

Strodach's and Lang's observations regarding those vestments are adapted as follows:

The *cassock* is a comfortably fitted garment as regards the body from the waist upward, but full and flowing below. It is open in front from top to bottom but provided with buttons and button holes at short intervals throughout the whole length and is always worn buttoned up. It is usually made of a durable black serge.

The *amice* is a short linen cloth, usually oblong in shape, and worn over the shoulders. After the alb has been put on, the upper part of the amice is turned down over it around the neck. The amice has been worn in the Divine Service for over 1,300 years. The vesting prayer for the amice is "Set on my head, O Lord, the helmet of salvation, that I may overcome the assaults of the devil."

The *alb* is the oldest of the vestments. It is not unlike a surplice in some respects, but it is longer. It has tighter fitting sleeves, while those of the surplice are full and flowing. The opening at the top is large enough to put the garment on over the head comfortably. It is not gathered around the neckband as is the surplice. Usually it is made of very fine linen. It is put on after the amice when the minister vests for a celebration of Holy Communion or for a high festival service. (Note: When using a traditional alb, it is worn over the cassock; many modern albs are made to be worn without the cassock and amice.) The vesting prayer for the alb is "Make me white, O Lord, and cleanse my heart that, being made white in the blood of the Lamb, I may have the fruition of everlasting joys."

Alternately, a vestment which may be used with the cassock for prayer offices is the *surplice*. This is said to have descended from the alb and is Scandinavian in origin. It is usually made of white linen with full sleeves. The garment is gathered in a neckband which encircles the wearer's neck and rests upon his shoulders. The *rochet* is a similar vestment worn over the cassock; it has been used by Bishops since the early thirteenth century.

(To be continued in the next issue of *The Lutheran Herald*)

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



SEPTEMBER 2—OCTOBER 5, 2019

A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF
NORTH AMERICA

The Calendar

September 1	Trinity 11
September 8	Trinity 12
September 15	Trinity 13
September 21 (Sa)	St. Matthew, Apostle, Evangelist
September 22	Trinity 14
September 29	Trinity 15/St. Michael and All Angels

FROM THE BISHOP

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

The visitations of this past month have been a great reminder of what a blessing it is when the Lord establishes unity in doctrine and practice within His Church. The Psalmist declares, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (133:1) And we know how true this is. After many years witnessing the chaos of the synods, it is a great consolation to see how the pastors and congregations of this diocese continue to strive to manifest our unity in doctrine through a unity in practice.

After visits with Pr. Carver and the saints of St. Paul's in Taylorsville, NC and Pr. Rutowicz and the saints of St. Boniface in Niles, MI in July, I visited with Pr. Rydecki and the saints of Emmanuel in Las Cruces, NM and Pr. Stefanski and the saints of Holy Trinity in Harrison, AR in August. Four more visitations are scheduled for September. It is crucial for our fellowship that the clergy of the diocese are always striving to aid in this work, helping me to fulfill my responsibility of oversight. And it is a joy to see so many of you who are so eager to know more about the rest of our fellowship and are so supportive of our shared labors.

At the end of this issue of *The Lutheran Herald*, you will find the first portion of an ongoing series on the historic vestments of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. As we work for uniformity in all things, our diocese will strive for unity in such matters (Apology XXIV:1). Yours in Christ, Bishop Heiser

Historic Vestments in the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

As Lutheran liturgical scholar P. Z. Strodach observed in his 1946 book, *A Manual on Worship*: "A vestment or garb peculiar to the ministrant and used by him at the time of his ministration in Divine Worship or for ministerial or official functions is as old as the Church of the Old Covenant. There the priest's ceremonial vestments were divinely appointed—Cf. Exodus 28. It is not unnatural that such an example and ever present use should influence the Church of the New Testament and eventually appear in a form adapted to its use. This was the fact. There is abundant evidence in existence which witnesses to the use of priestly vestments at the very early period in the Church's life." Strodach also testifies to the retention of historical vestments in the Evangelical Lutheran Church: "The proper churchly and historic vestments of the minister are the cassock, amice, alb, stole, cincture, and a simple linen chasuble for use at the Celebration of the Holy Communion and on high Days." In this, the Missouri Synod liturgical scholar, Paul H.D. Lang concurred, writing in 1965 that the "true basic elements" of proper "Eucharistic vestments" are "the cassock, amice, alb, cincture, stole, chasuble, and maniple."

(The illustration is from Strodach [1946].)



THE HISTORIC VESTMENTS IN USE AT THE TIME OF THE REFORMATION

1. Amice; 2. Orphrey of Chasuble; 3. Chasuble; 4. Sleeves of Alb
5. Maniple; 6. Stole; 7. Alb. Of these the Alb, Stole, and Chasuble are the ancient group.

For generations the Lord sent prophets to Judah. Preaching repentance and the righteousness of faith was their chief task in life, and they did it vigorously, rising early each morning to fulfill their ministry. Through His preachers God called to His people, telling them to forsake their deaf and mute idols, which could not hear or answer prayer, and turn to Him, the only living God, who hears and answers prayer. But they refused. They provoked Him to anger with the works of their own hands to their own hurt, meaning that by their sinning and despising the Word they afflicted themselves.

Even when the Lord pronounces judgment and exile on Judah, His mercy is present. They will go to Babylon in captivity. They will lose the land God graciously gave them. Their temple, worship, and way of life would be destroyed. But after seventy years the Lord would punish their punishers. Judah's exile would have an end. This is what allows Jeremiah, in the midst of his Lamentations, to confess, "This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:21-23). As long as it is today, it is the day of salvation. Let us live lives of daily repentance, continually seeking mercy from God for Christ's sake.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy succor, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XI.

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

Article XII.

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

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

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

—Augsburg Confession

This story reminds us that the Christian Church is the continuation of God's work. His work in these events surrounding Elijah shares key images and themes with the work He does now in the New Testament era with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His Law and judgment continue to stand against wicked leaders who corrupt the people with indecency and idolatry. He sends chosen men to speak His Word and teach people that we need water and faith from Him in order to live. He provides miraculous bread and declares His power over even death so that people may believe and be saved.

Whether He is using us to teach an entire nation, or to help and bless one small family in their difficult situation, it is God's work, not ours. He sends His Word and gives us the means according to His will. False teachers cling to comfortable situations, powerful institutions, novel gimmicks, and personal glory; but the work of God's Church is the consistent message of teaching His grace and salvation through water and bread, even to two humble people by one harried man, so that they might have true faith and live. Thanks be to God for this, to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Lord shows pity and mercy on us by condemning us for our sins. This runs contrary to the sinful flesh's thinking about what pity and mercy is. The sinful flesh thinks pity and mercy mean toleration of sin so that it is excused and passed over. This isn't mercy or pity, because, unless sinners repent of their wrongdoing and transgressions, judgment and punishment will come upon them. It may not be in this life, but their sins will catch up with them in the next life. Mercy doesn't excuse sin. It brings sin to light so that sinners might repent of it and be forgiven. This is God's way of putting away sin.

Jeremiah is sent to the unfaithful sons of Josiah. He reminds them of their father's faithfulness. Their father did justice and righteousness, and it was well with him. Josiah knew God and trusted in Him. His sons did not. Their eyes were "for covetousness, for shedding innocent blood, and practicing oppression and violence." Jeremiah preached repentance to them, and a promise that, should they repent, they shall "enter the gates of this house, riding on horses and in chariots, accompanied by servants and people."

The Lord, in true mercy and pity, wants to cleanse sinners from their sins by daily repentance and continual faith in Christ. He wants to cleanse our eyes from covetousness so that we look to Him for everything we need in this life, and the next.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy succor, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The king of Egypt goes to war against Carchemish by the Euphrates. This isn't Josiah's fight, yet he goes out to war against the king of Egypt anyway. The text doesn't tell us whether or not he consulted the Lord before going into battle, but it seems as if he did not. The king of Egypt warns Josiah against meddling in the affairs of others, especially because the Lord has commanded the king of Egypt to go to war. Josiah refuses to listen to God's Word in this instance and pays for it with his life.

Although it is lamentable that Josiah perished the way he did, his death is not entirely one of judgment. God often uses suffering and tribulation for our eternal good. The Lord promised Josiah that the destruction of Judah would not occur during his lifetime. By taking Josiah out of this life, he graciously spared him from Judah's fate and fulfilled His promise.

The Lord can use the sufferings and tragedies of this life to show us his mercy and to draw us unto Him. He promises to give us daily bread, and He daily fulfills His Word. On the day He ceases to give daily bread, He will fulfill His promises and take us to our heavenly home and our eternal reward. Like Josiah, we may not always consult the Lord in our daily decisions, but we know that He uses all things for our eternal good.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy succor, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Ahab called God's faithful prophet the "troubler of Israel." Satan would also teach the Pharisees and other false teachers of the Jews to characterize Jesus as a troubler of Israel.

Our sinful hearts don't like to be troubled, so if God's truth confronts us and threatens the comfort we have found in our wickedness, then we are tempted to condemn the one who brings the truth. Unfaithfulness brings the trouble; God's Word simply reveals it, because He desires to save us from it.

Ahab's wickedness was profound, so God's miraculous displays against Israel's idolatry were also profound and grand. Sometimes the Lord needs to provide a major display of His power and holiness in order to wake us up. It troubles sinners, but a worse fate would be silence from our Maker and Redeemer, and the comfort of being left in our evil would lead to a far worse trouble of everlasting death. Thanks be to God that He does send His Word and miracles. As St. Paul teaches in Romans 8:18, present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed in us on account of our Lord Jesus Christ! His sacrifice and resurrection was the grandest miracle of all, so that all who believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Lord God works on His terms, not ours. Sinful man wants to have quiet and no trouble, but God sees fit to use a major event to teach him. Other times we would desire a great sign, but instead God chooses to speak through small and subtle things. God teaches us to ask and pray, but that does not mean that He will forsake His will in order to pander to ours. He teaches us to confess and pray that “His will be done” so that our own will may be shaped to be like His.

Our Lord uses such methods in order to teach us humility. We are to accept the means and events that God considers good and needful just as Christ showed us that He accepted the cup of His suffering and death, even though His body was troubled at the thought. He gives us His Word and Spirit to enable us to endure and submit to that which He places on us. By faith He makes us able to understand that our will should not come before His, but that we must fear, love, and trust in Him because His will brings the greatest blessings of all.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Manasseh and Amon seduced the Old Testament church away from the true doctrine and worship of God. Now the Lord raised up Josiah to cleanse and defend the church. He removed the idolatrous images from the boundaries of ancient Israel. He repaired the Lord’s temple, and in the process found the Book of the Law. Josiah further reformed the Old Testament church based on the Book of the Law. Even after being cut to the heart by the Law, Josiah continued to reform the church and bring its worship into conformity with God’s Word.

The Lord teaches us that He cleanses and defends His church when it falls into false doctrine and worship. We give thanks for this reformation through Josiah. We also give thanks for God’s reforming work through Dr. Luther, for he too brought the pure Gospel and true worship to light.

This reading also teaches how we are to respond to God’s Word. Josiah humbled himself at the reading of the Law, and the Lord had mercy upon him. Isaiah 66:2 says, “But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.” The Lord crushes our hearts with His Law, condemning our sin. He shows mercy to the one who is contrite, who repents of his sin, and flees to Christ for mercy. As the Lord showed Josiah His mercy, so He bestows Christ’s blessings on all who believe.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy succor, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Manasseh reigned fifty-five years over Judah, making his reign the longest of all the Judean kings. His reign was also the worst by far. Unlike his father Hezekiah, he seduced Judah to sin by promoting open idolatry throughout the land. He was so brazen in his sin that he placed an idol in the Jerusalem Temple. He also shed innocent blood, so much that he filled Jerusalem with blood. It was because of Manasseh that the Lord determined to bring calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah.

The Chronicler tells us that Manasseh was deported to Babylon where he learned repentance. The affliction of exile that the Lord brought upon Manasseh showed him his sin so that he confessed it in a beautiful prayer, which we still have as a small book in the Old Testament Apocrypha. The Lord heard Manasseh's prayer and restored him to Judah where he bore the fruits of repentance, taking away the foreign gods. He could not turn the hearts of the people though. They continued to worship the false gods he had earlier promoted.

Manasseh's great sin, affliction, repentance, and restoration shows us how God deals with sin in every age. He sends affliction as a small punishment so that we recognize our sin and repent. When we repent and flee to Him for mercy, He freely forgives us for Christ's sake. Then by the power of the Holy Ghost we work to amend our sinful lives each day.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy succor, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

We are tempted to think coveting is “no big deal” and that the 9th and 10th Commandments are less important than the other eight. But coveting is a small, quiet cancer that is serious because it gets overlooked. False teachers encourage people to think that their wants are above reproach because they are “felt needs” and therefore must be accommodated as rights. But St. James teaches us, “When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:15). Ahab's coveting and petty behavior was tied up with treachery, murder, and theft. It also brought consequences on his descendants. So we see that coveting is not a sin to be minimized or dismissed.

God teaches us to seek His kingdom and His will. Righteousness and love are more valuable and gratifying than earthly property, wealth, or power. God's Word constantly teaches that all good things come from Him, including that which satisfies our true needs, and we should be content with His providence because His will is good! He does teach us to ask for things we want, but that does not mean we can justify covetous desires or treacherous, destructive efforts to satisfy them. His Word and Spirit make us humble so that we can seek what is righteous, and be content with His holy thoughts and ways!

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Ahaziah had no excuse. He had to have been taught about God's Words and works that were made manifest during the time of his father's reign. He knew of Elijah. But he still chose to mock and ignore God, and seek after lies and idolatry. He kept sending men to their death as he contended with God's prophet. And in spite of the warnings, Ahaziah died according to the Word of the Lord rather than humble himself.

As God's people we have the sad task of seeing the wicked and idolatrous people of the world fall as they try to contend against the Lord's Word and will. Some have heard the Word, but they choose to mock it. Others have had very little exposure to God's teachings, but even when confronted with it, they try to ignore it and continue in their folly, only to fall to the consequences. But the Church must remain steadfast in the Word. As His people, we know that discipline and consequences are real. He calls us to proclaim His truth and do His works even in the midst of rebellion and death around us because He desires that all people might hear His Word, and through it be humbled and be saved according to His grace in Christ Jesus.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Lord allowed sickness to come upon His servant Hezekiah to the point that he was near death. Every sickness is a harbinger of death, a reminder that our bodies will one day fail altogether. The Lord confirms this through the prophet Isaiah. This sickness not only points to future death. This very sickness leads to death. Hezekiah prays that God would remember him in mercy. The Lord answers his prayer, giving him fifteen more years of life. The Lord sends seasons of sadness, as well as days of gladness.

Hezekiah then shows off all Judah's treasures to the Babylonian envoy. The Lord tempers Hezekiah's joy with the news that one day all this treasure would belong to Babylon and his descendants would be servants in Babylon. At this news Hezekiah gives thanks to God that it won't happen in his lifetime.

Hezekiah's life demonstrates the truth of Paul Gerhardt's words, "God oft gives me days of gladness; shall I grieve if He give seasons, too, of sadness. God is good and tempers ever all my ill, and He will wholly leave me never" (TLH 523:3). In this life gladness seems to last days, while sadness lasts for seasons. Nevertheless, in days of gladness and joy give thanks to the Lord and enjoy the good He sends. In seasons of sadness and grief, remember the Lord's promise that your heavenly Father knows your needs and will provide what is best for your eternal good.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy succor, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

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

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

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

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

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

—The Large Catechism

SATURDAY, SEPT. 7: 2 KINGS 2:1-25 11TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

This chapter from God’s Word reminds us that these stories are not merely “cold” narratives. They are about real people who experienced emotions, struggles, and reactions like the ones we all have in our own lives.

Elisha was not a cold-hearted in his faith. He knew his beloved master had to be taken up as the Lord had declared. But no matter how much he accepted this as the good will of God, the feelings weighed heavy on him and he clung to whatever remaining time he could get before the Lord’s will came to pass.

Our Savior also showed that true faith is not unfeeling. Jesus expressed joy, exasperation, anger, and sadness, even as He remained perfectly faithful and obedient to the Father in all things. So we are not expected to be like cold, sterile robots while trusting in the Lord. Emotions are part of how God made us according to His perfect will. However, our emotions are also corrupted by sin, like all the rest of our powers, so they are not to be given free reign, but humbled and disciplined by God’s Word, will, and Spirit, like all the other aspects of our life. May the Lord make us feel all the joys of His blessings, and help us in all ways to be faithful.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Article XX. Of Good Works.

In the twentieth article they [the Roman Catholics] lay down these words, viz. that they reject and condemn our statement that men do not merit the remission of sins by good works. This article they clearly declare that they reject and condemn. What is to be said on a subject so manifest? Here the framers of the Confutation [the Papists' answer to the Augsburg Confession] openly show by what spirit they are led. For what in the Church is more certain than that the remission of sins occurs freely for Christ's sake, that Christ and not our works is the propitiation for sins, as Peter says (Acts 10:43): "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins"? To this Church of the prophets we would rather assent that to these abandoned writers of the Confutation, who so impudently blaspheme Christ. For although there were writers who held after the remission of sins men are just before God, not by faith, but by works themselves, yet they did not hold this, viz. that the remission of sins itself occurs on account of our works, and not freely for Christ's sake.

Therefore the blasphemy of ascribing Christ's honor to our works is not to be endured. These theologians are now entirely without shame, if they dare to bring such an opinion into the Church. Nor do we doubt that his most excellent imperial majesty and very many of the princes will not allow this passage of the Confutation to remain, if they be admonished of it. On this topic we could cite infinite testimonies from Scripture and from the Fathers. But above we have quoted a sufficient number on this subject. And there is no need to testimonies for one who knows why Christ has been given for us, who knows that Christ is the propitiation for our sins. Isaiah says (53:6): "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." The adversaries on the other hand teach that God hath laid our iniquities not on Christ, but on our works. Neither are we disposed to mention here the sort of works which they teach. We see that a horrible decree has been prepared against us, which would terrify us still more if we were contending concerning doubtful or trifling subjects. Now since our consciences understand that by the adversaries the manifest truth is condemned, whose defense is necessary for the Church, and increases the glory of Christ; we easily despise the terrors of the world, and patiently will bear whatever is to be suffered for the glory of Christ and the advantage of the Church.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §78–82

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE I.

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

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

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

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

God helps those who help themselves, right? Wrong. God helps those who trust in Him. The power and the mercy of God is most clear when things are hopeless, when the saints of God literally cannot help themselves. When we say, “God helps those who help themselves,” maybe we just mean that God expects us to do our best with what we have? This is not why He helps us. He helps us because He is merciful. He helps us for the sake of the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

In our text, Hezekiah was helpless to save his people. All he could do was pray and trust in God. And God heard him and delivered them.

Men often think that, when life becomes hard, they need to do something about it, or that God wants them to do something about it. But God primarily wants men to trust in Him. God allows enemies and hardships to come upon all so that we learn to trust in Him, rather than ourselves. Ultimately, our greatest enemy is sin. We are powerless against sin and there is literally nothing we can do about it. But, if we trust in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ, God Himself will deliver us from sin.

We pray: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The ultimate image we should see in Elisha is that of Christ. Of course Elisha is a type of Christ. He prefigures Christ in his ministry. As our Lord’s apostles were writing the Gospels they very much understood the miracles that Jesus performed to be foreshadowed by the miracles of Elisha. And just as Elisha was the successor to Elijah, so Jesus is the new Elijah.

The apostles very much make the connection for us that the miracles of Elisha are connected to the miracles of Jesus. Just as the vessels of oil are miraculously filled, the vessels of wine are miraculously filled at Cana. As Elisha raises the son of the Shunammite woman, so Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain. As Elisha feeds one hundred men with twenty loaves, Jesus feeds five thousand with five loaves and two fish. All of these things point us to the Savior who gives us eternal life through His gifts.

We should immediately be drawn to the body and blood of our risen Lord upon reading these stories. Our Lord raises us up at the Eucharist. He feeds us with the never-ending bread of life at His table. And the day will come when we eat with Elijah, Elisha, and all the apostles at our Lord’s table in heaven.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, fill us with the oil of faith and make us truly grateful for the abundant gifts You give to us. Help us to see our Lord as the fulfillment of the prophets of old. Amen.

Again, Elisha, as the prefigurement of Christ, heals a leper. He demonstrates to the pagan, Naaman, the power of the living God. Naaman is so overwhelmed by the healing that it seems that he converts to a disciple of the God of Israel immediately. Of course he knows very little about this God. He only knows His power.

It appears that Naaman's desire to have "two mule-loads of earth" from Israel is a belief that the God of Israel is tied to the soil of Israel. This can be seen as ignorance, but genuine devotion. Then there is the odd request for forgiveness when Naaman bows down in the temple of Rimmon. It seems strange that Naaman pledges not to offer "burnt offering or sacrifice" to any god but the Lord, and then wants permission to bow down in the temple of Rimmon. It seems this is ignorance again, and Elisha's answer of "Go in peace" is not permission. Elisha is saying, "Naaman, you already know the answer." Naaman had already experienced the reality of the true God and knew what he must do. Elisha was the disciple of Elijah. Elijah mocked and then executed the prophets of Baal. Elisha hadn't suddenly become a syncretist, nor had he started approving of syncretism. This passage is sometimes misused to condone syncretism, but it is certainly not an approval of it by Elisha.

We pray: Lord Jesus, help us to see that syncretism is never good or right. Help us confess You, Lord Jesus, no matter the consequences. Amen.

Two days ago we read that Ahaz, Hezekiah's father and a wicked king, had indebted the kingdom of Judah to the Assyrians for military help. Hezekiah has now inherited the consequences of his father's foolishness and, when he tries to free Judah from the debt she owes her enemies, the Assyrians attack with a force too great for them. Judah cannot escape her enemies without help.

There are many misfortunes and mistakes that children inherit from their parents. It is a reminder of the fallen state of creation that men are continually burdened with the mistakes of others, in addition to their own. Especially, it is a reminder of the curse we have all inherited from our first father, Adam. Everyone born naturally since Adam also inherits from him the natural inclination to sin, and we add our own lifetime of sins to it. If we try to free ourselves from sin's hold, we find that sin grows stronger and the devil grows angrier, so that we cannot escape.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the new Adam. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). It is Christ who frees us from sin, since we are too weak. Through Baptism into Christ we inherit a new life free from sin.

We pray: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In 1 Kings 11 we read how God divided the nation of Israel into two kingdoms. King Solomon was the son of David, he was the wisest man on earth, and he was the one who built the temple of the Lord. But, despite his great wisdom, he gave into idolatry. God disciplined Solomon by taking away the larger portion of the kingdom and giving it to another. Thus there became two kingdoms and two kings: the descendants of David ruled the kingdom of Judah to the South, while the rest of the nation to the North—called the “kingdom of Israel”—was ruled by others.

Today’s reading concerns the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel. God delivered them into the hands of the Assyrians for their unfaithfulness. It would be about 130 years before the southern kingdom of Judah would be taken into exile by the Babylonians. The destruction of Israel served two purposes: it put an end to the wickedness of Israel, and was a warning to Judah to repent of their own unfaithfulness.

When others suffer as a natural consequence of their actions, it is easy to scoff at them and think that we ourselves are better people. But each must look to his own sins and his own calling in life. It may be that God lets one man see the sufferings of another as a warning and an opportunity to repent. Repent, therefore, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness.

We pray: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Here by the Jordan river we see one of the more unusual stories of the Old Testament. The prophet Elisha caused an axe head to float on the water so that one of the sons of the prophets might recover it. At first, one might wonder if this is just magic. What is the reason for this miracle? As, of course, with many miracles, God is showing His care for His people, even in little, mundane things. He does supply our material needs. And that would be enough of a reason for this miracle, but there is an even more important purpose.

As in so many miracles in the Old Testament, this one foreshadows Christ in a certain way. Jesus also provided for the material needs of His disciples. In Matthew 17:24-27 Peter finds himself in need of money to pay the temple tax. He tells Peter to go fishing, and the first fish he catches will have the coin in its mouth. Jesus raised the needed item up from the water as Elisha did here in this chapter.

Again we see the parallel between both men as successors to Elijah. Both are men who are greater than Elijah. So, again, this miracle foreshadows and points to Jesus. This is Elisha’s purpose in doing this miracle; not only to provide for one man’s needs, but to show all men the living God, Jesus Christ.

We pray: Lord Jesus, may we see You in every part of the Old Testament. Remind us that all scripture is about You. Amen.

Because of the sins of the Hebrews, God allows a famine to come upon them, and also that they may be besieged by the Syrians. As usual, their sins have caused them to suffer terribly, even to the point that cannibalism was seen in the city. But one of the most obvious things we observe in this story is the King's complete helplessness. He cannot lift the siege and he cannot feed his people. In his rage he tries to blame Elisha. Elisha, however, is in no danger. God controls the entire situation. In fact, this is precisely what God wants His people to see. They are helpless. They can do nothing to save themselves. Their salvation must come from Him.

God caused the Syrians to believe they were hearing the armies of "the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians" advancing toward them. In terror they fled before the phantom noise. In an instant, the siege was lifted and the people saved. The king could take no credit for this. Only God could accomplish such a thing.

This is instructive for us today. None of us can ultimately avoid destruction in this world, or the next. Only God can save us in the midst of this wicked world. We must lean on Him in the hour of desperate need.

We pray: Lord, help to strengthen us in our faith toward You. Let us see and believe that our only hope of salvation is in You. Amen.

King Ahaz's idolatry is impressive. He burned his son as a sacrifice, stole the treasury of God's temple and gave it to the Assyrians, and, when the Syrians helped him, replaced the altar of the Lord with an altar to the gods of Assyria. For his extreme idolatry, the book of Chronicles says he was not even buried in the tombs of the kings, but was buried separately (2 Chronicles 28:27).

God does not always stop wicked government, but uses it as a form of discipline, to make men realize their sins and to repent. Ahaz was one of the worst kings Judah had. Because of him the worship of God was mutilated, the Word of God was silenced, and Judah became indebted to the wicked Assyrians. But the chapter ends with a word of hope. Hezekiah, Ahaz's son, would be one of the most faithful kings Judah ever had. King Hezekiah would heal what his father had destroyed and restore the worship of the true God, in accordance with the Word of God.

This is a graphic depiction of what it means to die to sin and be raised to the Lord Christ. Satan is the prince and ruler of this world. Everyone born in sin belongs to Satan as to a wicked tyrant. But the Christ is a new, faithful King, who heals what Satan has damaged. Through Baptism, we are taken out of Satan's kingdom and born again into the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

We pray: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

A plumb line is a weight on a string. Because of gravity, no matter how you hold it, the weight always points straight down in a perfect line. It is a builder's tool to test that all walls are perfectly straight.

Amos received a vision of the Lord on a wall with a plumb line. The wall is the nation of Israel, the plumb line is the Law of God, and God is the builder. God tests the people of Israel against His Law to see if they are perfectly straight. Anyone not walking according to His Law He disciplines that the whole wall may be straight—just as a builder replaces, cuts, or pounds a brick back into place. God does this by sending His servants to preach the Law, in the hope of repentance. God's Israel will be made straight; those who repent He fits back into place. Those who refuse to repent, He removes and replaces with others. Thus, Amos was sent to preach against King Jeroboam in the hope that Jeroboam would repent and return to the straight line of God's Law.

The pastors of the Church are called to preach the Law so that those in error may be made straight again, which in turn makes the whole wall straight. We cannot follow the Law of God perfectly, but those are truly straight and upright before God who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the Law of God for us.

We pray: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In this chapter we are given a glimpse into God's omniscience. He knows that Ben-Hadad will recover from illness. But God also knows (and so does Elisha) that Hazael will murder Ben-Hadad. He knows it before Hazael knows it. God knows how all the players will act out their roles.

Our Lord God holds all things in His hands. He knows all that will happen, and His will is accomplished. The future is not uncertain or chaotic. God has an end that He is driving all history towards. All things and all men serve His purposes. Unlike others in the world, the Christian knows that his life is part of God's plan and that he will join God in His eternal kingdom. This gives the Christian purpose and hope.

There is intelligence and design in the world. This is one aspect of the Christian worldview that made it easier to convert the pagans. The world and, more importantly our existence in it, is not just random and meaningless. It is purposeful. We don't have to be victims of fate. We are sons of the King of Kings. Not only is this easier to cope with psychologically, but it makes better sense of the world around us. The one true God's design can be seen in His creation. And history has a direction. It is not random or circular.

We pray: Lord, give us eyes to see You in Your creation and in history. May we recognize that all of history works toward Your ends, and may we be servants for You in that history. Amen.

God often uses men as the tools of His wrath. There are many examples. The Romans ended up being the instrument of God's wrath upon Israel after the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus. In that case they were unconscious instruments of God's wrath. Elijah was very much a conscious instrument of God's wrath against the prophets of Baal. Here Jehu is anointed king over Israel, and is made the tool of God's wrath against the house of Ahab.

Jehu is also conscious of his role as the bringer of God's wrath. We can see this several times here, including when Jehu answers Joram as to whether it is time for peace. Jehu says, "What peace, as long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft are so many?" Jehu is declaring that her sins must be punished. The overthrow of the dynasty is the result of many and grave sins, not political ambition. And the most disgraceful end came to Jezebel.

Once we are outside the Biblical text we must be more cautious in claiming that God is bringing wrath on any group of people, but in some cases it seems obvious. Surely God can and does bring wrath upon some people for their sins. It does seem obvious that the nations of the West, what used to be called "Christendom," have largely turned away from God. What should we expect from God? He did not spare Israel. Shall He spare us?

Let us pray that our Lord preserves His Church in the midst of the wicked world. And if judgment comes, may He preserve His Church through that as well. Amen.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession offers this simple definition of sacrament: "rites which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added" (XIII:3). The promise of grace must be heard, for it is the Word of God, but the rite is added that our eyes and hands may have something to grasp as proof of the promise. "Just as the Word enters the ears in order to strike hearts; so the rite itself meets the eyes, in order to move hearts" (Apology XIII:5).

In Isaiah 6, God forgives Isaiah's sins by a sacramental act. First, the seraph takes the burning coal from the altar and touches Isaiah's lips with it. This is the visible rite. Then the Word of promise is added to it: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away."

This sacramental act prefigures the sacraments of the New Testament. In Baptism, water is applied to the body as a visible sign. Then the Word of promise is added—the invocation of the Triune God. The ordinary water becomes a sin-forgiving sacrament through the promise of the Word. Likewise, in the Lord's Supper, ordinary bread and ordinary wine become a true communion with the Body and Blood of Christ through the gracious Word of the Lord.

We may marvel at Isaiah's unique vision, but we receive the same gift from God in the Church: the forgiveness of sins through visible signs.

We pray: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

I. Of Sin.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

Article XVIII.

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

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

—The Augsburg Confession

In Saturday's reading we heard God's dreadful command to Jehu, ordering him to put to death everyone in Ahab's house. Jehu would be the instrument of the Lord's vengeance on those who had persecuted His servants. In today's reading we find Jehu carrying out the Lord's command. First, he had Ahab's seventy sons executed. Then he executed Ahaziah's brothers, who had come in support of Ahab's house. Then he rooted out and slaughtered the worshipers of Baal in Israel. Through all the bloodshed, we see just how serious the Lord is when He promises to avenge: "'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The LORD will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:30-31).

The writer to the Hebrews applies this severe warning to all who sin willfully, including Christians. The Lord whom we know as our tender Shepherd is not at all tender when it comes to punishing the impenitent, as we saw in today's reading. Sadly, Jehu himself ended up turning away from the Lord, engaging in the very idolatry he was sent to punish, for which his house eventually suffered.

But to the fearful and the penitent, God comes with grace and offers us refuge in Christ, who bore the full weight of God's vengeance against sin on the cross and now offers us safety and peace. Now we take comfort, not only in God's forgiveness, but in God's promise to deal with those who persecute His people, even as He finally dealt with the house of Ahab.

We pray: O Lord, we stand in awe of Your righteous wrath. Keep us from falling into sin, and spare us in Your great mercy, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

We're only told briefly of king Azariah, that is, Uzziah, in today's reading, though he was one of Judah's best kings. For as faithful as he was overall, he still allowed idolatrous worship to go on at the high places. And the Chronicler tells us why he was struck with leprosy toward the end of his reign: pride overtook him, and he, though not a priest, dared to offer incense in the Lord's house.

As for the kings of Israel, it was the beginning of the end as one wicked king succeeded another, until finally the Assyrian armies came and began the process of dismantling the northern kingdom. That process would be complete by the end of Hoshea's reign.

It's difficult reading through these chapters of the Old Testament, isn't it? Not only is it somewhat confusing going back and forth between Judah's kings and Israel's kings—most of whom seemed to go by two different names—but it's also like watching a train derail in slow motion.

These chapters highlight a very important truth for us: the kingdom of God cannot be an earthly one, for the nation to which God gave every opportunity to succeed failed miserably. The kingdom of Christ must be a spiritual kingdom, where He, the only truly good King, rules in men's hearts through the Gospel here in time. His goal is not to set up another earthly kingdom, but to bring us safely into His heavenly kingdom, where we will be freed forever from the sin that so easily entangles.

We pray: O Father, Thy kingdom come. Give us Your Holy Spirit so that by Your grace we may believe Your holy Word and lead godly lives, here in time and there in eternity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As with so many of the kings of Israel and Judah, there was some good mixed with much that was bad. Amaziah followed the Lord for a time. He heeded God's Law at the beginning, and, as the Chronicler tells us, he also listened to a prophet who warned him not to let soldiers from Israel fight with Judah because of the wickedness of Israel's king. Amaziah also won an impressive battle against Edom.

But the Chronicler tells us that he then took Edom's gods, brought them back to Judah, started worshiping them, and wouldn't listen to the prophet who warned him. From there, he became prideful and provoked Israel's king to an ill-fated battle.

Jeroboam II in Israel never followed the Lord, and yet the Lord still showed mercy to Israel through him, restoring some of their territory and giving them more time to repent of their incessant idolatry.

In spite of the almost constant faithlessness of Israel and Judah, the Lord still was not willing to be done with them. He kept sending them prophets to warn them. He gave them moments of prosperity and peace. This is very much like the world today. Amid the rampant idolatry of the nations, there are pockets of faithfulness, moments of prosperity and peace. We might think the Lord would be ready to be done with this world, but He isn't. Not just yet. So great is His desire that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance, that all should look to His Son for forgiveness and healing. But for the sake of the elect, He will not delay His judgment forever!

We pray: O Lord, keep us from being influenced by the wickedness around us or deceived by the evil within us. Hasten Your coming, Lord Jesus! Amen.

The Chronicler helps us to understand the righteous judgment of God executed by Jehu against Ahaziah and his family. Though king of Judah, Ahaziah followed the wicked ways of the kings of Israel. Though closer to Jerusalem, he ruled as if from Samaria. Though he had the Word of God at his disposal, he listened rather to the word of his idolatrous parents and despised the faith of his forefather David. For this the Lord, through His instrument Jehu, put a swift end to Ahaziah's reign in Judah.

Does it seem strange that a king of Judah would abandon the worship of the Lord in order to imitate instead the idolatry of Israel—which, itself, was an imitation of the idolatry of the rest of the world? It shouldn't. The popular religion is popular for a reason. It fits with human reason. It creates its own path to God. It isn't restrained by the Word of the Lord. The worship of the Lord, on the other hand, acknowledges sin and reveals the mercy of God in the promised Messiah as the only path to salvation. To live according to the Word of the Lord is to swim against the current that carries the world to its destruction.

Don't be afraid to defy the idolaters of the world, to remain faithful while so many abandon the faith. The wicked may prosper, some for a longer and others for a shorter time, but their end is always the same. Meanwhile, the faithful quietly carry out God's plans, like those who hid future king Joash.

We pray: O Lord, when the wicked prosper and the people of the world join together in false worship, help us to remember Your faithfulness to Your people and the blessed truth of Your Gospel. Amen.

While wicked Athaliah reigned in her husband's place, Jehoiada the priest and other godly men and women in Jerusalem quietly took care of young Joash, the king's only remaining son. They knew they were risking their lives by keeping him safe all those years and by placing the crown on the boy's head. But they did it anyway, showing themselves ready to give their lives in defense of the last remaining son of David. Their patience, their diligence, and their courage were rewarded. The wicked queen's reign of terror was brought to an end, and the Messianic line of David was saved from near extinction.

The godly who cared for Joash had good reason to hope. God's promise to David that the Messiah would come from his royal line couldn't fail to be kept, so they were bold in their defiance of the wicked. How much bolder shouldn't we be, knowing how God worked in this story—and in every story since Adam and Eve—to fulfill that promise against all human odds!

When the wicked rise up in opposition to the Lord and His people, keep trusting in the Son of David, our Lord Jesus Christ. And keep serving the Lord boldly within your vocation. Sometimes the righteous lose everything for their faithful service. But sometimes, as in today's reading, the quiet service of God's people brings about a great salvation. Is your church small and unimpressive? Perhaps the Lord will use such smallness to allow you to "fly under the radar," as Jehoiada did, to spread the Gospel far and wide while the devil and the world ignore your existence!

We pray: Heavenly Father, bless the humble service You permit us to carry out in the world, that Your name may be glorified and the kingdom of Your Son extended. Amen.

Joash was a godly king, at first. Jehoiada had trained him well, not only to trust in the Lord, but to love the Lord, His temple, and His Word. It was no small thing to restore the temple that had been desecrated by the idolaters in Jerusalem, and to do so with great zeal. Joash loved his God.

Until he didn't. When Jehoiada died, Joash stopped listening to God's Word and started listening instead to the "wise" counselors of Judah who taught him to turn his back on his God and to despise the very temple he had worked so hard to restore. What a tragic end to a king who showed such potential at the beginning!

It's always a tragedy when a child of God goes astray. How many begin well, being baptized at a young age, being properly catechized and instructed in God's Word, eager to serve the Lord, only to stop hearing God's Word later in life! When they step away from the Means of Grace they show just how frail our human powers are as the devil, the world, and their flesh lead them to turn away from the God they once loved and from the Word they once cherished.

Still, the Lord sends His prophets—His pastors and preachers—to call His straying children to repentance, that they may humble themselves and be lifted up again with the free forgiveness Christ has earned for them on the cross. May we all take heed when God calls us through our pastors to repent! May the example of Joash teach us what not to do!

We pray: O Lord, I am weak, but You are strong. Forgive my sins and, for Your mercy's sake, preserve me in the true faith; through Christ my Lord. Amen.