
We pray: Oh Lord, we give You thanks that You have punished neither us, nor our nation as we deserve. When Your judgments do come, grant us grace to trust in the salvation You have given us in Christ Jesus, our crucified and risen Savior. Amen.

“Then the Lord said, ‘Is it right for you to be angry?’”

Jonah had a problem. He had prophesied destruction on Nineveh, but the people repented, and the destruction did not happen. Hear his own words: “I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness ... Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me!” Jonah had never really wanted to go to Nineveh. He didn’t want to preach the Gospel to them; and he didn’t want them to be saved. Now they were, and he was so angry about it that he wishes death on himself. God’s final words to him are, “Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons ... ?”

Did Jonah ever get over himself and learn to care about all those people? We do not really know. Why not? Because that is not the question. The question is, “Will you?” We are all tempted to be very egocentric. Repent of that. The Lord has saved us by the blood of Jesus and laid a world full of people before us who need that salvation every bit as much as we do. God grant us not only to live in the joy of Easter, but to speak those joys to others who do not yet know them.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks that You pitied us and gave Yourself over to death and resurrection for our salvation. Fill our hearts with such gratitude that we in turn pity others, and so speak of Your saving mercies to them. Amen.



Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” (John 20)

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

Lent is quickly drawing to a close. The solemnities of Holy Week and the celebration of the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord will soon be observed again with all the joys which attend that Holy Day. But as we know each Lord’s Day to be a ‘little Easter,’ it would be good for us to remember why that is so.

The Gospel for the first Sunday after Easter, *Quasimodogeniti*, sets forth events both on the Day of the Resurrection and on the Sunday which followed. Thus we read in John 20:

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side.

Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

The Gospel thus presents us with the Lord’s institution of the apostolic office and the calling of the disciples to that ministry wherein they would preach the Gospel and bind and loose sins. But St. Thomas was not present with them, and thus when the apostles began to fulfill

their ministry, St. Thomas chafed at their word: “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” The Lord rebuked this failure to believe that which the apostles proclaimed: “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

I believe that Thomas thought too much concerning the men who proclaimed the Word; he thought of Peter’s denials, James’ and John’s self-promotion, and all of the petty, sinful things which he and his brethren had done throughout the years. He still saw the men, and not the office.

This is a temptation for pastors and laity today. Pastors may think of their lives—their personal hopes and fears, their desire for security, their pride. So, too, laymen are tempted to judge by human criteria, as if the calling and worth of their pastor had anything to do with their popularity, winsomeness, social graces, etc. In short, all are tempted to dwell too much on the man *in* the office, rather than on the work *of* the office.

The pastor preaches the Word of God, administers the Holy Sacraments, and exercises the Office of the Keys not according to the will of men but according to the calling of the Lord through His Church. As we read in our Augsburg Confession: “This power [the power of the keys] is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, according to the calling, either to many or to individuals. For thereby are granted, not bodily, but eternal things, as eternal righteousness, the Holy Ghost, eternal life. These things cannot come but by the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments.” (AC XXVIII:8)

It is easy for laymen to become overly concerned with the person of the pastor; it is easy for the pastor to become overly concerned with his personal needs. In all these things, the man is subordinate to the calling of the Lord. Thus, Thomas was not to hear Peter, the fisherman: he was to heed the word of the Apostle of the Lord. The ministry is according to the Lord’s calling, and the doctrine which is proclaimed is that which is in God’s Word—without addition or subtraction. The work is Christ’s, and the fruit is His, as well.

Yours in Christ, Bishop Heiser

“Then God saw ... that they turned from their evil way; and God relented.”

Jonah had prophesied, according to the Word of the Lord, “yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” Not “might be,” but “will be.” Getting “overthrown” usually meant defeat by a foreign army. And there was no “Geneva Convention.” Having your city overrun by a foreign power in those days was a horror of such proportions that we can scarcely imagine it. But they repented! And what happened? God saw, and relented. He beheld these repentant Ninevites, and in view of their repentance, He withdrew the impending punishment.

Why, when He had said “shall be overthrown,” did He not follow through? The answer, of course, is that even when such a statement is made in the absolute, there can be an implied conditional. Where there is genuine repentance, God will show mercy.

For you, and for those you speak to, remember: when people repent and trust in Christ, God is always desiring to be merciful. So many people forget that God sincerely wants to forgive. You cannot be more Godless than a Ninevite. But neither can you sin a sin “bigger” than our Lord’s sacrifice on the cross. Therefore, be repentant, and ever be rejoicing that Jesus’ death and resurrection count for you.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Yourself into death to atone for my sins and rose again that I might be justified through faith in You, forgive my sins, strengthen my faith, and embolden me to speak Your saving name before men. Amen.

“Then I said, ‘I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.’”

Jonah is in the belly of a fish! What a frightful state to be in! And it was his own fault. Against Jonah’s defiance, the Lord places some hardship in his life. Jonah responds in repentance. “I have been cast out of your sight” means the Lord has visited “Law” upon his head; “Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple” means Jonah repents. And the Lord is merciful.

We too have hardships in our lives. Sometimes, those hardships are our own fault. The consequences of our own sins catch up with us. Other times, the fallenness of this world hits us: we get sick, or we are stolen from, or we get in a car wreck and it’s “the other guy’s fault.” The devil would use such things to harden you, to turn you from the Lord. The Lord would use these circumstances, not so much to punish, but as gifts, as drastic mercies, urging you to “look again toward Your holy” Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear ones in Christ, do not say “why me?” Hardship befalls everyone, whether it’s our fault or just a consequence of life in this fallen world. What matters is that we respond faithfully: turn again to Christ, and seek His mercies. Do so with the confidence that He will indeed be merciful to you.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, in the day of trouble and in the hour of our death, let not our hearts be turned from You. Rather, grant us Your Holy Spirit, that we may cling steadfastly to Christ Jesus our Savior, and so receive from You manifold deliverances from evil. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Judica Sunday

Chapter VI. Of the Third Use of the Law.

1. We believe, teach and confess that although men rightly believing and truly converted to God have been freed and exempted from the curse and coercion of the Law, they nevertheless are not on this account without Law, but have been redeemed by the Son of God, in order that they should exercise themselves in it day and night, (Ps. 119). For even our first parents before the fall did not live without Law, which Law of God was also written upon their hearts, because they were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26sq.; 2:16 sqq.; 3:3).

2. We believe, teach and confess that the preaching of the Law is to be urged with diligence, not only upon the unbelieving and impenitent, but also upon the rightly believing, truly converted, regenerate, and justified by faith.

3. For although they are regenerate and renewed in the spirit of their mind, yet, in the present life, this regeneration and renewal are not complete, but are only begun, and believers are, in the spirit of their mind, in a constant struggle against the flesh, i.e. against the corrupt nature and disposition which cleaves to us unto death. On account of this old Adam, which still inheres in the understanding, will and all the powers of man, it is needful that the Law of the Lord always shine upon the way before him, in order that he may do nothing from self-imposed human devotion; likewise, that the old Adam also may not employ his own will, but may be subdued against his will, not only by the admonition and threatening of the Law, but also by punishments and blows, so that he may follow and surrender himself captive to the Spirit (1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 6:12; Gal. 6:14; Ps. 119:1 sqq.; Heb. 13:21).

4. Then as to the distinction between the works of the Law and the fruits of the Spirit, we believe, teach and confess that the works which are done according to the Law, as long as they are and are called works of the Law, are only extorted from man by the force of punishment and the threatening of God’s wrath.

5. But the fruits of the Spirit are the works which the Spirit of God who dwells in believers works through the regenerate, and are done by believers so far as they are regenerate [spontaneously and freely], as though they knew of no command, threat or reward; for in this manner the children of God live in the Law and walk according to the Law of God, a manner which St. Paul, in his Epistles, calls the Law of Christ and the Law of the mind (Rom. 7:25; 8:7).

6. Thus the Law is and remains both to the penitent and impenitent, both to regenerate and unregenerate men, one and the same Law, namely, the immutable will of God; and the distinction, so far as it concerns obedience, is alone in the men, inasmuch as one who is not yet regenerate does what is required him by the Law out of constraint and unwillingly (as also the regenerate do according to the flesh); but the believer, so far as he is regenerate, without constraint and with a willing spirit, does that which no threatening of the Law could ever extort from him.

“Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man!” With these words, yesterday’s Introit (from Psalm 43) introduced the two weeks known as Passiontide. Our focus is now turned more dramatically toward what our Lord will suffer. Yet, in so turning, we are forced into deeper introspection. When we see our Lord’s suffering we must echo Jesus’ word from the cross: “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Him?” Or, as Johann Heermann has taught us to sing this thought: “O, dearest Jesus, what law hast Thou broken?” (TLH #143).

Why was the Christ forsaken? The Lord says through Jeremiah, “My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit...My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.” Jesus was forsaken by God because Man forsook God. He was forsaken because the “People of God” in the Old Testament (the outward institution that was known as Israel) forsook God. He was forsaken because that which looks like the Church to the human eye (and within which the true Church is hidden) has so often forsaken God. And He was forsaken because even the flesh of Christians often turns against Him, against whatever in His Word pricks the conscience. “It is my sins for which Thou, Lord, must languish!” (TLH #143).

We pray: O Lord we suffer because we lack perfect fear, love, and trust in You. Grant, for Jesus’ sake, that our own wickedness and backslidings will indeed serve to rebuke and correct us, that we may see such sin as evil and bitter and be turned from it to faith in Christ as our only remedy. Amen.

“But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”

The Lord had called Jonah to preach repentance in Nineveh. Nineveh was not an Israelite city; it was the capital city of Assyria, a very feared and hated nemesis nation to Israel. So when the Lord calls Jonah to go preach to the people of Nineveh, Jonah hops on a boat headed for Tarshish.

We know what happened: the storm, the getting thrown overboard, the being swallowed by a great fish. Jonah “arose to flee ... from the presence of the Lord.” Read Psalm 139:7-12. Jonah should have. You cannot “flee from the presence of the Lord.”

What has the Lord called you to do? Turn to the table of duties: some are pastors, others are laymen. We are parents or children, husbands or wives, workers or bosses, rulers or ruled ones. Whatever the calling that the Lord has placed upon you, do not run from it or resist it. Rather, as He has sacrificed His Son for you, give yourself over in wholehearted devotion to your calling. Be about doing what the Lord has entrusted you to do. Indeed, rejoice in that calling, and as the redeemed of the Lord, know that you are ever in the presence of the Lord. He both sees and corrects our errors, and forgives our many sins, through Christ our Lord.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks that You have saved us, and further honored us with opportunities to serve You. Strengthen me that I may serve you faithfully this day. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Quasimodogeniti Sunday

Article V.

That we may obtain this faith, the Office of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justified those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others, who think that the Holy Ghost cometh to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

Article XXV.

Confession in our churches is not abolished; for it is not usual to give the Body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are most carefully taught concerning the faith and assurance of absolution, about which, before this time, there was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by His command. The power of the Keys is commended, and we show what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences; that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from Heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.

Aforetime, satisfactions were immoderately extolled; of faith and the merit of Christ, and the righteousness of faith, no mention was made; wherefore, on this point, our churches are by no means to be blamed. For this even our adversaries must needs concede to us, that the doctrine concerning repentance has been most diligently treated and laid open by our teachers.

But of Confession, they teach, that an enumeration of sins is not necessary, and that consciences be not burdened with anxiety to enumerate all sins, for it is impossible to recount all sins, as the Psalm testifies [19:13]: "Who can understand his errors?" Also Jeremiah [17:9]: "The heart is deceitful, who can know it?" But if no sins were forgiven, except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see, nor can remember.

—The Augsburg Confession

TUESDAY, APRIL 9: HOSEA 13:9-14

JUDICA

"Judge me, O God!" This cry from the Introit for Judica causes one who ponders God's Law to tremble as it is sung. There is none but Christ who could utter such a thing in an absolute sense!

"Deceitful," "unjust," and "ungodly" are all things that were true of us from the very moment of our conception, as King David would confess with us in Psalm 51:5! Worse, this is no excuse for the fact that our flesh still tends toward these things, deceiving itself and seeking to deceive the new man that the unrighteous things it desires will no longer offend God. So it is, as St. Paul details in Romans 7, that there is a war within our members. Were it not for the death of Christ—and the resurrection that proves His death completed the payment for sin—we would indeed be the most pitiable of all creatures because of this battle between the Old Adam and the new creation in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:19)!

Yet, we make this plea for judgment and we make it boldly. We do so because what we were and what our flesh so often desires is not who we now are. Rather, we are the true Israel of the New Testament (Galatians 6:14-16), to whom God speaks through Hosea: "O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from Me." He pledges to be our King and to save us, ransoming and restoring us from our place of rebellious wandering.

We pray: Heavenly Father, You promised to ransom us from the power of the grave, from our selling ourselves into death. We give thanks that You show no pity toward these, but are, through Christ, their plague and destruction for the sake of us sinners! Amen.

“Judge me, O God”?

“Woe to her...she has not obeyed His voice...not received correction...not trusted in the Lord...not drawn near to her God.” How often the outward appearance of the Church disappoints! It is glorious neither by the standards of the world, nor by the Law of God.

Cisterns are built that don't hold water, and the Fountain of Living Water is deemed “not enough” (Jeremiah 2:11–13). Rules for holy living and gimmicks for filling church pews (or auditorium seats) abound. The poor-looking things that “don't make good common sense”—pouring a bit of water, small tastes of bread and wine—are tossed aside for more appealing things, as if the Sacraments were neither commanded in God's Word nor had His promise attached to them.

Those who downplay the command and promise of the Sacraments might just as well deny them; such teachers are far more dangerous than those who do. They give lip service to the Gospel and Sacraments. By refusing to adorn worship appropriately in the liturgy, or by trivializing the Sacraments in giving the body and blood of Jesus to those “who know not what they seek or why they come” (Large Catechism, Lord's Supper, 2), or who are not “agreed with one another in the doctrine and all its articles” (Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, X:31), they set Christ lambs at risk. They substitute human inventions for the means through which God brings us near and causes us to trust, thus keeping us from receiving correction and forgiveness for not harkening to His voice.

We pray: Grant, Lord, that we do no violence to Your Law, but, seeing its severity, hasten to You for instruction in the Gospel of Christ—and the sacramental application of the same! Amen.

“Remember these, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are My servant; I have formed you, you are My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me! I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.”

Throughout the entire Old Testament the Lord, through His prophets, told His people He would redeem them from sin, death, and Satan. With all these Old Testament reminders of the faithfulness of the Holy Triune God, you and I will listen to Jesus' Word to His people on this coming Sunday, “Peace to you,” with the ears of faith (John 20:21). He is with us. He has been with us, and will continue to be with us, in Word and Sacrament and He says, “Peace to you.”

In John 20:29 Jesus says to us who have celebrated the joyous festival of Easter, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” John then goes on to say, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” By His grace in Word and Sacrament you and I, indeed, have been given faith, and we do believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and we do have life in His Name.

We pray: Grant, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In all of our Old Testament texts this week we have heard prophecies of the coming Messiah and the establishment of God's Kingdom—the Church. Again today this is illustrated to us by the imagery of the highest, tenderest branch of a high cedar. The Lord will crop it off, He will plant it on a high and prominent mountain, and it will bring forth fruit. In every one of our readings the Lord promised His Old Testament people that this Church—His Kingdom--would not fail. It would not fail because He is doing it.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Thy Kingdom come." In Luther's explanation of this petition in the Small Catechism he says, "The Kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also... God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that... we believe His holy Word..." We go on to pray, "Thy will be done." Luther says: "The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also... God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature... and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die." God says through Ezekiel in 17:24, "I, the Lord, have spoken and have done it."

We pray: Almighty God, who through Thy Son, Jesus Christ, has overcome death and opened unto us the gates of everlasting life, we humbly ask Thee to put into our minds good desires, so that by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today's reading fleshes out the theme of Judica. How ungodly is the nation? "Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money." Justice—whether temporal or spiritual—meant to spring from the Word of God and sound reasoning was exchanged for greed. We also see this in Christ's Passion: wicked leaders gladly gave money for the betrayal of their enemy and used political coercion to ensure an evil result at His trial.

Money and honor are not only used this way still in secular things, but even within visible Christendom. Those who use social media know that your beliefs are openly denied and derided. People mock the idea that God created the heavens and the earth in the way He said He did, that Jesus is God the Son who died on the cross and rose again on the third day, and other such basics truths. In their opinion, such views are not to be spoken in public without ridicule, much less are they to determine how you live. Self-important commenters insist that Christian ideas are not to govern how you serve in public office—if you should even be allowed to vote, much less be elected. Even people and organizations that claim to be Christian ridicule a six day creation or that we hold the death of Christ to be what gives us life. They teach falsehoods about righteousness by our attempts to keep moral teachings, and quite often they are more outspoken against the orthodox Church than the atheists are.

We pray: O Lord, thank You for comforting us through Micah, assuring us that those who claim You while rejecting Your Word will not prevail, nor continue safely in their blasphemy. Teach them, with us, always to honor Your Word, apart from which none truly honor You. Amen.

Who is the Judge? “Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool.” How shall I be pleasing to Him? “He who burns incense is as if he blesses an idol” and “He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man.”

The works of the Law cannot suffice. Even the prescribed offering of a bull might as well be the shedding of a man’s blood, Isaiah tells us. For that crime, God says in Genesis 9:6, a man-killer’s blood would be shed, because such is not merely an attack upon the creature, but upon the image of God. By now declaring this equivalence between offering a bull and killing a man, God declares the offering of an animal sacrifice without the proper disposition and discernment (1 Corinthians 11:26–32) to be an attack on the image of God, as well.

Why so high a designation for killing an animal that Scripture does not list as being made in the image of God? Because every such sacrifice was to be understood as pointing to the sacrificing of Him who is “the brightness of [God’s] glory and the express image of His person,” the Son through whom He “has in these last days spoken to us” (Hebrews 1:2–3).

What can save us if even doing the works of the Law falls short before Him? “On this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My Word.”

We pray: Thank You, O Father, for looking upon me with favor, having made me tremble at Your commandments so that, in my lowly and sorrowful state, I look for exaltation only through forgiveness in Your Son’s fulfillment of the Law in my place. Amen.

Throughout the Old Testament the Jews often didn’t comprehend the promise of the coming Savior. They didn’t understand how He was going to save His people. And they didn’t realize that the kingdom He would set up would not involve the nation of Israel as an earthly kingdom.

They misunderstood what God was doing, just as their fathers had done. And just as God had done for their fathers He does for them. He says, “Behold, the Man whose name is the Branch! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the Lord.” Like their fathers they thought the Lord would plant a “Branch” that would branch out and expand this earthly nation to its former glory. At the time of the prophet Zechariah many of the returning Jews thought that their return was the beginning of this kingdom.

In Matthew 16 Jesus asked Peter the question, “Who do you say I am?” With God-given faith Peter responded, “You are the Christ.” Jesus replied, “on this rock [that is, Peter’s confession] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” As God promised His people through Zechariah that the Branch would build the temple of the Lord, He now promises that on the confession of Jesus as the promised Branch He is building His Church. God faithfully repeated His promises to His people that He would send them a savior. God always keeps His promises, and through God’s gifts of Word and Sacrament we have been given faith to believe His Word.

We pray: Grant, Almighty God, that we who celebrate the solemnities of the Lord’s resurrection may by the renewal of Thy Holy Spirit rise again from the death of the soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

All of the readings for this week have been types of promises by God, that no matter how things look to God's people, at all times He is still in control and He will accomplish His purposes. Even though the glory of Israel is a mere shadow of its former self, still the Lord will send the promised Descendant of David to save His people from their sin.

In our reading for today "the Lord honored faithful Zerubbabel not only calling him, 'My servant'; He also established him as a signet (or sign) guaranteeing to His people the fulfillment of God's promise given to David (2 Sam 7:12-16). As this sign Zerubbabel was 'chosen' not by the people, nor by the powerful emperor Cyrus. This [unimportant] prince of Judah, a small poor nation under foreign control, was honored by the Supreme Ruler of the world and His Church, the Lord of Hosts, to be a prominent link in that illustrious chain of ancestors extending from David to Jesus Christ, the God-Man. In the face of all opposition, in the midst of catastrophic political changes, the kingdom promised to David and the scepter assured to Judah would continue till Shiloh come, the Prince of Peace whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom" (Minor Prophets, T. Laetsch, p 401-402). We see again that when God makes promises to His people, he is always faithful to keep His promises. By Word and Sacrament you and I have received the same promise. By faith, we too, live in that kingdom.

We pray: Grant, Almighty God, that we who celebrate the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may by the renewal of Thy Holy Spirit rise again from the death of the soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

"Judge me, O God" found sensibility in yesterday's reading. We acknowledge we are beggars before God (Matthew 5:3), so we are contrite and tremble at the judgment we deserve. Yet, we trust that Christ was born under the Law (Galatians 4:4) expressly to fulfill all righteousness for us (Matthew 3:15). Thus, we are blessed ones (Matthew 5:3), who may so call upon God to judge—to vindicate—us. We are covered with Christ's righteousness, the baptized and believing Church (Galatians 3:26–27), called out from all the world.

Today, you are given another assurance. While your flesh bristles at the Word of God that your mind loves, and the devil and the world use the Word in attacking, your Lord defends you against these enemies. As the world watches God (hoping He fails you) and you look to Him, He upholds you until He destroys them. Through the Word-powered water of Holy Baptism, their power to accuse before Him is destroyed, until by fire they are driven from you forever.

"Rejoice greatly!" He says, as all is accomplished through the King who comes to the wreckage that we would make of our lives and of the Church. He comes "just and having salvation." He cuts off your warfare; your concern is now with the peace He makes for you. Through faith in His work of destroying the sin that separated you from God, you have peace with Him. You have the Word of His peace to carry forth, that He may reign over hearts by grace.

We pray: We give thanks, Lord Jesus, that You have made us, Your flock, like the jewels of a crown and a banner over Your land, showing the beauty of Your reign—the forgiveness and restoration of sinners. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Palmarum (Palm) Sunday

Article III.

Also they [the Lutherans] teach, that the Word, that is, the Son of God, did take man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are Two Natures, the divine and the human, inseparably conjoined in one Person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the Virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, that He might reconcile the Father unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but for all actual sins of men. He also descended into hell, and truly rose again the third day; afterward He ascended into Heaven, that He might sit on the right hand of the Father, and forever reign, and have dominion over all creatures, and sanctify them that believe in Him, by sending the Holy Ghost into their hearts, to rule, comfort and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and the power of sin. The same Christ shall openly come again to judge the quick and the dead, etc., according to the Apostles' Creed.

—The Augsburg Confession

TUESDAY, APRIL 23: EZEKIEL 21:25-27

EASTER

The Book of Ezekiel was written after many Jews were taken into exile by Babylon. They were carried away because they were worshiping false gods and refused to listen to God's prophets. They wouldn't repent! God clearly tells His people that what they thought--that they could ignore God's Word and worship Him anyway they wanted--was wrong. He told them exactly how He was to be worshiped, where He was to be worshiped, and how His people received forgiveness of sin; but they ignored Him. In our text the Lord says, "Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until He comes whose right hand it is, and I will give it to Him."

During this Easter season we learn again that it is Jesus "whose right hand it is." He is the One who left heaven and was born of a virgin. The Holy Creator humbled Himself and became a man to live, suffer, and die to take sin—our sin—upon Himself and pay the penalty of death for it. This One became sin for us. He overcame sin, death, and Satan. He is the One who is worthy. He is the One "who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil... with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death" (Second Article, Small Catechism).

We pray: Grant, Almighty God, that we who celebrate the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may by the renewal of Thy Holy Spirit rise again from the death of the soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 22: HOSEA 13:14

EASTER MONDAY

Christ's Church celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus every Sunday, but on Easter we make it a "more special" celebration. This event, along with Christ's death on Good Friday, is the "main event" in the Christian Church. Without these events we would have no doctrine, no teaching, no reason for the Church to exist!

The women in yesterday's text had a job to do. Their dear friend had been crucified and His body hurriedly placed in a tomb. Now that the Sabbath was over they needed to give Him a proper burial. We know that their expectation of finding His body in the tomb was wrong. It was clear that they didn't expect Him to rise, and when they saw His body was gone they were very much afraid.

Many times in the Old Testament the Lord had told His people He would redeem them from death and the power of the grave. In our reading from Hosea for today we read, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O grave, I will be your destruction!"

However, right from the fall into sin, the devil, the world, and our old sinful nature have been making us afraid to take the Lord at His Word. Luther says: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ... or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me... and kept me in the true faith" (Third Article, Small Catechism).

We pray: Grant, Almighty God, that we who celebrate the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may by the renewal of Thy Holy Spirit rise again from the death of the soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 15: JEREMIAH 7:1-15 MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK

We have arrived at Holy Week, the great week of weeks. The call of the Lord to "all you of Judah" applies to us this day, "Amend your ways and your doings." Throughout time, the message of God to a fallen world remains unchanged, "Repent!" Through the prophet Jeremiah God recounts the many sins of Israel: oppression, shedding of innocent blood, idolatry, theft, adultery, swearing falsely, etc. One need only look at the list of sins to see nothing has changed with regard to the sins people continue to commit in our time.

God points to the hypocrisy of the people of Jeremiah's day. Abominable things were done by people who claimed to be God's people and went to the temple claiming their actions were God-Pleasing. They had turned the temple into "a den of thieves." Sound familiar? When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem He found the temple was once again a "a den of thieves." There it was, hypocrisy in the name of God.

The irony of the Cross is that Jesus, who had cleansed the temple, would later bear the sins of the same people who had disgraced the temple. Upon the Cross Jesus would become a disgrace before God and Man as He atoned for the sins of the world.

Hypocrisy is still found in Christendom. Abominations such as women's ordination, evolution, abortion, and homosexuality, to name a few, are claimed to be God-pleasing. Jesus paid the price for these sins, too. May God bring repentance, and continue to lead us all to repent of our sins.

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who amid so many adversities do fail through our own infirmities, may be restored through the Passion and intercession of Thine only-begotten Son. Amen.

When we think of heroes we can find ourselves thinking about the likes of Superman, Batman, or Captain America. They defeat the bad guys by overpowering them. The image that comes to mind is the “good guy” standing over the “bad guy” with his foot on the “bad guy’s” chest. “Victory is mine!”

It’s Tuesday of Holy Week. We are one day closer to the Cross of Good Friday. We are moving ever closer to the commemoration of the suffering and death of Christ, as described by Isaiah. Jesus doesn’t look anything like a superhero. Jesus would give Himself to being struck on the back, to having His beard plucked, and finally to being nailed to the Cross. Then, the Hero died. From the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Romans 11:33), a place unreachable by our human thoughts and intellect, comes forth “Good News.” Strange as it may appear to human reason, God defeats death by crucifying His Son. The Hero dies so those whose sins He bore, the sins of His enemies, might live. Though the Hero’s heel is bruised, the serpent’s head is forever crushed. The serpent’s power over creation has been vanquished.

Indeed, the Righteous shall live by faith, as demonstrated by Jesus who fears, loves, and trusts His Father above all things. “For the Lord will help Me,” “He is near who justifies Me,” and “Surely the Lord God will help Me” are words of faith. All the way to the point of death Jesus trusted His Father. And as we know, death could only hold Life in the tomb but three days!

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, grant us grace to pass through this holy time of our Lord’s Passion that we may obtain the pardon of our sins. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Easter Sunday

Chapter IX.

Of the Descent of Christ to Hell.

There has also been a controversy among some theologians, who have subscribed to the Augsburg Confession concerning the following article: When, and in what manner, the Lord Christ, according to our simple Christian faith, descended to hell, whether this was done before or after His death? Also, whether it occurred according to the soul alone, or according to the divinity alone, or in body and soul, spiritually and bodily? Also, whether this article belongs to the passion or to the glorious victory and triumph of Christ?

But since this article ... cannot be comprehended by the senses or by the reason, but must be grasped alone by faith, it is our unanimous advice that there should be no disputation concerning it, but that it should be believed and taught only in the simplest manner; according as Dr. Luther of blessed memory, in his sermon at Torgau in the year 1533, has, in a very Christian manner, explained this article, separated from it all useless, unnecessary questions, and admonished all godly Christians to Christian simplicity of faith.

For it is sufficient that we know that Christ descended to hell, destroyed hell for all believers, and delivered them from the power of death and of the devil, from eternal condemnation [and even] from the jaws of hell. But how this occurred, we should reserve until the other world, where not only this point, but also still others, will be revealed which we here simply believe and cannot comprehend with our blind reason.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

Holy Saturday is sometimes the forgotten day of Holy Week. Nothing seems to happen. Holy Week began with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. By Thursday evening He is in the upper room and institutes His Supper. Later that evening He is betrayed into the hands of those who would ultimately crucify Him on that Friday afternoon filled with woe. A great deal had taken place during the week, and now . . . it's Saturday . . . it's quiet . . . indeed, "It is finished!" It is Saturday, the Sabbath, and Jesus now rests from His labors in the tomb of another.

We already know the rest of this story. He, whose "visage was marred more than any man," will arise from the dead. As soon as the sun sets and the Sabbath is over, the time for His body to rest in the tomb is over. It's the beginning of a new day, the beginning of a new creation that is found only in Christ and the forgiveness of sins He secured on the cross. One day our bodies also will rest from their labors. We will be placed in graves that Christ has sanctified by His resting in the tomb. Christ has given us the promise of the resurrection to eternal life with Him.

So on this day when there seems to be a lull in Holy Week, let us not forget this special day. Remember that the Sabbath, a day of rest, was God's creation, and that our rest is found in Him and His life-giving Word.

We pray: O God, who didst enlighten this most holy night with the glory of the Lord's resurrection, preserve in all Thy people the spirit of adoption which Thou hast given, so that, renewed in body and soul, they may perform unto Thee a pure service. Amen.

St. Paul wrote, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:16-17). Jeremiah was indeed an heir of the kingdom. For the sake of God's Word Jeremiah suffered at the hands of the people. He brought God's Word of judgment to them, and the people sought to kill him: "Let us cut him off from the land of the living." Sound familiar?

Another prophet, Isaiah, said this about the Messiah sent by God: "By oppression and judgment He was taken away. Yet who of His generation protested? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people He was punished" (Isaiah 53:8).

The anger of sinful mankind toward God is real. It manifests itself in hostility toward God's children, and sadly, it can also be seen in how God's children sometimes treat each other. Maybe it is anger. Maybe it is the thoughtless words that are spoken. Or maybe it is the "silent treatment." Whatever it takes to mistreat another, sin will find a way.

God did not abandon Jeremiah. He preserved him in true faith unto life everlasting. Likewise, God will not abandon you. He gave you His Spirit in Holy Baptism, and each day He brings you to repentance and turns you to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

We pray: Grant we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who of our evil deeds are continually afflicted, may mercifully be relieved by the Passion of Thine only-begotten Son. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 18: ZECHARIAH 3:1-10 MAUNDY THURSDAY

“For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Ecclesiastes 7:20), not even a high priest like Joshua. To make matters worse, there stood the Accuser, Satan. Satan was there “to oppose” Joshua, who was dressed in the filth of his sins. So what does Joshua do for himself? What can Joshua do for himself? He is filthy with sin and can’t change his status as a sinner. But God can!

God removes Joshua’s sins and clothes him “with rich robes.” Joshua can do nothing. God does everything. “See, I have removed your iniquity from you. and I will clothe you with rich robes.” Joshua simply receives what God gives.

Now that Joshua had been forgiven, a burden was placed upon him. He was told by God to “walk in My ways” and “keep My command.” But how? God’s answer is found earlier in Zechariah: “Return to Me” (Zechariah 1:3). Turning to God with a repentant heart keeps one walking in the ways of the Lord.

The Christian life is not found in blazing one’s own path of righteousness. The Christian life is found only in looking to God for mercy and having Him create a clean heart within you. Your forgiveness comes as a result of God’s “Servant the BRANCH.” He removes your iniquity and gives you life, His life. He gives you His own Body and His own Blood to strengthen and preserve you in the true faith.

We pray: O Lord God, who hast left unto us in a wonderful Sacrament a memorial of Thy Passion, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may use this Sacrament of Thy body and blood that the fruits of redemption may continually be manifest in us. Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 19: LAMENTATIONS 2:8-15

GOOD FRIDAY

Today is Good Friday. It is indeed GOOD Friday. This is the day that gives meaning to Christmas and Easter. Without Good Friday and the death of Jesus there is no hope for a world filled with sin and death. Christmas would only be a baby in a manger, who had no unusual purpose in life, and Easter is just about an empty tomb that was never occupied. Without the death of Jesus our lives would have no purpose, because all there would be is sin and death.

The people of Jerusalem rejected the Lord and had Him crucified. They saw the consequences of rejecting Him, as Jerusalem was later destroyed and brought to rubble. They had listened to the “false and deceptive visions” of false prophets. The false prophets were not interested in God’s unchanging message of repentance: “They have not uncovered your iniquity.” Such false prophets can be heard this very day. They do not preach about sin and grace, but about how God wishes for their hearers to be happy. They say all their hearers need to do is follow the right formula and God will bless them with health, wealth, success, and fame.

Be thankful that God has opened your eyes to the truth of your sin, and the truth of Christ crucified for you. Our Lord was crucified “and indeed it was very good.”

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast willed that Thy Son should bear for us the pains of the cross that Thou mightest remove from us the power of the adversary, help us to remember and give thanks for our Lord’s Passion that we may obtain remission of sins and redemption from everlasting death. Amen.