

SATURDAY, NOV. 30: MALACHI 3:7-18 27TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

“Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God, and one who does not serve Him.”

The Lord accuses His people of speaking harshly against Him. What is the harsh thing they say? “It is useless to serve God.” What do they mean? They are talking about things of this world, of course. “We call the proud blessed; those who do wickedness are raised up, even those who tempt God go free.” We could add to it: “Cheaters do prosper.” The faithful seem no less likely to get cancer per capita than the unbelieving.

What is going on, both with them and with us, is that we are engaging in a theology of glory. God can make a distinction even in this world between those who are His and those who are not, as He did with some of the plagues in Egypt. But that is not usually what He does. Usually, we observe, along with Ecclesiastes, that the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike.

The Lord will make a distinction. Of the faithful He says, “they shall be Mine.” We are redeemed by Christ Jesus, marked with the name of God in Holy Baptism, made to receive Christ in Holy Communion. In the day of judgment we will be His. God grant us to rejoice in this, and to long for nothing beyond the gifts of His forgiveness, His blessings, and His promise of eternal life.

We pray: “Dear heavenly Father, forgive me for setting my heart too much on the things of this world. Grant me rather to rejoice in the gift of Your love, given me for the sake of Jesus. Amen.”

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



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The Calendar

<i>November 1 (F)</i>	<i>All Saints' Day</i>
<i>November 3</i>	<i>Trinity 20</i>
<i>November 10</i>	<i>Trinity 25</i>
<i>November 17</i>	<i>Trinity 26</i>
<i>November 24</i>	<i>Trinity 27</i>
<i>November 30 (Sa)</i>	<i>St. Andrew, Apostle</i>



Pastor C.D. and Sherry Hudson

FROM THE BISHOP

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

Job, in the hour of his calamity, exclaimed, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job 1:21) Job’s experience powerfully instructs the Church that the Lord who has made heaven and earth works all things according to His good and gracious will, and He does so in ways which are often beyond the knowledge or expectations of men.

It has been known throughout the diocese that Pastor Chuck Hudson, our dear brother in Christ and office, has suffered from lung cancer for several years. But while we had known that the day would come when he would be taken from us, his last days passed much more quickly than I believe any of us anticipated.

FRIDAY, NOV. 29: JEREMIAH 14:7-9 27TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

“O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for Your name’s sake; for our backslidings are many, we have sinned against You.”

Why should God be merciful to us? Jeremiah knew not to try to claim some worthiness before God. Our sins do indeed “testify against us.” Yet as the armies of Babylon swept through Jerusalem and unleashed ruination, what were these sinful people of God to do but cry out to Him for mercy? Indeed, that is exactly how the Law is supposed to work.

So back to the question: why should God be merciful to us? Our catechisms teach us in praying “forgive us our trespasses” that “we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we are neither worthy ... nor have we deserved ...” In short, we implore God to be merciful, not because of who we are, but because of who He is. We ask Him to “do it for Your name’s sake.”

He does. Christ has borne the sin of the world, so that all those the Holy Spirit brings to Him through faith receive His grace, His mercy, His love, and the forgiveness of their sins. God grant us all faith like Jeremiah’s in the unfailing grace of God toward His repentant and believing children.

We pray: Most merciful God, let Your mercies rest also upon us, for though we surely deserve Your wrath and punishment, Your Son Jesus Christ has borne all that for us. In Him we trust and in His Name we pray. Amen.

THURSDAY, NOV. 28: ISAIAH 40:27-31 27TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

“But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.”

The Lord is ever faithful. Nevertheless, He works on His own timetable, according to His own wisdom. As Israel bears the hardships they have brought upon themselves by their own sin and rebellion--even though they repent, and yet deliverance from their hardships does not occur then and there--they say, “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God.” True faith knows not to demand immediate gratification from God.

Notice the order in the verse above: from flying, to running, to walking. Many imagine it should be the other way! But as we mature in our faith, it becomes less ecstatic, more sober, more disciplined; the calm devotion of a steady walk. In that steady devotion to Christ and His Word we calmly confess that there is no hardship we do not deserve, nor any burden from which our faithful God will not finally release us, for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Lord.

We pray: Heavenly Father, we give You thanks that Jesus unfairly suffered for our transgressions. Grant us so to endure all that seems unfair, confidently trusting that You will make all things right in Your time, according to Your mercies. Amen.

It was the Lord’s gracious will to deliver Pastor Hudson from this vale of tears on October 6; his family, former parishioners, friends, and his brethren of the diocese gathered in Richmond, Missouri on October 10 for his funeral.

A thorough accounting of his labors cannot be listed here. What may be said is that in all that he did, but above all in his service to Christ Jesus, Pastor Hudson strove to be faithful in thought, word, and action. As a husband and father, as a soldier of these United States, and as a steward of the mysteries of God, Chuck Hudson sought faithfully to fulfill his vocations.

As a pastor, he served the saints in Richmond from 1995 until his retirement last year. He helped established Repristination Press. He was one of the founding pastors of this diocese. As it has been my great privilege to know him as a friend for nearly three decades, since our days as seminarians in 1991, I know that I cannot recount fully the wisdom, knowledge, and encouragement which he has imparted to me, and to many others, over the years. We will mourn his absence, even as we rejoice in that victory which he has in Christ. And we will await the blessed resurrection of all the Lord’s saints.

Yours in Christ, *Bishop Heiser*



Clergy in attendance (l. to r.): Prs. Heimbigner, Stefanski, Henson, Dcn. Harroun, Pr. Rydecki, Bp. Heiser, Prs. Rutowicz, Carver, Dulas, Ahonen, Scheck and Dcn. Oncken

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

Chapter XI.

OF GOD'S ETERNAL FOREKNOWLEDGE AND ELECTION.

Concerning this article no public dissension has occurred among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession. But since it is a consolatory article, if treated properly, and by this means the introduction in the future of a controversy likely to cause offense may be avoided, it is also explained in this writing.

AFFIRMATIVE

The Pure and True Doctrine concerning this Article.

1. First of all, the distinction between foreknowledge and predestination, that is, between God's foreknowledge and His eternal election, ought to be accurately observed.

2. For the foreknowledge of God is nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen, as it is written (Dan. 2:28): "There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days."

3. This foreknowledge is occupied alike with the godly and the wicked; but it is not the cause of evil or of sin, so that men do what is wrong (which originally arises from the devil and the wicked, perverse will of man); nor the cause of their ruin, for which they themselves are responsible; but only regulates it, and fixes to it a limit how long it should last, and that everything, notwithstanding that in itself it is evil, should serve His elect for their salvation.

4. The predestination or eternal election of God, however, is occupied only with the godly, beloved children of God, and this is a cause of their salvation, which He also provides as well as disposes what belongs thereto. Upon this [predestination of God] our salvation is founded so firmly that the gates of hell cannot overcome it (John 10:28; Matt. 16:18).

5. This is not to be investigated in the secret counsel of God, but to be sought in the Word of God, where it is also revealed.

6. But the Word of God leads us to Christ, who is the Book of Life, in whom all are written and elected that are to be saved, as it is written (Eph. 1:4): "He hath chosen us in Him" [Christ] "before the foundation of the world."

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 27: HAB. 3:1-19 27TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

The Lord will come in great terrors, visiting judgment on those who have defied Him. Habakkuk speaks of the desolations He will bring, which amount to abject ruination! And it is in this horrific context that Habakkuk speaks his faithful words, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Things go wrong sometimes. The economy crashes, an epidemic breaks out, a flood or an earthquake or some other natural disaster occurs, or a nation falls under the heels of a conquering enemy. So many who are weak in their faith fall into despair. "How could God let this happen?" they ask, as though it were their place to sit in judgment of God!

When disaster strikes, rejoice in the Lord anyway. You are the redeemed of the Lord. "Joy" in the God of your salvation. Faithfully understood, even great calamities are but minor distractions. No matter how bleak things may look in this world, Jesus Christ has still atoned for your sin, God still loves you, and eternal glory does yet remain yours.

We pray: Oh God, teach us to regard temporal things faithfully, and not to lose sight of things eternal. Rather, strengthen us and keep us in Christian faith, now and unto the day we die. Amen.

“My tabernacle also shall be with them; yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Our Lord once graciously guided the children of Israel through the desert, and finally into the promised land. His presence was seen in a cloud by day and fire by night. He commanded the construction of a tabernacle, a “portable temple,” if you will. At its dedication (Exodus 40), the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, and the ark of the covenant was placed within it. The tabernacle was the earthly dwelling place of the Lord; the location of His real presence among His people.

In Ezekiel, God tells a people going into exile that the tabernacle will be restored, and with it the covenant relationship between God and His people. In John 1 we read that the Word became flesh and made His dwelling (literally, “tabernacled”) among us. Jesus Christ is the real presence of God with us. As we receive His real presence in Holy Communion, we once again rejoice that the Lord is our God, and we are His people.

And so shall it be forever. Holy Communion is a partaking in the marriage feast of the Lamb which will have no end. We rejoice that He “tabernacles” among us now, and we look forward to the uninterrupted communion we will have with Him in the life of the world to come.

We pray: Oh Lord, grant us rightly to treasure the communion we have with You, now and forever. Amen.

7. Thus Christ calls to Himself all sinners, and promises them rest, and He is anxious that all men should come to Him and permit Him to help them. To them He offers Himself in His Word, and wishes them to hear it, and not to stop their ears or despise the Word. He promises besides the power and efficiency of the Holy Ghost, and divine assistance for perseverance and eternal salvation.

8. Therefore we should judge concerning this our election to eternal life neither from reason nor from the Law of God, which would lead either into a dissipated, dissolute epicurean life, or into despair, and would excite in the heart of men pernicious thoughts (and such thoughts cannot be effectually guarded against as long as they follow their own reason), so that they think to themselves: “If God has elected me to salvation, I cannot be condemned, although I do whatever I will.” And again: “If I am not elected to eternal life, it matters not what good I do; for my efforts are nevertheless all in vain.”

9. But the true judgment concerning predestination must be learned alone from the Holy Gospel concerning Christ, in which it is clearly testified that “God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all,” and that “He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (Rom. 11:32; Ez. 18:23; 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2).

10. To him, therefore, who is really concerned about the revealed will of God, and proceeds according to the order which St. Paul has observed in the Epistle to the Romans, who first directs men to repentance, knowledge of sins, to faith in Christ, to divine obedience, before he speaks of the mystery of the eternal election of God, this doctrine [concerning God’s predestination] is useful and consolatory.

11. That, however, “many are called, few are chosen,” does not mean that God is unwilling that all should be saved, but the reason is that they either do not at all hear God’s Word, but wilfully despise it, close their ears and harden their hearts, and in this manner foreclose the ordinary way to the Holy Ghost, so that He cannot effect His work in them, or, when it is heard, they consider it of no account, and do not heed it. For this [that they perish] not God or His election, but their wickedness is responsible (2 Pet. 2:1 sqq.; Luke 11:49, 52; Heb. 12:25 sq.).

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome, §1–12

With the interplay of the names Jacob and Israel in our first verse, God speaks to both physical and spiritual realities, to the familial and political units, and to the outward appearance of Christ's Church. For the deliverance and safety of His people, neither Egypt nor Babylon was too much to give. For the salvation of souls, God the Son would give even Himself to save the Church to be His Bride.

The Exodus, the Exile (and return), and the redemptive work of the Christ are woven together here. Had Yahweh not already proven that the waters would not overflow His children, even though the water would drown the charioteers and horses of Pharaoh? Certainly, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted that the flame would not scorch them—or that if they were consumed, it would only be so that they might live forever unscorched in God's Kingdom. The restoration from Exile is not only from Babylon, but from where the northern tribes had already been scattered—indeed, from wherever the sons of Adam dwelt. None can diminish the reach of Christ's atonement! “Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth!”

We pray: We thank You, O Christ, that in You we have been gathered—that by the Holy Spirit we testify of You, “Jesus is Yahweh” (1 Corinthians 12:3), besides whom there is no Savior (John 14:6). As You gave sight to the blind and Your Word to the deaf, so You have bought us and brought us forth from all nations, that we might be Your own and live under You in Your Kingdom and serve You in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, for which we give You praise, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Spirit, ever one God, unto all eternity. Amen.

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come to mind.”

The Lord has promised from of old: there will be new heavens and a new earth. In Revelation 21:5 we hear these words coming from the mouth of the Lord, “Behold, I make all things new.” The fulfiller of Isaiah's prophecy is none other than Christ our Lord.

Christ is the firstborn of the new creation. Though He is eternally God, His human nature is assumed, not in the way of the old order of things, but rather by a virgin birth. By His death on the cross He atones for the old creation's fall, overcomes the old creation's death, and defeats the one who ruined the old creation in the first place: the devil himself.

Anyone who is in Christ is also a new creation. We still live in a fallen world, and sin still inheres in our flesh. But the fix is already in. We will be raised imperishable, honorable, holy, sinless, and immortal, to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. By the grace of God the troubles of this world will be forgotten as we dwell forever in the eternal glory of an unfallen world, in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, in perfect communion with our most gracious Triune God.

We pray: O God our Father, grant us not to treasure the things of this world too much, but rather to embrace, hold fast, and treasure Your wonderful promise of a blessed eternity, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Last Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XVII.

Also they teach, that, at the Consummation of the World, Christ shall appear for judgment, and shall raise up all the dead; He shall give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils He shall condemn to be tormented without end.

They condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils. They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed (exterminated).

—The Augsburg Confession

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 5: ISAIAH 41:1-20 20TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

There is more than one will behind the setbacks and afflictions we experience.

Concerning Old Testament history, recall that “all these things happened to them as examples . . . written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). The Church is and always has been the true Israel of God, hidden then within the nation of Israel, and now within all nations (Galatians 6:14-16, Romans 9:6-8, Jeremiah 31:34). The assurance the Lord gives through Isaiah is that the descendants of Abraham from Isaac—through faith in the promise, and not by the working of man—are His chosen, whom He never casts off.

Yahweh gave Abraham victory over his enemies, but Abraham kept passing through lands he could easily have claimed because God had directed him elsewhere. Even so, God would also give victory to anyone else if it would ultimately turn to the benefit of His Church—even to those who would teach His chosen to trust in Him and confess Him through the Exile. As Joseph confessed, they would mean it for evil, but God would intend and accomplish good for His people through them (Genesis 50:20–21). “Those who war against you shall be as nothing, as a nonexistent thing. For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you. Fear not, you worm Jacob, You men of Israel! I will help you,’ says the Lord and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.”

We pray: Grant us, O Father, ever to trust in Your will and bountiful grace toward us, that we may never be dismayed, but confess that You will work all things together for the good of Your Church for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

The souls of the proud are not right: they glory in their own working, seeking their own profit—even in generous actions. Whether looking good before men or simply feeling good about their works, it reflects the same lack of trust in the Lord as the actions of those who grab onto money or power and cling to it as if it would endure forever. “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away” (“But the word of the Lord endures forever,” 1 Peter 1:24–25; cf. Isaiah 40:5–8).

Who, then, are the righteous, if not those who do great works and appear materially blessed by God? The just person knows himself to be a sinner, set in the midst of a fallen world full of others who are like him in that regard. Each one lives with his particular trials: one with the affliction of want, another with the affliction of abundance, each faced with the question of in what or in whom he shall trust. More, he not only sees this about himself, but in Scripture he sees also what Yahweh has promised: that it would become clear, as the final age was ushered in by the incarnation of God the Son, that the only way to have life would be by entrusting his life to that Son.

We pray: Lord God, only through faith are we declared just and righteous by You and given life. Keep us in such thankful confidence in the forgiveness of sins in Christ, by Your Holy Spirit, that this saving trust may always shape our lives to Your glory and our neighbor’s good. Amen.

The prophet teaches us many precious promises about the future of the saints in the heavenly Jerusalem. Her glory will shine for all the world to see, for she is the Bride of Christ, in whom He rejoices. Because these are promises to be fulfilled, we have them now by faith, not sight. Living mundane lives in the world, it’s easy to forget or neglect His promises about the eternal glory of the saints, especially when the Church looks small, forsaken, and desolate by worldly standards.

Today’s reading teaches us how to be faithful lest we grow to neglect and forget His promises. First, He commands His watchmen on Jerusalem’s walls, His called servants, to continually speak of the Lord. They’re not to hold their peace. God’s people are to give the Lord no rest till He fulfills His promises. They’re to be constant in prayer that God’s kingdom come among us and that Christ would come quickly and fulfill His promises. Second, the Lord commands us to go through the gates of Jerusalem and build up the highway. He wants us to walk on the highway that leads to everlasting life by remaining in the Church, daily confessing our sins, and receiving mercy. In the Church God doesn’t rest, but works for our sake, declaring us righteous for Christ’s sake and keeping us in the true faith.

We pray: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

These promises will come true on the Last Day for the Church, which is the Israel of God. When Christ returns the Church shall receive the glory of the nations as she is revealed to consist of people from all nations. We will no longer need sun or moon to lighten us because “the Lord will be to you an everlasting light.” John writes of the Church in Revelation 21:23, “The Lamb is its light.” This blessed heavenly country is the expectation of all true Christians who live in this world as sojourners, looking forward to the fulfilment of God’s promises with longing hearts of faith.

While we live in this world of darkness, sin, and influence of the devil, the Lord has not left us without light. Jesus said in John 9:5, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” He is still in the world in the places He has promised to be: His Word purely preached and His Sacraments rightly administered. His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, shining in our hearts and illuminating our sin-darkened minds, kindling faith that is counted as righteousness in God’s sight. Now we have the light of the world in the Word and Sacraments. On the Last Day, the same Jesus will be our everlasting light.

We pray: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

It matters not whether our fathers in the faith—those saints who have gone on before us, whether in Scripture, the early history of the Church, the Reformation, or of our own family and parish—are mindful of us; God is our Father. While we see the saints under the altar praying in Revelation 6:9-11, it matters not whether they know the particulars of our lives, as that is not what makes prayer effective. If we pray for someone suffering from a kidney stone and it is found that they have bladder cancer that might be now sent into remission, it wasn’t our knowledge of the intricacies of their need that brought them healing—nor was it the medicine or surgery, in and of themselves—but the fact that our Father knew and blessed.

Isaiah confesses that the people have become like those who have never known the Lord’s merciful rule. He cries out to ask the Lord not to confirm this sinfulness further in them. He accuses the Lord, as it were, of treating them like the Egyptians, yet confesses that such could not be the case. It’s how Isaiah and the people he served felt, but he confesses that he knows that when God’s people feel such affliction, He suffers it with them. He confesses that they have grieved the Holy Spirit by their rebellion and deserve enmity from the Lord, but he looks to the glorious name of God—Our Redeemer from Everlasting—and cries out for that same remembrance as He had in the days of Moses.

We pray: “Doubtless, You are our Father,” so we who are afflicted are turned to You. God the Son, our great High Priest, was afflicted for us and has doubtless redeemed us. In Jesus’ name, hear and help, O Lord! Amen.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8: ISAIAH 64:1-12 20TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

How often our prayers begin as Isaiah's does! "If only God would come down with wrath for our enemies!"

Perhaps we have holier thoughts, remembering that we do not fight against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness: "If only God would come down and destroy not the people, but the people's delusion!"

Holier still, if we remember that the condition of our flesh is as Isaiah confesses, with "all our righteousnesses" being "as filthy rags," so that we must judge ourselves as "an unclean thing" if we look at our own works and power: "If only all that troubles and afflicts us would be purged away as if with fire! If only God would remove my sin from me in such a way that I would sin no more and need no more purging!"

The people fade like a leaf because they cannot see the works of the Lord, and even the place of His presence—the Temple—is gone. Isaiah, though, confesses "But now, O Yahweh, you are our Father!" and that he and his brethren are the clay; the Potter may mold them in His way and timing, while they must trust that He intends this all for their good.

We pray: We thank You, Lord, that we may always trust that, "as a tender father hath pity on his children here, Thou in Thine arms will gather all who are Thine in childlike fear," and that, for the sake of Christ, You will preserve us and give us peace until You bring our sin and our affliction to the end that He has already won for us, and given to us through the forgiveness of our sins, even life and salvation. Amen.

THURSDAY, NOV. 21: ISAIAH 54:1-17 26TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

The Holy Ghost teaches us through St. Paul that this chapter is about the Church. The Church is often looked upon as a barren woman by the world, just as Hagar looked at Sarah with scorn. The true Church is small and insignificant by the world's standards, while the false church is large and visibly successful. The false church gives birth to children of the Law, children who imagine they are saved because of a hybrid of grace and works, or of grace and social justice in our day. They are not true children of God.

Although the Church seems barren, she will give birth to many children, so many that her tent will expand throughout the entire world. She bears children by the promise of the Gospel and through Holy Baptism. She gives birth to children who are righteous on account of faith, not by works or virtue-signaling. Her children bear no disgrace or shame because Christ's merits cover their sins.

Even though God at times withdraws His protecting hand, His covenant of grace is like His covenant with Noah. It endures beyond the close of this age so that there will always be a holy Christian Church. Don't judge the true Church by its size, or any other metric, for God will bring forth more children when and where it pleases Him, children who trust His promises, which endure forever.

We pray: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 20: ISAIAH 35:1-10 26TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

During His earthly ministry Christ opened the eyes of the blind, unstopped the ears of the deaf, and strengthened the feeble knees of the lame. He spoke words of consolation and forgiveness to the fearful-hearted. Physical water didn't spring forth in the wilderness, but through the ministry of Christ living water burst forth in the world. John 7:39 says this living water is the Holy Spirit. As physical water sustains men's earthly life, the Holy Spirit gives and sustains spiritual life within a man. Christ also called men to follow Him on the narrow path that leads to life, the highway Isaiah prophesies. No unclean thing walks this road, for those that follow Christ in faith are cleansed from every sin.

Until the Last Day, this highway will run through the wilderness of this world. The highway is the Church, for that is where sinners follow Christ on the narrow path that leads to life. In the holy Christian Church sins are richly and daily forgiven. There Christ gives living water, the Holy Spirit, through His Word and Sacraments so that the eyes of the spiritually blind are opened, the ears of the deaf are opened to hear God's Word, and the feeble knees of the discouraged are strengthened. Until Christ returns, walk on this highway, for it is the only path by which we will enter eternal life.

We pray: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9: ISAIAH 5:1-7 20TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Today's reading gives answer to yesterday's: "Does the vineyard feel abandoned? Well, how should I feel about the vineyard? What has not been done for you that you still complain as if you had been wronged? Rather, you have wronged Me!"

Neither pruning, nor watering, nor protection will change the nature of a thing, but only being born as something else. Israel rejected the nature that had been given them when Yahweh led them out of Egypt, the nature of children whose characteristics would be as outlined in Exodus 20. They willfully forgot His mighty acts of deliverance and their birth as His nation and Church. They looked at His Law as something they must fulfill to become His children and tried to minimize and pervert it to make this goal attainable. They added to it to "protect" it and to suppose they had kept it, when they had actually abandoned it the very moment they thought that keeping it would make them His.

As in Matthew 25, where Jesus is able to separate the sheep from the goats and then to declare their actions as fitting for the nature of each, here is a vine that needs to be totally other than what it is, that will only produce what it ought if it is destroyed and reborn.

We pray: O Lord of Hosts, You "looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help," as the people forgot that their citizenship was only by Your justice and righteousness—by satisfying Your justice through the blood of the Messiah, that the Messiah's righteousness might be the saving possession of His people. Grant that we may always be kept in this true faith, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Twenty—fifth Sunday after Trinity

XIV. Of Monastic Vows.

As monastic vows directly conflict with the first chief article, they ought to be absolutely abolished. For it is of them that Christ says (Matt. 24:5, 23 sqq.): “I am Christ,” etc. For he who makes a vow to live in a monastery believes that he will enter upon a mode of life holier than the ordinary Christians, and by his own works wishes to earn heaven not only for himself, but also for others; this is to deny Christ. And they boast from their St. Thomas [i.e., Thomas Aquinas, of the 13th century] that a monastic vow is on an equality with baptism. This is blasphemy against God.

—Smalcald Articles, Part III

TUESDAY, NOV. 19: ISAIAH 34:1-17 26th SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Isaiah prophesies the Last Day and final judgment in vivid and haunting images. It will be as a slaughter on the cosmic battlefield. The stench of corpses, mountains melted in blood, and the celestial bodies dissolved. The creation will be rolled up like a scroll once the end is reached. It is inevitable, just as the leaf and fruit fall from a fig tree once their end arrives. That day will be the day of the Lord’s vengeance. The horrid images throughout this chapter describe well “the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41) to which the unbelieving will depart.

Isaiah calls this “The year of recompense for the cause of Zion.” For whose sake is all this done? For believers! The Lord’s return shouldn’t terrify Christians. It is for their sake that the Lord God executes judgment on the Last Day. Zion is the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, all who believe the Gospel and trust Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. The vengeance and judgment executed will not be for the sins of Christians. Christ richly and daily forgives our sins in His Church. He covers us with forgiveness so that our many sins are forgiven each day. The Last Day will be a day of vengeance on unbelievers, those who are not justified because they reject the righteousness of faith.

We pray: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, NOV. 18: ZEPHANIAH 3:9-20 26TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Today's text is best understood in light of yesterday's Gospel lesson, the parable of the sheep and the goats. The Lord describes the separation of the faithful from the unbelievers and impenitent. The nations gathered, He will pour out His indignation and wrath on them. This is the eternal punishment the goats receive. The sheep, those who are meek and humble, trusting the Lord's promised mercy, will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

The prophet then beautifully describes this kingdom. There will be no more unrighteousness, for they will be perfectly righteous. There will be no more lies and deceitful tongues, for the father of lies and deceit is judged. No one shall make them afraid, not even their consciences, for "In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against me." Why? "The Lord has taken away your judgments." Without sin, God will only rejoice over us. "He has cast out your enemy." The Devil will no longer harass us for our sins. Neither will our flesh entice us to sin, for we will have glorified bodies.

As we pray in this week's Collect, may we live each day with this final judgment and promised kingdom in mind. Daily forsake your sin. Fight against temptation. Trust Christ's promised mercy. Grow in good works and holiness.

We pray: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, NOV. 11: DAN. 11:36-12:13 25TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

If there is one thing we can learn from Scripture, and from history, it is that many kings or leaders of nations let power go to their heads. Such is the description of "the king" at the beginning of today's reading. He thought he was more important than the gods, even more important than the true God.

Over the course of time not much has changed. Tyrants have come and gone, each thinking very highly of himself. But the story of everyone of them ends the same way. All of them are dead or will die. As awful as these tyrants can make life in this world, God has not left His people without hope. As we read today: "At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people."

As Christians, we need to concentrate on that which is of lasting importance, Holy Baptism. By virtue of your Baptism you are one who "is found written in the book." You are one of "those who are wise." You are one of those that "shall shine, like the brightness of the firmament" when you awake from your "sleep in the dust of the earth." Such wisdom is not an innate trait. Rather, you are wise because God has chosen you to be in Christ. "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

We pray: Almighty God, for the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, guard and protect us from those in this world who seek our harm. Amen.

This text is difficult to understand. Just who is Gog, and where is Magog? The answer to these questions has been sought by theologians for years. Longing to know the “who”, “what”, “where”, “when”, “why”, and “how” of all the details of this text is laudable. However, when those details are not clear, it is best to set those questions aside, rather than turn it over to mere speculation.

What we can confidently say about this text is that we do not know every detail. Yet, Holy Scripture reminds us that God knows every detail of this text, and the whole of Scripture, because He inspired it to be written. In fact, He knows every detail of all of time, right down to the number of hairs on our heads. In this text God reminds us that, while He may allow certain things to happen in this world which at first appear ominous, He will use them to show forth His glory.

The ultimate case in point is the crucifixion of our Lord. From our human vantage point, when Jesus died on the Cross all appeared lost. Jesus was gone and buried in the tomb. From God’s vantage point, Christ dies and death dies with Him. Furthermore, death cannot hold the Lord of Life. After three days, Jesus rises from the dead. What appeared to be the demise of Jesus was in fact His victory over death.

Our consolation is knowing that because we are baptized into Jesus, we share in His death to sin and will one day, too, share in His resurrection.

We pray: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Son Jesus and the victory over death which He has won for us. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twenty—sixth Sunday after Trinity

CHAPTER III, ARTICLE VI.

But they [Romanists] object, that love is preferred to faith and hope. For Paul says (1 Cor. 13:13): “The greatest of these is charity.” Now, it is in accordance with this, that to justify is the greatest and chief virtue. Although Paul, in this passage, properly speaks of love toward one’s neighbor, and indicates that love is the greatest, because it has most fruits. Faith and hope have to do only with God; but love has infinite offices externally towards men. Nevertheless we grant to the adversaries that love towards God and our neighbor is the greatest virtue, because the chief commandment is this: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God” (Matt. 22:37). But how will they infer thence that love justifies? The greatest virtue, they say, justifies. By no means. For just as even the greatest or first Law does not justify, so also the greatest virtue of the Law does not justify. But that virtue justifies which apprehends Christ, which communicates to us Christ’s merits, by which we receive grace and peace from God. But this virtue is faith. For as it has been often said, faith is not only knowledge, but much rather to wish to receive or apprehend those things, which are offered in the promise concerning Christ. Moreover this obedience towards God, viz. to wish to receive the offered promise, is no less a divine service, λατρεία, than is love. God wishes us to believe Him, and to receive from Him blessings, and this He declares to be true divine service.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, ¶104–107

SATURDAY, NOV. 16: EZEKIEL 37:1-14 25TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

“Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7). This text is valuable for helping to understand why today’s reading is important.

The one claim to fame of the children of Israel was that Abraham was their father. However, what really connects a person to Abraham is not Abraham’s blood, rather it is the blood of Christ. All who believe in Christ are members of His Body, including Abraham. Therein lies the connection to today’s reading.

Your bones are among the piles and piles of dry bones that Ezekiel saw in that valley. Apart from God’s Word prophesied over you in Holy Baptism, you would have remained a pile of dry bones. But God’s Word was spoken over you and you were made alive in Christ.

As eerie as the thought of all those dry bones may be, our hope rests in the Word of God and the promise made through the prophet Ezekiel: ““Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,” says the Lord.”

We pray: Eternal, merciful God, we pray Thee extend Thy goodness and mercy unto us for the sake of Thine only-begotten Son, that we may enjoy the everlasting blessings of Thy heavenly washing and may come to the eternal kingdom which Thou hast prepared for us. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 13: EZE. 39:1-29 25TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

This week’s readings have a recurring theme of the Lord battling and defeating His foes. Each time it appears the foe is winning, God rises up and again defeats the enemy. There are numerous accounts such as these recorded in Scripture. The great benefit for the Christian is that God shows us again and again how He quite handily overcomes seemingly overwhelming odds.

What Scripture records of those large scale wars--where God is always the Victor--also has daily significance for us. Every day the devil and the world assault you, but God is there protecting you from them. However, as tough as they are, it is that most personal of enemies, one’s own sinful flesh, that can prove most difficult to deal with because the attacks come from within. One can easily become discouraged, “for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment” (Small Catechism, Fifth Petition).

Again, remember your baptism and its daily significance. When you were baptized God came to make His home with you and bestowed His Spirit upon you. The odds of you defeating the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh are overwhelming. Thus God wages war against the devil and the world on your behalf, and even wages war on your own sinful flesh. Daily He leads you to repentance, where the old sinful flesh is drowned and the new man arises to serve Him.

Without the Holy Spirit you would be defeated and left dead in your trespasses and sins. Thanks be to God for the life He has given you in Christ, for His continued presence in your life in this world, and for His promise of life eternal with Him.

We pray: Heavenly Father, leave me not. Amen.

THURSDAY, NOV. 14: ISAIAH 43:14-25 25TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

After I read the Scripture appointed for today I wondered what to write. Tired after a long day, I sat down at the computer and reread today's text. As I was reading, the words "And you have been weary of Me" began to trouble me. I thought about how easy it is for the joy of being a Christian to turn into contempt toward God because of the many problems one faces as a Christian. How is a Christian to face the many challenges of life and not become "weary" of God?

I am reminded of my pastor from years ago who told me, "If you are struggling, that is a good sign. It tells me that God is at work in you." God uses the words, "And you have been weary of Me" to awaken you to the fact that He is there in your life, stirring your soul. In the midst of our faithlessness God remains faithful to His chosen people, turning us from sin unto His Son and the forgiveness He won.

"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins."

We pray: O God, who by the meek endurance of Thine only-begotten Son didst beat down the pride of the old enemy, help us, we beseech Thee, rightly to treasure in our hearts what our Lord hath of His goodness borne for our sakes, that after His example we may bear with patience whatsoever things are adverse to us. Amen.

FRIDAY, NOV. 15: ISAIAH 33:17-24 25TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Isaiah gives us a beautiful picture of the restoration of Israel. Brought back from the edge of destruction and captivity to the Assyrians, God would once again restore His people to the land he had given them. But in addition to a restoration in the course of time, there would come an even greater and permanent restoration when God's people will "see the King in His beauty."

The earthly restoration of Israel did not last. Israel would turn from God, and God would have others come and conquer the people of Israel. Yet, those who trusted in God were given a promise that would last for eternity. God would bring His people to be with Him forever.

As we approach the last days of the church year we are reminded that the whole of creation is nearing its end. Crops are harvested and fields are bare. Leaves, once lush and green, have withered and fallen to the ground. We see that which was once alive looking all but dead.

God has given us this cycle to remind us that nothing of this world will last forever. He would have us look beyond this world and the death that surrounds us. He turns our eyes to "see the land that is very far off." Through the working of the Holy Spirit, God keeps the eyes of our faith ever fixed on Jesus. Greater than the hope of earthly restoration for the children of Israel is the hope of eternity with God. That is our hope, too.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who didst give Thine only-begotten Son to be a High Priest of good things to come, hereafter grant unto us, Thine unworthy servants, to have our share in the company of the blessed. Amen.