

SATURDAY, APRIL 6: HEBREWS 13:1-25 EASTER SATURDAY

Throughout this week of examining the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ and the importance of His bloody sacrifice we are reminded how Christ has opened eternal life to us by His glorious resurrection from the grave. While this good news of your Savior prepares you to be ready to die in peace, in our reading for today we are reminded not to die, but be ready to live in the words, “Let brotherly love continue”!

Here we see an explanation of Commandments Four through Ten, as included in the summary of “Love your neighbor as yourself.” We remember that we are called to live sacrificially, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Yet all the while we trust the Holy of Holies has now been opened to us allowing us to come before God with hearts of repentance, trusting we are forgiven for Christ’s sake when we fail.

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Hallelujah!

Let us pray: Oh, then, draw away your hearts now from pleasures base and hollow. There to share what He imparts, here His footsteps ye must follow. Fix your hearts beyond the skies, whether ye yourselves would rise (TLH 206:10). Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD

**OCULI—EASTER SATURDAY
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THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 11:14-28 (NKJV)

And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

THE COLLECT

We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Oh what words of encouragement these are: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Remember the Sunday after Christmas when we heard how we are just like Simeon and Anna, how we behold the Christ with the eyes of faith as we wait our departure in peace. The Holy Spirit has revealed this to us through the gospel, that this Jesus is indeed the consolation and the redemption we have been waiting for as the early saints awaited. That same peace and joy comes to us because of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we have just celebrated again this Easter. Faith enables us to trust that He has redeemed and rescued us from our sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; for that consolation and redemption comes only in the person of the resurrected Christ!

Let us pray: Faith's strong hand the Rock hath found, grasped it, and will leave it never; even death now cannot part from its Lord the trusting heart (TLH 206:3). Amen.

Yesterday's reading was a reminder that we not lose our hope of the resurrection of the dead to life everlasting, but to remain firm in faith with the assurance that Christ's resurrection was sufficient. However, because of our dreadful sinful human nature, sometimes we are tempted to wonder about this work of Christ that we confess, asking, "Is it really sufficient?"

We must remember that we are not alone. Our reading for today encourages us to live by faith as have many others who placed their hope in the promised Christ and His work. We do well to daily look to Christ as being our substitute, for by His holy life He perfectly fulfilled God's law in our place (Romans 5:19); and by His innocent sufferings and death He bore the punishment for our sins in our place (2 Corinthians 5:21). All that Christ has done is imputed to us by faith (Romans 4:24); that is, it is all counted as if we ourselves had done it (Romans 4:5). His death, therefore, frees us from guilt and condemnation, and His holy life makes us righteous in God's sight, and fit to enter into heaven. Our entire hope of salvation rests on Christ and what He has done for us (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Let us pray: Jesus, my Redeemer, lives; I, too, unto life shall waken. Endless joy my Savior gives; shall my courage, then, be shaken? Shall I fear, or could the Head rise and leave His members dead? Nay, too closely am I bound unto Him by hope forever ... (TLH 206:2-3). Amen.

Do you have a strong faith or a weak faith? It is a sign of faithlessness to boast in the power of one's own faith. Rather, see in the gospel of Luke those whose faith the Lord commends: the sinful woman who wept at Jesus' feet (Luke 7), and the tax collector who, with head down, beat his breast and cried, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18). These two went away justified, rather than the proud, presumptuous Pharisees.

The people of this current generation, ensnared by the prideful claims of "popular Christianity," boast of great faith and how much they love Jesus. How different is the plea of the distressed father in today's lesson: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" Jesus is looking for a heart that acknowledges its weak and pathetic faith; one that is shy, troubled, and terrified by its many sins and feels that it is not worthy of the precious treasure of Christ's benefits because of its great impurity.

Saving faith always "looks to Jesus Christ alone, Who did for all the world atone; He is our one Redeemer" (TLH 377:1). Our righteousness before God and our deliverance from every evil of body and soul is not found in our strong faith, but in our strong Savior. By His death and resurrection the demons are rebuked and the power of sin is crushed.

True saving faith, then, fixates *not* on faith, but on Christ! *Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!* To such a cry the Savior always comes in mercy with all of His gifts, drives the devil away, and lifts up poor sinners.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5: MARK 9:33-50

OCULI

Isn't it just like sinners to obsess about who is the greatest? It's an unshakable instinct. It's the American way. If Bs are good grades, As are better. We want the gold medal, not silver or bronze. We admire winners. We look down on losers. And if God can help us become winners, well then, that's the God we will follow. Failure is not an option.

The disciples, too, were preoccupied with glory, all jockeying for positions of power in God's kingdom. But Jesus had an entirely different plan: weakness instead of power; a cross instead of glory; not the greatness of winning, but the greatness of losing—losing His very life to be our ransom from sin and death.

To make His point, Jesus stands a little child in their midst and teaches, "If you want to be great in My kingdom, then receive this little child in My name. For when you do, you will be receiving both Me and My Father Who sent Me." A little child is the very picture of helplessness, and that is exactly where Jesus places Himself for us, in the position of a little child. To receive, in faith, this Christ-Child, the Man of sorrows and the cross, is to receive God Himself.

Faith doesn't ask who is the greatest. Faith looks to Jesus in the manger and on the cross and says, "There. That's greatness." Do you want to be great in God's eyes? Then become small and insignificant in your own. Become like a little child—completely helpless and dependent on God's mercy. For "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3: HEBREWS 10:19-39 THE ANNUNCIATION

Our reading for today enlightens us unto the result of Christ's victorious work of His life, death, and resurrection. In Luther's Small Catechism we read why Christ "has redeemed me": in order that I might be His (2 Corinthians 5:15); live under Him in His Kingdom (Colossians 1:12-14); and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness (1 Peter 2:9); even as He is risen from the dead, and lives and reigns to all eternity.

As Christ rose from the dead, we are called to rise from the death of sin to the newness of life in Him that we have in our baptism (Romans 6:4). As He lives and dies no more, so we are to live in righteousness and no more become a servant of sin (Romans 6:9-10). As slaves of righteousness, remembering the good confession, we are called to live by faith with the assurance that, as He reigns to all eternity, so too we will live and reign with Him forever (Revelation 3:10). Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has a great reward.

Let us pray: I am flesh and must return unto dust, whence I am taken; but by faith I now discern that from death I shall awaken with my Savior to abide in His glory, at His side (TLH 206:4). Amen.

We continue to rejoice in hearing the news that, “He is no longer in the grave, but alive!” Often we forget the true benefit of Christ’s victorious resurrection and what that means for us as members of the church today.

Concerning Christ’s work of Redemption the Scriptures and Luther’s Small Catechism teach us: He has secured and delivered me from all sins, namely, from the guilt of sin by paying its penalty for me on the cross (1 John 1:7), and from the dominion of sin by giving me grace to fight against it and overcome it (Romans 6:14); from death--not from bodily death, for even the Christian must die, but from the fear of bodily death (Philippians 1:23); from spiritual death (Ephesians 2:6); from everlasting death (John 3:16); and from the power of the devil (1 John 3:8). On account of my sins, I was in Satan’s power, but Christ has freed me. Since He has paid the penalty for my sins, Satan no longer has any claim upon me, and can no longer harm me (John 10:27-28).

We pray: Then take comfort and rejoice, for His members Christ will cherish. Fear not, they will hear His voice; dying, they shall never perish; for the very grave is stirred when the trumpet’s blast is heard (TLH 206:8). Amen.

Perfection is God’s absolute standard of goodness if you want to enter into the kingdom of heaven (see Matthew 5:48). For sinners, then, all disputes about who is the greatest (Mark 9:33-34) are fruitless and only end in defeat (see James 2:10). That doesn’t keep sinners from trying to find loopholes, though.

The Pharisees thought they had one in the Old Testament divorce law, so they sought to challenge Jesus: “See, Moses permitted divorce! Do you agree with Moses, Jesus?” “Yes, Moses permitted it, but only because you people were going to do it anyway, and there needs to be some kind of limit to, and regulation on, bad behavior. But this was not, and is not, God’s design.”

These verses are a hard pill to swallow, especially in our day when these very sins are so common, even among Christians. Divorce for any reason other than marital infidelity or desertion is not okay, despite what the culture promotes and the state endorses. It is sin. So is fornication and even lust in the heart (Matthew 5:27-32). Oh yes! For those who have never fornicated or divorced, their lust still condemns them.

Thanks be to God for the mercy of our Savior who receives adulterous scoundrels and forgives their sins. The sins of our generation are great. Perhaps you yourself are guilty of adultery, even in the gross, outward way. Repent! Repent and believe the Gospel. You have a perfect God Who has suffered your punishment, and His perfection is great enough to cover even your greatest sin.

THURSDAY, MARCH 7: MARK 10:13-31

OCULI

The rich young ruler was more correct than he realized when he addressed Jesus as “Good Teacher.” There is only one man in the entire history of the human race who is *good*—Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and Son of God. Only He has perfectly fulfilled the entire will and Law of God, for that is why He came: *not to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill* (Matthew 5:17).

The young man was good by a human standard, but he was the furthest thing from it by God’s standard. His presumption of self-righteousness deceived him into presenting a few paltry crumbs of outward obedience to the Law before the throne of God’s justice. But all his *doing* would earn him nothing except death and eternal separation from God. The one thing He lacked was God’s own perfect righteousness: Jesus’ perfect life and innocent suffering and death for the forgiveness of sins.

In verses 13-16, which are customarily read at a baptism, Jesus says, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” A different kind of righteousness is needed to inherit eternal life. It is a righteousness bestowed through the Word and baptism into Christ, and received through faith alone.

Thank God that you don’t have to agonize over whether you have done enough and thus wonder if you are saved. Through baptism your eternal life is in the hands of the God, with Whom all things are possible, even the salvation of sinners who do not have the power to save themselves!

MONDAY, APRIL 1: HEBREWS 9:1-28

EASTER MONDAY

He is Risen! He is risen Indeed! Hallelujah! Those were the words of Christians world-wide yesterday celebrating the joy of Easter: the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, having suffered and died for the sins of world, rose alive victorious over the grave, having destroyed the headship of Satan, and his power of death forever. This happened through the blood sacrifice of God’s only begotten Son, so that mankind, through faith, has the freedom to enter into the presence of God, and not be destroyed because of his sin. This was the purpose of Christ Jesus being conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, and suffering under Pontius Pilate, so that He might make it possible for all mankind to be saved from sin, death, and the power of the devil once and for all!

Our reading for today elaborates on the importance of the blood sacrifice that God set forth through the sacrifice of bulls and goats as the people of God were saved by faith. They looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ and how God has always had mankind at the center of restoring him back into His presence. There he may have a right fear, love, and trust in God, which Adam once had in the Garden of Eden before sin took its reign. It is possible only through Jesus Christ’s life, death, and the rising from the grave.

Prayer: Jesus Christ, my sure Defense and my Savior, ever liveth; knowing this, my confidence rests upon the hope it giveth, though the night of death be fraught still with many an anxious thought (TLH 206:1). Amen.

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Mark 16:1-8 (NKJV)**

Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, “Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?” But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away; for it was very large.

And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples; and Peter; that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.”

So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

THE COLLECT

Almighty God, who through Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech Thee that as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Blind Bartimaeus’ cry is the cry of God’s church throughout the ages: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me—Kyrie eleison! It is the fervent prayer of the church, not just during Lent, but at all times. The Kyrie both begins the Divine Service, and it sets the tone for everything that follows, weaving its way throughout the liturgy.

In the Kyrie we are saying that we are the blind beggars standing at the side of the road, crying out to Jesus for help in our need. Religious “hipsters” tell us that this is a morbid, out-of-date way to worship God. We should toss out the historic liturgy, with its Kyries, and replace it with more “happy” and “uplifting” “praise” songs that joyously celebrate the good things going on in our lives. But we’re stubborn. Just like Bartimaeus, we ignore the fashionable crowd and cry out all the louder, *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us! Kyrie eleison!*

God never fails to hear our cry. He gathers us—the baptized—together in His name to give us our sight back. In the Word of Absolution and in the preaching of the Gospel, His mercy blots out our every sin and heals our souls from the guilt thereof. By feeding us with His very Body and Blood, given and shed for us, Christ opens our eyes to see the pure love of God.

For every imperfection of our love the mercy of Christ is the all-sufficient covering. The faith by which we are saved is the faith that continuously receives the mercy of God and stubbornly clings to it for dear life.

God's Lamb had come to His temple and He would put up with no competition. Animal blood cannot cleanse from sin, but the blood of God's Lamb does. In cleansing the temple, Jesus was announcing that the time of sacrifice would come to its appointed end when, in a matter of days, He Himself would be nailed to a cross for the life of the world.

Jesus is both the Sacrifice and He is the Temple. Most religions have temple buildings by which men try to reach God. Only Christianity claims as its temple a flesh and blood Man Who is the very God, Who died in our place and rose from the dead to give us eternal life in His Name. All other temples in the world reach up to try and touch God. Only Christianity has a temple that God Himself builds out of our human flesh and bone and blood. In this Temple the Son of God reaches down from heaven to touch our humanity and forgive our sin.

So where do you go with your sins? God's Law reveals our sin and our need for a temple. Sins demand sacrifice and sacrifice requires a temple. So where do you go? You go to Christ, Who is both the Temple and the Sacrifice. And where is Christ? Christ is where His Word is preached and where His Sacraments are given out. You go to His Church where His baptized people are gathered in His Name around His Word and the Supper. There is the once-for-all-time, once-for-all-people sacrifice, the Lamb that takes away the Sin of the world.

“Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant” (Hebrews 7:22b).

Today, the church quietly reflects on the body of Jesus resting in the tomb. It is a reflective day, looking back at Good Friday, contemplating our sins that made it necessary, yet rejoicing that our forgiveness is now bought and paid for. We also look forward to tomorrow, to the celebration of Jesus' resurrection! For as sin has been undone, so the wages of sin must be done away too. Death cannot hold our Lord! And so it cannot hold us, either.

That's where our text comes in. Under the old covenant sacrifices had to be made repeatedly. They only forgave sins in the sense that they “reached forward” (a little like Holy Communion “reaches back”) and distributed the forgiveness that Christ had yet to win. He has done it now. Our sins really are forgiven. When we go to communion, we don't just receive an “advance.” We receive the very body and blood (of the New Testament or “covenant”) that were crucified and shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

Jesus has become the surety of a better covenant. And as we receive His words in our ears, and His body and blood in our mouths, that surety is given to us as intimately and personally as we could possibly have it. Thanks be to God for the “better covenant,” the forgiveness of sins and the eternal life of which we are “sure,” for the sake of the completed work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection ...” (Hebrews 6:1a).

By the pen of the author of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit invites us to move beyond “the elementary principles of Christ” and “go on to perfection.” What are the “elementary principles”? The next verse tells us: Baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection, and judgment. In short, these are the basics of the faith that we learned in our Small Catechism!

What that does not mean is that we quit praying our Catechisms. We must always get back to basics. We are not to consider confirmation a sort of “Christian graduation,” as though there is no more we should know. But against those who might be tempted to discard even these basics, the Spirit mandates that we go on to perfection--that is, come to know and understand, and live out even more of what God gives us in His Holy Word.

Dear ones in Christ, God did not breathe a single word of Scripture pointlessly. Every word is a gift, a gift that we rejoice to hear and receive and wholeheartedly embrace. As you repent of your sins, repent of any negligence you have had toward the word of God. Continue to grow in your knowledge and understanding of who Christ is and what He has done for you. And pray that you may ever more fervently hold fast and live out the forgiveness of sins and the eternal life that Jesus died to give you. It is finished. Your every sin is forgiven you for Jesus’ sake.

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. John 6:1-15 (NKJV)**

After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.

Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.

Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.”

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?”

Then Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.

So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.” Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

THE COLLECT

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

MONDAY, MARCH 11: MARK 12:1-12

LAETARE

We sing, “Curb those who fain by craft and sword would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son and set at naught all he hath done” in the hymn “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word,” verse 1. How is it that human beings are so covetous that we want the kingdom of heaven, but don’t want Christ? Even among the pious there is an attitude that God should do all that we ask, as if He were a puppet on a string. We approach politics and pray that God would give us this or that candidate, believing we somehow know what is best for the kingdom of heaven. We spend more than we make and then complain to God that we don’t have enough to make ends meet. And the moment we face any adversity, or any expectation is conveyed to us, we protest and reject God.

But God owns everything. We have no claim. Jesus is the heir; He did not have to suffer at all. Yet for our sakes He set aside the “good life” in heaven, suffered rejection, dishonor, and even death. He did all this at the hands of human beings, and then made us heirs of eternal life with Him. The kingdom can only be ours through faith in Him. And when we recognize what Jesus suffered on our behalf, then we find dignity and honor in our own suffering for His sake. When we see how freely He shares His kingdom with us, then there is contentment and joy in everything we receive from His hand.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28: HEBREWS 5:1-14

MAUNDY THURSDAY

“And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9).

What does it mean that Jesus was “perfected”? As the eternal and uncreated Word of God, was He not always perfect? Well, of course He was. But in going to the cross, Jesus drank the cup His Father gave Him. He lived the perfect life we fail to live, died His atoning, sin-forgiving death on the cross for us, and rose again from the grave. So He was “perfected” in the sense that He completed His work, doing all that the Father gave Him to do.

As such, He “authored” eternal salvation for “all who obey Him.” Those words can be trouble too! After all, do we obey Him? Do we keep the commandments of God? We know that we “daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment.” But *obey* means more. It means to “listen up” to what our Lord has said to us.

So, we listen up to the Law, and endeavor to lead holy lives. We listen up to that Law again when it shows us our sin. But we also listen up to the Gospel, to the good news that Christ’s life, death and resurrection have indeed “authored” eternal salvation for us. By grace, through faith, you do indeed “listen up” to Jesus. Thus you are one who obeys Him, and salvation is yours.

“For the word of God is living and powerful ...” (Hebrews 4:12a).

Jesus Christ is our great High Priest. Priests in the Old Testament did two particularly important things: they offered sacrifice for the sins of the people, and they interceded for the people to God. This is what Jesus has done. He has offered Himself as the great atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world, and He continues to intercede for us, to be our advocate with the Father.

The priest also speaks God’s word to the people. This, too, Jesus has done. He speaks God’s word (His own word!) to us--words of Law and Gospel, words of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. When Christians lose faith in the power of that living and active word they turn to gimmicks, all those things that many try in order to make Christianity more “relevant.”

The word of God is living and active. It is relevant all by itself. Repent of your sins, the sins for which Christ died. And rejoice, for His sacrifice is sufficient to forgive them all. His blood pleads to the Father for mercy upon you. He intercedes for you, and with His living and active word He keeps you in the one true faith unto life everlasting.

From God’s point of view, Christ the Passover Lamb was tested to prove that He is without spot or blemish. From man’s viewpoint, it would be advantageous to find fault in Him, because if Christ is shown to be less than perfect, then we aren’t as bad. If we cannot attain Christ’s perfection our sinful nature reasons that at least we can pull Him down.

Still, to this day countless people try to pull Christ down. They pit His teaching against the political and social trends of our day and reject His teaching if it differs from the whims of man. Sinful human beings are willing to accept Christ as many things—a great man, inspired teacher, example to follow, revolutionary—but not as Savior. Of course, even if Christ does fit our political and social whims, He ends up being considered a failure to be rejected anyway.

“You are greatly mistaken,” Jesus said. “You know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.” Jesus does not fit our understanding of right and wrong, justice, or morality. The almighty God in His weakness is far more powerful than the might of man. Yes, we are to pay our taxes, and we are to render to God what is due to Him as well: our entire being, which He redeemed and owns. We squabble over taxes, but the God-man Jesus gave His life for us, and gives us His righteousness free of charge.

What ironic contrasts are in our reading for today. David's Son is David's Lord. "Love the Lord with all your heart," is the greatest commandment, but the religious leaders wanted to be honored above God. "Love your neighbor as yourself," but the teachers of the commandments devour widow's houses, while the widow freely gives all that she had. Where do you fall in the spectrum of contrasts? Does God have your entire being, as the greatest commandment requires? Do you expect God to forgive you for all your offences against Him, but chafe at the slights you endure from others, responding, "He did it to me!" and cursing people for their mistakes and foibles?

Ah, what wretches we truly are! Yet, we are not far from the kingdom of heaven. "In this is love," the Apostle John wrote, "not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). From this truth we learn to love God and our neighbor. God works in us with His grace—His love—forgiving us for our crimes against Him. We then "love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Truly when we meditate on the Scriptures we are not far at all from the kingdom of heaven. The Scriptures are light and life in Christ our Savior, because the Holy Spirit works through them. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit gives us faith and causes us to grow in love for God and man.

"For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses ..." (Hebrews 3:3a).

The letter to the Hebrews was written to people who were getting burnt out on the Christian Faith. Christ had not yet returned, their faith in Christ seemed, to some, to have been disappointed, and it was often not popular. So they contemplated "throwing in the towel" and going back to Mosaic Judaism.

The author of Hebrews reminds them that Jesus is superior to Moses. Moses delivered the children of Israel from temporal bondage in Egypt and from the threat to temporal life represented by the Egyptian army, but Jesus has delivered us from eternal bondage and eternal enemies: sin, death, and the devil.

Jesus is indeed worthy of greater glory than Moses. He has delivered a greater salvation, a salvation to which the Old Testament Passover and other laws of Moses pointed. Do not grow weary. By the grace of God endure to the end. By the death and resurrection of Jesus you have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. As you are in Christ, you too participate in a glory greater than that of Moses, the unfading glory of your Savior.

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation ...?” (Hebrews 2:3a).

The children of Israel had received salvation from the Lord: deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the covenant, the promised land, and most of all, the promise of a Messiah/Savior/King who would come to them. Now, in the New Testament, we have received even more: the fulfillment of the promises, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life on account of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But what if we neglect it? People get all excited about this, that, or the other weird cult, but let’s face it: more people are led astray by apathy than by Christian heresies. We have received much! And the affront to God caused by the ignorant is nothing compared to the insult of those who know the truth, and act like it doesn’t matter!

Thanks be to God we have that great salvation! We, who deserved the hell Jesus suffers for us on the cross, we are going to receive the eternal inheritance that Jesus alone deserves by right. So, as we follow our Lord on the way to the cross, do not neglect. Rather, rejoice. Our salvation is bought and paid for!

Through Jeremiah God said, “Do not trust in these lying words, saying, ‘...the temple of the LORD are these’” (7:4). The disciples were impressed with the great beauty of the temple in Jerusalem. Yes, it was impressive. Yes, it was the place where God said He would come and speak to the people. But, “Surely in temples made with hands, God, the Most High, is not dwelling... We are God’s house of living stones, builded for His habitation...” (“Built on the Rock the Church Doth Stand,” verses 2 and 3; cf. Acts 7:48-49 and 1 Peter 2:5). Still, the false prophets who come in Jesus’ name come with material splendor. They play on our covetous greed even as they seek not only to take our material wealth away from us, but worse, they try to take away the kingdom of heaven. They say that if we really believe, then we will be wealthy, healthy, beautiful, and popular. “Name it to claim it,” they preach, as if God is nothing more than a snack machine in a break room.

Even if we could keep it forever, all the wealth of this world is not worth comparing to the treasure of heavenly bliss. But the wealth of this world does not endure. Therefore Jesus tells us to let it go for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let it all go if necessary, whether it is freedom in this life, family members, health, wealth, honor, or popularity. All such things are of this life and are temporary. But eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus is forever.

Jesus gave His church a job to do: watch and pray. He does not expect His church to solve all the political or social ills of the world, or right every wrong. He does not tell us to revel in glory, but warns that there will be great persecution. Yes, love is a verb, and loving others means that we will positively affect their lives. We will help people, especially the household of God. But primarily we will watch and pray, recognizing that the time for repentance and faith is very short.

In our dealings with others we should consider how we can teach them responsibility, both spiritually and materially. Much of what we know spiritually is learned materially, so if a person is irresponsible with the wealth of this world, it means that he also squanders spiritual wealth.

Christ is coming soon, and the wealth of this world will be consumed. God grant us such love for the creatures that He made in His own image that we value each of them as a treasure in Christ and use the wealth of this world for their salvation. That means that at times we will withhold material help from individuals so that they may learn to value eternal wealth. It also means that we will be liberal with our own wealth, because all that we have, especially salvation, we were given by God.

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Matthew 21:1-9 (NKJV)**

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. “And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.” All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: “Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.’” So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ Hosanna in the highest!”

THE COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, who hast sent Thy Son, our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon Him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility, mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of His patience and also be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God world without end.

Jesus lives! Praise God from Whom all blessings flow! The angel proclaimed that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead! Nathanael had once questioned if anything good could come out of Nazareth, that backwoods town. And Philip had responded, “Come and see.” Well, “Come and see.” Jesus of Nazareth has risen!

And yet the women were alarmed and the disciples were in doubt and disbelief. In their grieving shock and sadness, short-sightedness and despair, they had not connected the prophetic dots and Jesus’ words. But the Savior appeared to them all in different contexts throughout the next forty days and proved His resurrection, even amidst the promulgated lies of the Jewish religious leadership.

Jesus lives! Even though He visibly ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, He still remains with us to this day. He, who once miraculously opened ears and restored sight to the blind, still opens ears and restores sight to the blind through His Spirit, working through His divine instruments—His Means of Grace.

Join in His Divine Service and let Him—the Divine One—serve you and refresh you in the cleansing of His Holy Baptism, strengthen you in His Holy Word, provide you with His body and blood in His Holy Supper, and grant you His Holy Absolution as He has won it for you.

Jesus lives! He has confirmed this truth time and again. Do not doubt it or become callous to it. Instead, in faith rise with heart and voice and life in praise to Him who has redeemed us unto life in heaven!

If we view good and evil merely by outwardly observable behavior, we make serious mistakes. First, such a view leads us to believe people are justified apart from faith. Second, such a view leads to the slandering of pious Christians who quietly do many good works without drawing attention to themselves. Third, we ourselves are lead away from repentance and into increasingly gross sins.

In our passage for today, we see a faithful Christian doing a good work that didn’t fit the politically-correct understanding of a good work in her day. We see her criticized for her good work. We also see Judas sinning inside himself because of his greed, and his love of money led him to increasingly gross outward sin. Judas’ coveting sadly ended with the taking of his own life.

Good and evil are defined by God, and revealed in the Scriptures. It is God’s word that condemns even the thoughts of our hearts, leads us to repentance, and builds us up in true faith, which leads to works that are good in God’s sight. Faith leads us to honor Christ over all—over the poor, over our pride when we are rebuked by God, over financial security, and even over our culture’s sense of right and wrong.

Ironically, in this way God’s word is very freeing. It is also empowering. We are not subject to the lying conscience, or emotions, or sociological trends, or our efforts to be good enough for God. The Holy Spirit works in us through Word and Sacrament to renew us in the image of God, and bring out of us the fruits of faith.

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 8:46-59 (NKJV)

“Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.”

Then the Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”

Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”

Then the Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.’ Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom do You make Yourself out to be?”

Jesus answered, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”

Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”

Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”

Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

THE COLLECT

We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

When John the Baptist was six months old in Elizabeth’s womb, the angel Gabriel visited the Virgin Mary and announced to her that she would bear the Son of God nine months later. Shortly thereafter Joseph was instructed to trustingly take Mary for his beloved wife. He was then reminded of the prophecy regarding this Child—that He would be called *Immanuel* which means *God With Us*.

On that first Good Friday on Golgotha the prophecy of *God With Us* is again manifested with great clarity. For in the temple the Lord opened the Holy of Holies to mankind by tearing the thick veil or curtain from top to bottom. God was breaking into man’s midst just as He had miraculously done thirty-three years earlier by coming in flesh and blood. And so we rightly sing yet again, just as at His incarnation, *From Heaven Above To Earth I Come*.

God With Us. Paul preaches that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. The Roman centurion, a recipient of the Word of God at the crucifixion scene, proclaimed this *God With Us*. And all of those observers at Golgotha had this image imprinted in their minds for the rest of their life, for this had proven to be no ordinary crucifixion.

God With Us. Another follower of Jesus by the name of Joseph of Arimathea came out that day and made a public confession. He, too, recognized *God With Us*; the Word of God had not returned void but had grown in his heart and life.

May *God With Us* continue to strengthen us in His faith.

How do you treat a King? The Gentile Wise Men sought Him out, travelling a great journey in order to find Him. And when they had laid their eyes on Him they fell down and worshipped Him. Then they offered Him prophetic gifts of the best quality.

How do you treat a King? The heathen Roman soldiers mocked Him by clothing Him with an old royal purple robe. Then they twisted together a crown of thorns and rammed it into His skull. And then in scorn and contempt they saluted Him and hit Him, bowed before Him and spat on Him.

How do you treat a King? Condemned to die, Jesus carried His own instrument of death through the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha. But in His greatly weakened state He could no longer bear the weight. So the Roman soldiers grabbed a man along the packed route, Simon of Cyrene, and forced him to help his fellow condemned Jew carry the cross to Calvary.

How do you treat a King? At the “Place of a Skull” Jesus was stripped, offered wine mingled with myrrh to kill the pain (a drink He refused), tied and nailed to the cross, hung up on the accursed tree for all the world to see, and then proclaimed with signage as *The King Of The Jews*. And during the next six hours of torturous cruelty, physical and spiritual, He was the recipient of insults and derision numbing to the ears. He was rejected by His own Father, as the sin-offering for all mankind.

How do you treat a King? How do you treat *this* King?

The day had been very busy. With the final Passover meal fulfilled and the Holy Supper instituted, Jesus and His disciples journey to the peaceful prayer garden of Gethsemane just beyond Jerusalem’s gates. Weary and filled with immense distress and sorrow, Jesus turns to His beloved Father in prayer, laying His burdens before Him, ever seeking the Father’s will.

The disciples do not grasp the weight of the moment; their exhausted flesh overtakes them. These closest friends of Jesus can only muster a little support for their intensely suffering Friend. But the loving Father diligently listens to each prayer and answers as only the Father can in order to redeem fallen mankind—God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to die for the world as the full propitiatory sacrifice.

Prayer is as important to the soul as breath to the body. Without it, the soul struggles and starves. At numerous places in the Gospels Jesus teaches us the importance of prayer by personally practicing it. The heavenly Father is always ready and willing to hear the prayers of His children; His is an ever waiting ear.

Take advantage of daily time with Jesus in meditation on His Word and in prayer to Him. He will always hear and answer. It is in prayer to our Father that burdens are relieved and peace is granted in both heart and life. The Father’s ear is always available. Speak with Him regularly, bringing all of your concerns, as well as joys before Him, knowing this, that He will never betray you, His beloved child.

An old phrase continues to ring in my mind from my Catechism days, “Only in repentance is restoration.” How true!—not only for the little child, or the teenager, or the temperamental friend, or spouse, but also for each and every adult.

Jesus had gone through very wicked treatment at the hands of those who owed Him their breath of life. When asked if He was the Christ, He did not deny but confirmed it. Yet this only intensified the evil treatment by His accusers who rejected Him as the promised Messiah sent by God.

All of the disciples fled from the garden upon Jesus’ arrest, abandoning Him. Cold Peter in the courtyard continued his denial of his Savior because it was not comfortable and convenient to admit the truth in the midst of such animosity. With every denial his anxiety increased—the tension between knowing the Truth and denying Him making Peter the more volatile.

God used the simple instrument of the rooster to call Peter to task for his rejection. No peace remained in his rebellious heart. He quickly exited the courtyard and in weeping sorrow repented so that healing, restoration, could be his. Without repentance Peter was lost. But in sincere repentance, restoration bountifully flows forth.

The same is true today. When we repent of our sins, when confession is made, then absolution is granted. The floodgates of forgiveness are opened, and cleansing is full and free in Jesus’ sacrificed body and shed water and blood. What joy to arise and begin anew, cleansed in Christ, just as with Peter!

“What evil has He done?” Such a question, if asked of murderous Barabbas, would have been easy to answer. But the Jews really had no legitimate answer when asked that of Jesus. True, they fabricated various things, but they were all perversions and lies.

“What evil has He done?” Jesus had done nothing to deserve such wicked treatment and condemnation. He was not guilty of their charges. Though He was a King, His kingdom was not of this world. Though He said He would build the temple back in three days after its destruction, what did that really matter to these unbelieving Jewish leaders who took Him as a crazed Man? And He never encouraged the people to withhold their taxes that were due to Caesar.

“What evil has He done?” But Jesus was guilty. He became sin for us who knew no sin so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. That is why He was placed on the center cross as the chief of sinners being crucified that day. He was the epitome of sin, we might say. Jesus *exemplified* all filth and wretchedness and evil; He *was* all filth and wretchedness and wickedness. His sole purpose was to come and repair the vertical breach that man had caused in his rebellion against God in Eden some four-thousand years earlier.

“What evil has He done?” He took upon Himself all of the sins of the Barabbases—including each of us—so that we might be washed clean in His blood, which alone cleanses from all sins. He fully paid for all sin of all time. You are forgiven!