

SATURDAY, JUNE 29: JUDGES 6:1-40 1ST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

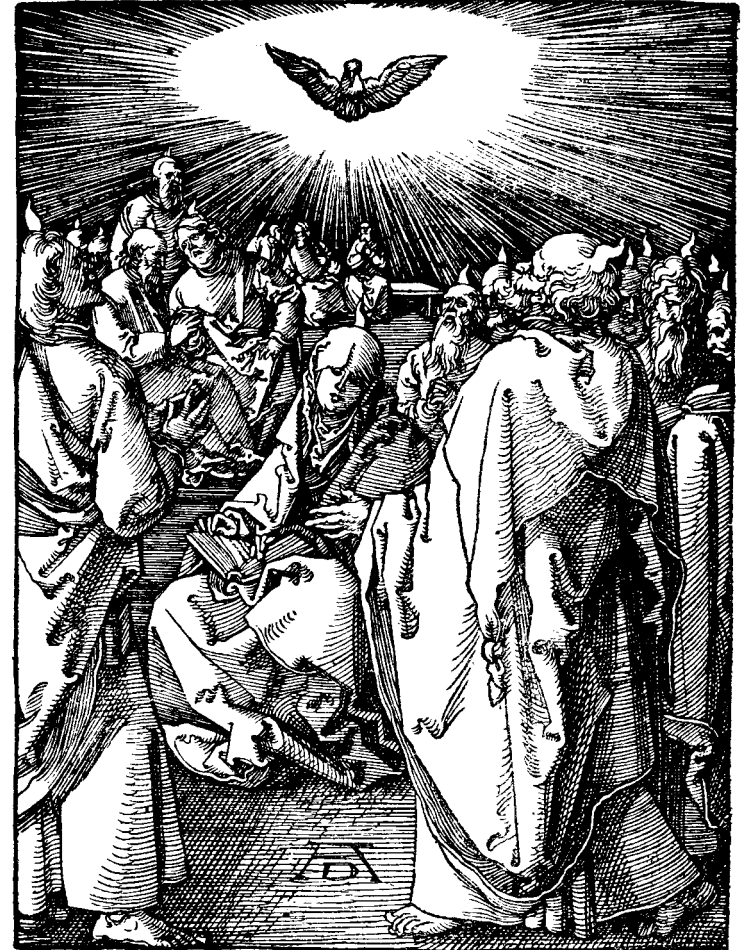
Today's appointed text presents the account of the Angel of the Lord calling Gideon to be judge over Israel, as well as Gideon's testing of the Lord with the sign of the fleece. But this is not the only proof that Gideon requests of the Lord. He also asks the Angel of the Lord to show him a sign, which the Lord graciously provides in verse twenty-one. The Lord is long suffering with His elect and exhibits purposeful (agape) love, patiently supplying the requested sign (the assurance asked for) that He is with Gideon in all that the Lord commands.

The greatest assurance or sign that God is with His elect is graciously provided on the cross of Calvary, where the Lamb of God has all the sins of the world laid upon Him. He takes them all onto Himself; not one falls upon the ground. In His precious Means of Grace He rains down His righteousness and holiness upon you by grace, through faith, as assurance that He is always with you in all that the Lord commands.

Gideon is regarded as a faithful believer and leader of God's people, and yet we see in this text that he struggled with his faith when faced by earthly challenges. This should give us courage in our own struggles of faithfulness, and Christian courage in the face of worldly challenges and persecutions.

We pray: Heavenly Father, through Your abundant grace and divinely instituted Means through Your Son, may the Holy Spirit always work faith in us. Amen.

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The Calendar

<i>June 2</i>	<i>Exaudi</i>
<i>June 5 (W)</i>	<i>St. Boniface, Martyr</i>
<i>June 9</i>	<i>Pentecost</i>
<i>June 16</i>	<i>Feast of the Holy Trinity</i>
<i>June 23</i>	<i>Trinity 1</i>
<i>June 24 (M)</i>	<i>The Nativity of St. John the Baptist</i>
<i>June 25 (Tu)</i>	<i>Festival of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession</i>
<i>June 29 (Sa)</i>	<i>St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles</i>
<i>June 30</i>	<i>Trinity 2</i>

FRIDAY, JUNE 28: JUDGES 2:1-23 **1ST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**

Today's meditation text is summed up by four words: "unfaithfulness and its consequences." The Israelites had every reason to be faithful to their Lord, but chose instead the path of unfaithfulness and, at times, even open rebellion against Him. This situation is frighteningly similar to the conditions we see exhibited in modern Christianity. Christians have been delivered from numerous persecutors and persecutions to only turn away from their deliverer time and again. The redeemed all too quickly forget the abundant blessing, and abandon, or even violently reject their Redeemer in favor of the idols of the surrounding world. We, like the Israelites in this text, are quite often content to ignore the Word of God for the sake of temporary comfort or earthly advantage.

When leaders (judges) were sent by the Lord to direct the people back to His life giving Word they would rally around a charismatic figure for a while, but would inevitably fall away from the source (God's Word) of blessings once the earthly spokesman was gone. The Gospel shines forth in this text though, for as inevitably as sin provoked the Lord to anger and incurred punishment, even more surely the cry of repentance found God's mercies graciously bestowed. The ebb and flow of Israel's faithfulness cannot be lost on any one of us who daily must confess our own sinfulness before His throne of grace.

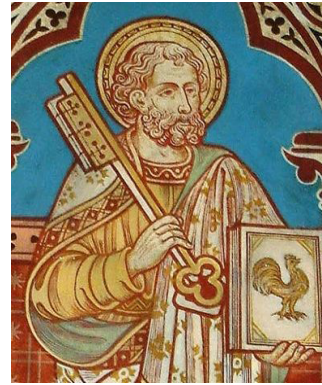
We pray: May the Holy Spirit mercifully strengthen our faith in the true source of every blessing, that we might cling to Jesus Christ and His Gospel, delivered through His chosen Means. Amen.

The first half of our text presents a beautiful historic narrative of the choosing and guiding of Israel from Abraham to Joshua. The key events of the nation's history are recounted as proof of what is to come for the people God has chosen to be His elect. The historic narrative demonstrates that the Lord will not fail to fulfill His promises contained in His Word because He is a mighty God, abundant in grace and love toward those He chooses.

The second half of today's meditation text presents the consequence of God's elect turning from Him and His covenant. These two facts are presented and recorded for the Israelites' and our edification, regarding what it means to be the Lord's elect. We are chosen purely by grace, but after that gracious election we are called to walk as children of God. All the wondrous blessings of being God's elect will be bestowed upon the people as a gift if they will be faithful to Him and His covenant promise.

The Lord is gracious and abundantly merciful, long suffering, and ever patient—but that does not mean we can openly practice hypocrisy, heresy, and faithlessness without being judged as apostates. All of God's elect must boldly confess before the world, “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

We pray: Lord, through Your holy Means of Grace may we always be drawn closer to You and be ever thankful to come repentantly before You as Your servants, confessing only You. Amen.



DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

This month's devotions begin with the week of *Exaudi*—the Sunday after the Ascension. It is a week which occupies a very special place in the Calendar of the Church. As the Sunday which falls between two of the most significant days in the apostolic

church—Ascension and Pentecost—the account of the acts of the apostles on this day is of great significance.

When the Lord had ascended to the right hand of the Father, the concern of the whole Church was for the vacancy in the ranks of the twelve apostles left by the suicide of Judas. The apostles understood that they were to wait at Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Spirit. But as the Church of a mere 120 saints gathered, they were not worrying about tactics and techniques. They were not concerned for winsomeness or social standing when it came to addressing the vacancy in the ranks of the apostles. St. Peter set forth the standard: “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” (Acts 1:21–22 NKJV) What mattered was that such a man must have received the whole teaching of Christ Jesus and also was a witness to the resurrection. There were two men who fit these criteria: Joseph and Matthias. Lots were cast—thus leaving the choice between the two to divine providence—and Matthias “was numbered with the eleven apostles.” (v. 26)

The calling of the pastoral office is to continue to proclaim the apostolic doctrine, to administer the Sacraments and to bind and loose sins. And the administration of this holy office will continue until the Christ returns in glory at the end of the age.

*Yours in Christ,
Bishop Heiser*

Lesson from the Book of Concord Exaudi Sunday

IX. Of Excommunication.

The greater excommunication [i.e., execution or banishment], as the Pope calls it, we regard only as a civil penalty, and not pertaining to us ministers of the Church. But the less [i.e., the so-called 'lesser excommunication'] is true Christian excommunication, which prohibits manifest and obstinate sinners from the sacrament and other communion of the Church until they are reformed and avoid sin. And ministers ought not to confound this ecclesiastical punishment or excommunication with civil penalties.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

The selections from the Book of Concord for the Sundays of the Church Year are from H. E. Jacobs' translation of the Book of Concord, and are taken from the table of suggested lessons for Sundays and Festivals of the Church. (The table of appropriate lessons was originally found in Pipping's Christliches Concordienbuch [Leipzig, 1734].)

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26: JOSHUA 23:1-16 1ST SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Today's assigned chapter reveals a constant reality for all of God's chosen elect that enjoy the gracious, undeserved mercy and abundant blessings of the Lord. Joshua nears the end of his earthly life, and the Lord directs him to explain in no uncertain terms the fact that God expects His children to be faithful as He is faithful.

Joshua points the leaders of the people to the recorded history of God's gracious care for the nation throughout its existence. This record shows clearly that, if the Lord's people will cling to Him and His Word, they shall not be disappointed, nor will their enemies overcome them. He also presents the alternative to faithfulness to the Lord and His covenant by pointing to God's assurance of judgment coming upon all those who rebel against Him and His covenant.

The things presented as challenges and temptations for the Israelites are no different from the things in our own lives that continually sing the sirens' song that lures the hearer onto the rocks of destruction and death. We, as they, are not to turn to the left or the right from God's Word. We, as they, are not to intermarry with those who do not obey the Lord (see 2 Corinthians 6:14). We, as they, are not to look to idols and false faith in the things of this world, as many of our neighbors do.

We pray: Almighty heavenly Father, allow us to see Your abundantly gracious hand in all things, and may we never be tempted and deceived by flesh, world, and the devil to turn from You. Amen.

This chapter presents the military conquest of the remaining Canaanite tribes in the territory, but does not necessarily imply complete elimination of the Canaanites. These realities are clarified in chapters twelve through twenty-two where it is demonstrated that Israel fails to subdue all the territory God had given them. This sad fact is due to Israel's slow and steady drift into complacency, faithlessness, hypocrisy, and eventually apostasy.

However, the focus of chapter eleven is the spectacular victories that are graciously bestowed upon Israel through Joshua in his faithfulness to the Lord's Word. The forces arrayed against Israel are described as a great horde, numbering like the grains of sand on the seashore, with numerous horses and chariots. God's command to Israel through Joshua regarding this vast horde is "Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will give over all of them, slain, to Israel." They have nothing to fear regarding the long odds facing them because of the apparent high number and seemingly powerful enemy they now face, because God "will give over all of them, slain".

The Lord fights for His people; God battles on the behalf of His chosen. Joshua acts faithfully, decisively, on these gracious words of promise from the Lord and is not disappointed, because God cannot deny Himself, His Word, or His promises.

We pray: Lord God, we rejoice in Your Word that You have graciously sent, and Your assurance to not be afraid of our enemies, for You have slain them all for us. Amen.

All of the Old Testament daily readings this week look forward to the day of Pentecost and beyond. But today's verses take us first to Maundy Thursday and the garden of Gethsemane. And we stand in awe as we see God the Father Himself preparing the sword for His own dear Son, His eternal, only-begotten "Companion." Jesus cited these verses as a prophecy about Himself and about how His disciples would scatter and flee when He, their Shepherd, was taken away by the armed guards on the night of His betrayal. And so they did.

But Jesus added a word of hope after predicting their abandonment: "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee" (Matthew 26:32). Just as the striking of the Shepherd and the abandonment of the disciples were a given, so was the resurrection, and the reconciliation of the apostles, and their commissioning to preach in Galilee.

Most of the inhabitants of Israel—indeed, most of the inhabitants of the world—would be cut off as they rejected the Gospel. But "one third," according to Zechariah's prophecy—a minority—would be preserved by preaching, a remnant of grace that would be refined by the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit.

Fire involves the burning away of the impurities that still cling to us, and that can be painful. But, as Peter points out in the first chapter of his first epistle, the purpose is not to harm, but to reveal the genuine faith that the Holy Spirit has created in us—the faith by which we know Christ Jesus as our Savior and as our God.

We pray: Father in heaven, You called us by Your name in Holy Baptism. In every trial preserve us in the true faith by Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of the most challenging aspects of Old Testament end-time prophecies is the timing of them. Zechariah's prophecy speaks of the "day of the Lord," which is usually a reference to the return of Christ at the Last Day. But some of the events described in the prophecy are events leading up to that day, beginning at the day of Pentecost and taking place all the way up until the establishment of the New Jerusalem in the new heavens and the new earth, just as Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, cited by St. Peter on Pentecost, has the "last days" beginning with that outpouring and culminating with the Lord's coming on the Last Day.

Another challenging aspect of prophecy is the use of picture language, where earthly places and events are used to depict spiritual truths. Zechariah uses such picture language to summarize for us the last days, and the Last Day itself. He shows us that the Church will be under attack, but ultimately her enemies will be destroyed; the kingdom of Christ—His rule in the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit—will spread throughout the world; and the Lord Himself will come at last with all His saints to judge and to reign forever over His people. The details of the prophecy may be cryptic, but the main points are clear enough to give hope to the people of God and a reason to rejoice.

We pray: O Lord, preserve us through the trials of this New Testament era. Nourish us with Your Word and Sacraments, and, in Your mercy, bring us safely to the Last Day, that we may dwell in Your house forever. Amen.

Sadly, many are confused or misguided when meditating upon the verses before us today. The curious human mind or heart wonders about verses twelve through fourteen, when it should

ponder verse eight instead: "And the Lord said to Joshua, 'Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you.'" This verse contains the theme of today's appointed text when it directs the hearer to "not fear" because the Lord has "delivered."

The Lord has delivered His people from the enemies of sin, death, and hell through His dying upon the cross. The Lord fights for you against your enemies—and is victorious beyond measure. There has been no day like that, before it or after it; for the Lord atoned for your sins with His very own flesh and blood, winning eternal salvation for you and all who look to Him with a repentant heart in faith by grace.

Do not fear the devil, for Christ has delivered you from his clutches. Do not fear the world, for your home is secured in the Father's house in His eternal kingdom. Do not fear the flesh, for the Means of Grace are present to preserve and strengthen you for the battle; a battle which you are assured to be victorious in, for the Lord has already won the war—and has thus promised you "Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand."

We pray: Thank You Lord for mercifully dwelling among us and gracing our lives through Your Means of Grace. Amen.

tuted the Mass wherein an offering should be made for daily sins, venial and mortal. From this has arisen the common opinion that the Mass taketh away the sins of the living and the dead, by the outward act. Then they began to dispute whether one Mass said for many were worth as much as special Masses for individuals, and this brought forth that infinite multitude of Masses. Concerning these opinions our teachers have given warning, that they depart from the Holy Scriptures and diminish the glory of the passion of Christ. For Christ's passion was an oblation and satisfaction, not for original guilt only, but also for all sins, as it is written to the Hebrews (10:10), "We are sanctified through the offering of Jesus Christ, once for all." Also, 10:14: "By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." Scripture also teaches that we are justified before God through faith in Christ, when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. Now if the Mass take away the sins of the living and the dead by the outward act, justification comes of the work of Masses, and not of faith, which Scripture does not allow.

But Christ commands us [Luke 22:19]: "This do in remembrance of Me"; therefore the Mass was instituted that the faith of those who use the Sacrament should remember what benefit it receives through Christ, and cheer and comfort the anxious conscience. For, to remember Christ, is to remember His benefits, and to realize that they are truly offered unto us. Nor is it enough only to remember the history, for this the Jew and the ungodly also can remember. Wherefore the Mass is to be used to this end, that there the Sacrament [Communion] may be administered to them that have need of consolation; as Ambrose says: "Because I always sin, I am always bound to take the medicine."

Now, forasmuch as the Mass is such a giving of the Sacrament, we hold one communion every holyday, and also other days, when any desire the Sacrament it is given to such as ask for it. And this custom is not new in the Church; for the Fathers before Gregory make no mention of any private Mass, but of the common Mass they speak very much. Chrysostom says that the priest stands daily at the altar, inviting some to the Communion and keeping back others. And it appears from the ancient Canons, that someone celebrated the Mass from whom all the other presbyters and deacons receive the Body of the Lord, for thus the words of the Nicene Canon says: "Let the deacons, according to their order, receive the Holy Communion after the presbyters, from the bishop or from a presbyter." And Paul [1 Cor. 11:33] commands concerning the Communion: "Tarry for one another," so that there may be a common participation.

Forasmuch, therefore, as the Mass with us has the example of the Church taken from the Scripture and the Fathers, we are confident that it cannot be disapproved, especially since the public ceremonies are retained for the most part, like those hitherto in use; only the number of Masses differs, which, because of very great and manifest abuses, doubtless might be profitably reduced. For in olden times, even in churches most frequented, the Mass was not celebrated every day, as the Tripartite History (Book 9, chapt. 33) testifies: "Again in Alexandria, every Wednesday and Friday, the Scriptures are read, and the doctors expound them, and all things are done, except only the celebration of the Eucharist."

—The Augsburg Confession

Old Testament Jerusalem, the City of God in an earthly sense, is symbolic of New Testament Jerusalem, the City of God in a spiritual sense, that is, the Holy Christian Church. From the day of Pentecost until the Last Day, the Church is giving birth to believers in Christ through Holy Baptism. She nurtures her children through the ongoing ministry of Word and Sacrament and comforts them with the forgiveness of sins. She gathers in people from every nation, tribe, language, and people. And some of these, in turn, become "priests and Levites," that is, ministers of the Gospel whom the Church sends out to keep bringing in her children.

This is cause for rejoicing! For the Church, though often besieged and under attack, is promised eternal victory over all her enemies. Even in the midst of her earthly struggles, she keeps bringing in more children through the Holy Spirit's effective working through the Gospel. Today's reading reflects Jesus' own words to His disciples in Matthew 16:18: "On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

But the greatest cause for rejoicing will occur at the consummation of the age, at the end of the New Testament era. On that day, those who would not be brought into the Church, but remained enemies of God and His people, are sentenced to eternal fire, while the children of God are given an everlasting home in the new heavens and the new earth.

We pray: Help us, O Lord, to rejoice in the Church You are now building and in the place You have given us within it, even when it appears to be failing. Graciously defend us against all our enemies and grant us to yearn for the new heavens and earth. Amen.

There is another prophecy of Pentecost in today's reading, or at least, a prophecy that was fulfilled in a most excellent way on the day of Pentecost.

Although Jeremiah's prophetic ministry took place in the southern kingdom of Judah after the northern kingdom of Israel had already been exiled, he addresses the lost tribes of Israel throughout his book. In today's short reading, the Lord speaks directly to the northern tribes living among the nations, far away from Jerusalem, the Temple, the priesthood, and the sacrifices for sin. He promises a future return to the House of God and rescue from their captivity.

He is speaking of a spiritual captivity, the captivity of sin. He is speaking of a spiritual return, not necessarily to the plot of land that lies to the east of the Mediterranean Sea, but to the family of God, to the spiritual rest that comes through faith in Christ, to the freedom from fear that comes from sins atoned for in Christ's death and forgiven through Holy Baptism.

The spiritual return of some of the members of the scattered tribes of Israel began in a literal way on the day of Pentecost, when Jews who lived in the surrounding nations came to Jerusalem and heard the apostles speaking in their languages and declaring to them the wonderful works of God. They, in turn, took the Gospel back to the nations where they lived. Those who have believed the Gospel will be safe from the destruction that comes on the nations who have rejected it.

We pray: Heavenly Father, we thank You for mercifully sending out Your Gospel and for rescuing people from sin's captivity through the Holy Ministry. Comfort us by Your Holy Spirit and keep us safe on the day when You judge the nations. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The First Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XXIV.

Falsely are our churches accused of Abolishing the Mass; for the Mass is retained on our part, and celebrated with the highest reverence. All the usual ceremonies are also preserved, save that the parts sung in Latin are interspersed here and there with German hymns, which have been added to teach the people. For ceremonies are needed to this end alone, that the unlearned be taught. And not only has Paul commanded to use in the Church a language understood by the people [1 Cor. 14: 2, 9], but it has also be so ordained by man's law.

The people are accustomed to partake of the Sacrament together, if any be fit for it, and this also increases the reverence and devotion of public worship. For none are admitted except they be first proved. The people are also advised concerning the dignity and use of the Sacrament, how great consolation it brings anxious consciences, that they may learn to believe God, and to expect and ask of Him all that is good. This worship pleases God; such use of the Sacrament nourishes true devotion toward God. It does not, therefore, appear that the Mass is more devoutly celebrated among our adversaries, than among us.

But it is evident that for a long time, it has been the public and most grievous complaint of all good men, that Masses have been basely profaned and applied to purposes of lucre. For it is unknown how far this abuse obtains in all the churches, by what manner of men Masses are said only for fees or stipends, and how many celebrate them contrary to the Canons. But Paul severely threatens those who deal unworthily with the Eucharist, when he says [1 Cor. 11:27]: "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." When, therefore, our priests were admonished concerning this sin, Private Masses were discontinued among us, as scarcely any Private Masses were celebrated except for lucre's sake.

Neither were the bishops ignorant of these abuses, and if they had corrected them in time, there would now be less dissension. Heretofore, by their own negligence, they suffered many corruptions to creep into the Church. Now, when it is too late, they begin to complain of the troubles of the Church, seeing that this disturbance has been occasioned simply by those abuses, which were so manifest that they could be borne no longer. Great dissensions have arisen concerning the Mass, concerning the Sacrament. Perhaps the world is being punished for such long-continued profanations of the Mass, as have been tolerated in the churches for so many centuries, by the very men who were both able and in duty bound to correct them. For, in the Ten Commandments, it is written (Exodus 20), "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." But since the world began, nothing that God ever ordained seems to have been so abused for filthy lucre as the Mass.

There was also added the opinion which infinitely increased Private Masses, namely, that Christ, by His passion, had made satisfaction for original sin, and insti-

It can be difficult to see the Gibeonite deception as anything other than malicious sinning. But throughout the Old Testament we see men of faith act on God's Word in unfortunate ways. Abraham trusted God's promise of a son and heir. Since Sarah was past childbearing age he slept with Hagar. Rebecca trusted God's Word that Jacob would be the heir of the promise. She led him to deceive his aged father Isaac. These saints trusted God's promise, but acted on it in less than ideal ways.

The Gibeonites were no different. They had heard the report about the God of Israel. They heard how the true God destroyed the enemies of Israel, including Jericho and Ai, in order to fulfill His promise to their ancestors and give them the land. The rest of the Canaanites heard this report and "gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord." The Gibeonites knew they could not defeat the God of Israel so they performed a ruse so that they might be incorporated into God's people, for they believed that apart from Israel they would be destroyed as others had.

The Lord does not commend their deception, or teach us to deceive by their example. But the Lord does reward their faith. Through the leaders of Israel, the Lord allows the Gibeonites into God's people and saves them from destruction, even keeping them close to His Tabernacle. God does not want you to deceive others, but He does want you to trust His promises so that you let nothing deter you from entering the New Israel of His Church by a bold and courageous faith.

We pray: O Blessed Holy Trinity, grant us faith to daily flee to You for mercy and escape everlasting destruction as members of Your Holy Church. Amen.

The people of Judah had grown complacent. They were no longer producing the fruits of righteousness. They no longer lived for the Lord, but were caught up in enjoying the pleasures of this life. Isaiah warns them that all this will soon be wiped out. He was referring to the future destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity. He pleads with them to repent, but even the repentance of the few would not prevent the impending destruction.

The renewal of the people of God wouldn't take place "until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high"—another prophecy of Pentecost. The powerful preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins that the people of Jerusalem heard on that day would spark a true renewal in the hearts of God's people. The Spirit's fire would produce true repentance and faith, followed by true fruits of righteousness. Faith in Christ would produce works of love. Complacency toward God and neighbor would be replaced by zeal for God and genuine concern for the neighbor. Jerusalem itself would remain in a state of upheaval after Pentecost, but God's people would live in peace with God and with one another, in spite of the earthly conditions around them.

The prophet's warning against complacency still applies, because Christians, too, can get caught up in earthly pleasures and the luxuries that surround us. Stay focused on Christ, and walk with the Spirit, so that you may continue to produce His blessed fruits, promoting true justice, godly peace, and the holy name of Jesus Christ.

We pray: Grant us Your Holy Spirit, O Lord, and turn our hearts ever to Your word, that we may escape the entanglements of this life and come into the perfect peace of eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God inhabits eternity. He dwells in a “high and holy place,” far beyond man’s reach or grasp. But He has chosen also to dwell “with him who has a contrite and humble spirit.” The access that the contrite and humble person has to God is unnatural; no sinner, by nature, has such access to the holy God. It had to be purchased by the blood of Christ. Nor could any sinner come to true contrition or humility except by the preaching of the Law and the Gospel.

After Christ made atonement for sins, He sent His Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to empower the preaching of His apostles: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Now, “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Romans 5:1-2).

What else did Peter promise the baptized? “And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit!” God no longer dwells with us as when the Word-made-flesh dwelt among His disciples. But He has not left us orphans. He dwells with us forever by His Holy Spirit, throughout our earthly pilgrimage. Wherever the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered, there is God’s Spirit dwelling with us, both as individuals and as the Church, bringing healing for the penitent, forgiveness, peace, comfort, guidance, strength, boldness, and every gift from above.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to help us until Your second coming. Grant us a rich measure of His gifts, that we may serve You with great zeal and in perfect peace. Amen.

In the previous chapter, the king of Ai routed the Israelites. Israel was accursed because Achan had taken an accursed item from Jericho. Once Achan’s sin is revealed and the offense removed, the Lord is present with Israel to give them victory. Joshua uses the recent route to Israel’s advantage and sets an ambush for the king of Ai. With the Lord’s help, Ai is razed to the ground and its people destroyed. Joshua hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening to show that “he who is hanged is accursed of God” (Deuteronomy 21:23). At sundown he orders the body removed from the tree and covered with stones. The episode began with Israel being accursed due to Achan’s sin. It ends with the King of Ai being declared accursed instead.

The king of Ai is a type of our Lord Jesus. Christ was sinless, unlike the king of Ai, yet God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ is our substitute under God’s wrath. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” (Galatians 3:13). Christ is hanged on the tree of the cross in our place, to atone for all our sins and the sins of the entire world. He is taken down before sunset and buried in a tomb, the entrance covered with a large stone. But unlike the king of Ai, Christ rises from grave in order to give the benefits of His death to all who believe that for His sake we have a merciful God.

We pray: O Blessed Holy Trinity, forgive our sins for the sake of Christ, who gave Himself into death for us. Amen.

Even in our post-Christian culture most people know this story. They may even know the children's song "Joshua fit the battle of Jericho." The story is memorable because it tells how Israel destroyed the fortified city by walking in circles around it. It's memorable for its display of God's almighty power.

Less remembered, though, is the reason for Jericho's destruction. The iniquity of the Canaanites was complete (Genesis 15:16). The Lord had given these people generations to repent of their iniquity, but they refused. That day was their reckoning. Every person, city, and civilization has an appointed day on which God's longsuffering will cease. This is part of the story of Jericho that more people in our day could stand to remember. God wants all men to repent and trust His mercy. Jericho refused. Except one. Rahab heard the report about the God of Israel, and in spite of the fact that she was a very public sinner, she believed. Her faith saved her and her family from Jericho's deserved destruction.

God is powerful, and demonstrates that power here. But He is also merciful to those who repent of their sins and flee to Him for mercy, even if our sins are notorious like Rahab's. She trusted the Israelite spies and Joshua for mercy. God desires that we continually repent and trust Christ's merits and mercy. Unbelief will be punished. This world's walls will fall on the Last Day. But all who flee to Christ for forgiveness and mercy will find them and be welcomed into the New Israel, the Church, where God richly and daily forgives all our sins.

We pray: O Blessed Holy Trinity, who hates sin, but promises forgiveness to those who repent, grant us Your grace that we may daily flee to You and avoid eternal destruction. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Pentecost Sunday

THE THIRD ARTICLE.

Of Sanctification.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body; and the Life everlasting. Amen.

What is meant by this Article?

Answer. I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me through the gospel, enlightened me by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith; in like manner as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the true faith; in which Christian Church He daily forgives abundantly all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and will raise up me and all the dead at the last day, and will grant everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.

—The Small Catechism, Part II

Isaiah uses the images of fields and trees to portray spiritual truths. When he says, “the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest,” he describes the state of the soul. The soul that does not receive the Gospel through faith is like a wilderness, dead and without water. But when the Holy Spirit works faith in it by the knowledge of the Christ and the forgiveness of sins, then life enters it and it becomes a fruitful field and even a forest.

On Pentecost, which the Church celebrated yesterday, St. Peter preached to those Jews who had called for the Lord’s crucifixion, for he says, “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). They crucified the Christ on account of their unbelief, through which their soul was dead and like a waterless wilderness. Recognizing the dead state of their soul, they beg St. Peter, saying, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). He then preaches to them the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Christ’s name and many of them believe and are baptized.

Through the preaching of the Word of God, the Holy Spirit took their desolate souls and brought life to them. A dead soul produces only more death. But a living, fruitful soul, cultivated by the Holy Spirit through the Word, produces repentance, faith, and the good confession that Jesus Christ is Lord.

We pray: O God, who didst give Thy Holy Spirit to Thine Apostles, grant unto Thy people the performance of their petitions, so that on us, to whom Thou hast given faith, Thou mayest bestow also peace; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Amen.

The purpose of any statue, monument, or memorial is to commemorate a significant event so that future generations might not forget that event and what it means. The twelve stones taken from the bottom of the Jordan are no different. Joshua takes the twelve stones to Gilgal and erects a memorial to the event. When their children, or their children’s children ask “What are these stones?” the Israelites are to remember how they crossed over the river on dry ground because “the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over,” as He had done at the Red Sea. This memorial would teach future Israelites that the hand of the Lord is mighty, so they should fear Him.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night in which He was betrayed, left the New Israel a memorial. “Do this in remembrance of me,” He commanded regarding the bread and the wine, which He taught are His true body and very blood. As often as we partake of the Holy Supper, it reminds us of Christ’s sufferings and death for our salvation so that we think on them often and treasure all that Christ did for our salvation. But this Supper is much more than just a memorial. To remember Christ’s suffering and death for us is “to remember the benefits of Christ and receive them by faith, so as to be quickened by them” (Ap. XXIV.72). Believing His Word, we receive the benefits He won upon the cross for us: the forgiveness of all our sins, and everlasting life.

We pray: O Blessed Holy Trinity, who works our salvation, grant us grace to faithfully partake of Christ’s true body and blood in the Sacrament that we receive His benefits by faith. Amen.

These Israelites were not those who had left Egypt. The original crop of the sons of Israel had perished in the desert because of their unbelief, except for Joshua and Caleb. None of the current Israelites had witnessed the plagues or walked through the Red Sea on dry ground.

With the death of Moses Israel was tempted to doubt that God was with them. To fortify their faith the Lord gave them a sign. “By this you shall know that the living God is among you.” The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord would cross the Jordan. The Lord promised to exalt Joshua’s ministry before the people, being with him as he had been with Moses. This miracle would show Israel that God is present with Joshua. It would also show Israel that God is with them to fulfill His promises and lead them into the good He promised to their ancestors.

The Lord is with His people, the Church, today. He gives us His Word that He is with us always and that never will He leave us, nor will he forsake us. He doesn’t prove His presence through a mighty sign like stopping up a river so that we may cross. He gives us greater signs. He is present in the ministry of His called and ordained servants, who cause us to cross through baptismal waters, which make us children of God. He is with us in the Sacrament of His true body and blood to forgive our sins and fortify our faith. Like ancient Israel, we can be confident that He is with His Church and that He is mighty to save.

We pray: O Blessed Holy Trinity, who is gracious and compassionate, grant us Your grace that we daily know that You are with us. Amen.

Compare this passage to Revelation 22:1-2: “He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

Ezekiel received a vision of the heavenly temple, as St. John also did. The river of life flows from God’s throne and, whether through the waters of the river or through the trees that grow along it, healing proceeds from God’s throne. That is, the Word of God—written in Scripture and faithfully preached—heals men’s souls by offering them the forgiveness of their sins.

In Ezekiel’s vision, the river flows from the right-hand side of the altar. The Lord Jesus, likewise, sits at the right hand of the Father in glory. Since He is the Word of God in the flesh, the Lord Jesus is the source of that healing in His person, for forgiveness is found only through faith in the person of the Lord Jesus. “The first and chief article [of the Faith] is this, that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification, Rom. 4:25” (Smalcald Articles, part 1:I).

We pray: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Amen.

Nothing that the Lord does fails. At the time of the Babylonian captivity, doubtless the Israelites wondered why they had ever come out of Egypt a thousand years earlier. Did God destroy Pharaoh and the nations of Canaan for them, just so they could be slaughtered by the Babylonians? Against these fears, God reminds them, “[I] did not create in vain,” and, “I did not say to the seed of Jacob, ‘Seek Me in vain.’” When Judah went into captivity, it was not the end. God called them to trust in Him, even in the midst of disaster, and He would deliver them from evil.

Terrible disasters befall all men on account of Adam’s fall into sin. Some of them cause us to doubt whether our life is worth living. One man digs himself deep into debt for his education, only to find himself unemployed. Another man sees all his children die early and knows that he is the last of his family name. Sin causes us to doubt God’s goodness and to despair.

In Christ, God gives us the hope of the Resurrection and the Life of the world to come. All who believe in Him will rise from the dead in glory, when the Christ returns, and will live forever with Him in eternal peace and joy. “Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other” (v. 22).

We pray: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Amen.

Moses couldn’t lead Israel into the Promised Land because he disobeyed the Lord in Numbers 20. The task fell to Joshua. Joshua was to meditate on the Law day and night. No one would be able to stand against him. The Lord promised to be with him as He had been with Moses. He was to be strong and courageous, confidently trusting in the Lord.

Jesus is the greater Joshua who would lead the new Israel, His Church, into the Promised Land of everlasting life. By works of the Law we are unable to enter that heavenly country. By the righteousness of the Law no one will be saved. But God the Father sent the greater Joshua to do what we could not accomplish by the Law. Christ meditated on the Law of the Lord day and night and fulfilled it perfectly in our place. Like Joshua, no one was able to stand against Jesus. The Lord was with Him throughout the days of His life. He lived and died strong and courageous, trusting His heavenly Father and committing Himself fully to His care.

All who believe in the greater Joshua and trust His promises possess everything He earned in His perfect life and innocent, bitter sufferings and death. Because you belong to Christ by faith, you are to meditate on the Law of the Lord day and night. The Holy Ghost strengthens you though that Word so that you can be strong and courageous, confidently trusting in Christ’s merits and atonement for you. He has promised to you as He did to Joshua, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

We pray: O Blessed Holy Trinity, who dwells in our hearts by faith, grant us Your grace that we daily place all our confidence in You. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Trinity Sunday

ARTICLE I.

Our Churches, with common consent, do teach, that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet that there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are co-eternal, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. And the term “person” they use as the fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

They condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article, as the Manichaeans who assumed two principles [gods], one Good, the other Evil; also the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all such. They condemn also the Samosatenes, old and new, who contending that there is but one Person, sophistically and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Ghost are not distinct Persons, but that “Word” signifies a spoken word, and “Spirit” [Ghost] signifies motion created in things.

—The Augsburg Confession

THURSDAY, JUNE 13: ISAIAH 45:22–25

WHITSUNDAY

There is only one God. And there is only one way to God, and that is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. No matter who one is or where one comes from, all who hope to be saved must come to God through the Christ. All who do not will perish forever. For this reason, salvation is found only in the Christian Church, for no other religion approaches God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The modern-day Jewish faith cannot save, because it denies the Lord Jesus Christ.

About whom, then, does the Lord speak when He says, “In the Lord all the descendants of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory”? St. Paul answers with these words: “They are not all Israel who are of Israel... That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed” (Romans 9:6, 8). The phrase “descendants of Israel” in this passage does not mean the earthly nation of the Jews, but only those who are “in the Lord”—that is, those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

The true Israel is the Christian Church. The promise of salvation does not belong to any earthly nation. Instead, all those who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have become the true heirs of the promise of salvation and are the true children of Israel by faith.

We pray: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Amen.

This passage makes absolutely clear that salvation comes only through faith. Wisdom cannot save. Strength cannot save. Riches cannot save. Neither can the outward act of circumcision. Wisdom we understand; the Greeks of biblical times were seeking salvation through wisdom and knowledge, but they perished because they lacked faith. Strength is obvious, for who is stronger than God? Riches, also, cannot buy the gifts of God. Circumcision, however, represents the Law, and there are many who wrongfully seek salvation this way.

The Jews thought they were saved because they followed the code of the Law: they were circumcised, they sacrificed, and they tithed. But God declares judgement upon them because they lacked faith. Likewise, there are many hypocrites in the Church of God. They attend Church regularly, they tithe, and they give to the poor, but they lack faith in their hearts. Their outward good works will not help them if they do not have faith, as the Lord Jesus teaches in these words: “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you’” (Matthew 7:22–23).

We are saved by faith. The man who has faith, even if he lacks wisdom, strength, or the opportunity for good works, is still justified by his faith.

We pray: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Amen.

“You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock.” What does it mean that we are God’s witnesses? A witness tells it as it happened; he does not add interpretations or guesses. A witness lets God’s Word and actions speak for themselves. If someone had asked the Israelites, “How do you know your God is real?” they could have said, “We saw Him part the Red Sea. He promised our father, Abraham, that we would inherit the land of Canaan, and here we are.” God is able to defend Himself from those doubters; we are merely His witnesses.

Martin Luther had the same attitude when he disputed with the false teacher Zwingli in 1529. When they came to the matter of the Lord’s Supper, Zwingli tried to deny the true presence of the Christ’s body by means of twisted philosophical arguments. But Luther wrote on the table the words, “This is My body,” and would not depart from their simple meaning. Zwingli was trying to outsmart God’s Word, but Luther let God’s Word speak for itself—he was its witness.

As Christians, our calling is not to manipulate others or to force them to the Truth by coercion. We are God’s witnesses; we merely set forth what God has already done and already said. The rest is up to the Holy Spirit, whose work it is to create faith.

We pray: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Amen.