

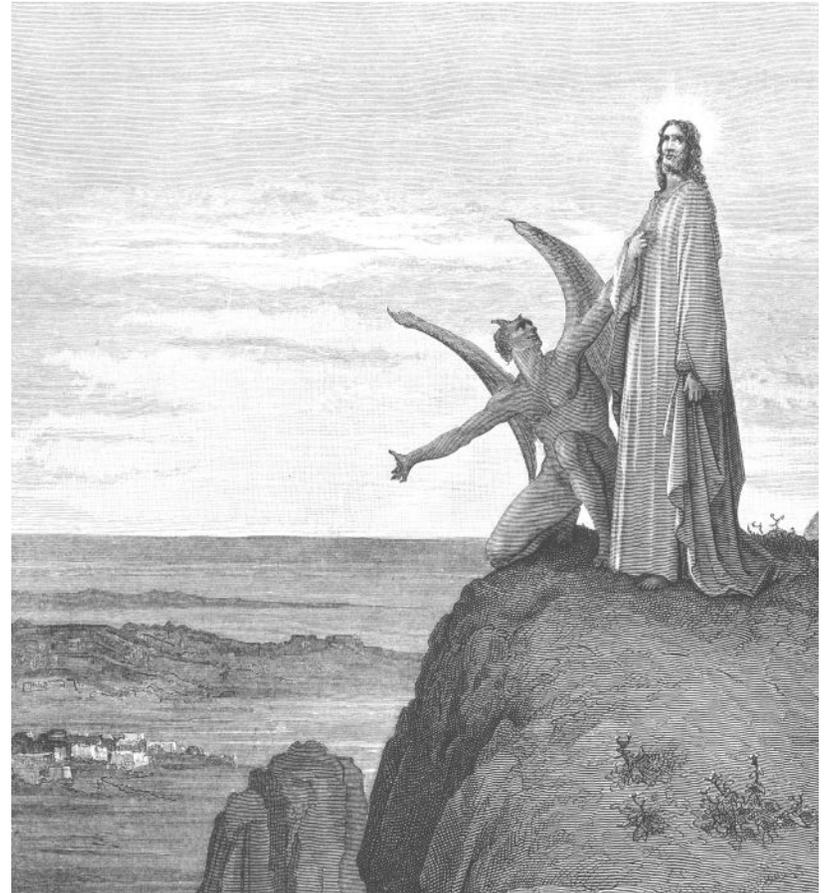
The Lord Jesus is troubled in His spirit because one of His disciples will betray Him. This shows our Lord's compassion for us poor, miserable sinners. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, troubled Him in His spirit when they ate from the tree in the Garden of Eden from which they were not to eat. And that was the beginning of an entire people sinning and betraying Him. We also sin against Him and betray Him with our daily sinful thoughts, words, and deeds.

But our Lord Jesus in His compassion does not leave us, nor forsake us. He instead comes down from His heavenly throne and takes upon Himself our flesh, so that through the betrayal of His disciple Judas Iscariot He might be turned over to evil men, in order that He might suffer and die to redeem us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He loves us so much that He bears the trouble and sorrow that we cause, in order that we might have life and salvation.

Our Lord's compassionate heart aches for His creation. It aches for those who forsake and betray Him daily. He continues to call all peoples to Himself. He called His disciples to take heed of His betrayal, letting them know that even though He knew this was going to happen, He willingly endured it for their benefit. He continues to let us know that He loves us by preaching into our ears what He has done for us, in order to redeem us and bring us into our eternal home in Heaven.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



**MARCH 2–APRIL 4, 2020**

**A PUBLICATION OF  
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF  
NORTH AMERICA**

## The Calendar

March 1	Lent 1—Invocavit	TLH 559
March 8	Lent 2—Reminiscere	TLH 329
March 15	Lent 3—Oculi	TLH 262
March 22	Lent 4—Laetare	TLH 151
March 25 (W)	The Annunciation	TLH 237
March 29	Lent 5—Judica	Ev. Lutheran Hymnary 587

(Hymns of the Day are for the appointed Festival or Sunday. The appointed Hymn for Judica—"Lord Jesus Christ, true man and God" was not included in *The Lutheran Hymnal*; you will find a copy of it from the 1913 edition of *The Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* printed after the reading for the Book of Concord for Judica.)

### FROM THE BISHOP

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

#### **Upcoming Synod and Colloquium**

As noted previously, the 2020 Synod of the ELDoNA will meet at Salem Lutheran Church in Malone, Texas from April 21–24. The first two days will be devoted to the synod and will address a number of weighty matters, including the colloquy of several candidates for membership in the diocese. The colloquium also looks to be a beneficial time, with many worthwhile papers being presented to the diocese. I strongly encourage not only the pastors, but the laity in the fellowship of the diocese, to make time, if possible to join us for these days. Please contact me if you have any questions, and please let me know if you are planning on attending.

#### **Summer Family Camp**

This year, Holy Cross Lutheran Church of Kerrville, Texas is hosting our annual camp, which will be June 22–26. All of the pastors of the diocese have the details concerning this camp—please let your pastor know as soon as possible if you wish to attend!

FRIDAY, APRIL 3: JOHN 12:20-50

JUDICA

A grain of wheat must go into the ground and die if it is to produce fruit and give wheat to the sower and bread to the eater. The Bread of Life must also go into the ground dead if He is to produce life in all those who believe and cling to Him in faith. We also must be buried in the ground in order to enjoy the fruits of Heaven. Those who die in the faith will receive an eternal crown of glory. The Son of Man received a thorny crown of glory and was lifted up on the tree of the holy cross in order that we might be lifted up out of the grave and given eternal life and a seat at the banquet feast of Heaven.

We have a foretaste of that feast in Holy Communion. In this meal that grants us forgiveness of our sins, and also life and salvation, we are given spiritual sustenance; our souls are fed with the Bread of Life. The grain of wheat—our Lord Jesus Christ—went into the ground and brought forth life abundantly for us. We eat His Body and drink His Blood and find life and sustenance in Him through this meal. We eat the fruit of the wheat seed—bread—and drink the fermented fruit of the grape seed—wine—and we are granted the fruit of faith in Him.

Our Lord Jesus is the firstfruits of those raised from the dead. All those who trust in the fruits of His death receive from Him eternal life in Heaven.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In the previous chapter of the Gospel of the Evangelist and Apostle St. John, our Lord Jesus Christ had raised Lazarus to life after he had been dead for four days. What is the response of the chief priests and Pharisees? They plot to put Him to death. We are told in today's pericope that they also planned to kill Lazarus, because it was on account of him that many people believed on the Lord Jesus as the Messiah who comes to redeem them.

What was the response of the people? A great multitude gathered together, they took palm branches and went out to meet Him coming to them on a donkey, and they shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!" They react this way because they had heard of the raising of Lazarus and believed that the Lord Jesus was the author and giver of life. He can conquer death. He can conquer their death, and He has conquered death for all those who cling to Him in faith.

But this joyous scene, which we will hear more about on Sunday, will not last. Judas Iscariot will betray the Lord Jesus into the hands of the chief priests and Pharisees because of his greed. He played the concerned individual for the poor, but He only cared about the money box, because he stole from it often. His greed condemned an innocent Man. But our Lord's death conquers death once and for all so that we may live with Him for all eternity.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### *Responding to the Coronavirus*

In recent weeks, the Chinese coronavirus, COVID-19, has gone from an isolated, regional outbreak to what may become a global pandemic. It seems that this illness is something which, once again, exposes the inability of men to undo all of the damage which sin has inflicted on the world. Loss and pain and death are continually afflicting our fallen race on account of our transgression. This will not change until the Christ returns in glory at the end of the age.

How should we respond? We do not yet know how serious of a problem this disease will be in the United States and Canada.

Panic is never a helpful way to address a time of trouble; neither is living in a state of denial. In 1527, facing a truly dire situation, Martin Luther chose to remain in Wittenberg at the time when the plague broke out in that city. In a tract entitled, "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague," Luther wrote of the obligation which Christians have toward one another in such a time of affliction: "This I well know, that if it were Christ or His mother who were laid low by illness everybody would be so solicitous and would gladly become a servant or helper. Everyone would want to be bold and fearless; nobody would flee but everyone would come running. ... If you wish to serve Christ and to wait on Him, very well, you have your sick neighbor close at hand. Go to him and serve him, and you will surely find Christ in him." (*American Edition*, vol. 43)

We should take reasonable precautions to safeguard ourselves and care for our loved ones and brothers and sisters in Christ. We should be good stewards of the life which the Lord has given to us: there is no place for acting with a willful disregard for taking appropriate steps to guard against the spread of this (or any other) disease. And we should never despair. No worldly affliction changes the promises of God. "For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." (Rom. 14:8 NKJV)

Yours in Christ, *Bishop Heiser*

## Doctrine and Practice

### Honor for the Saints vs. their Invocation

“Our Confession approves honors to the saints. For here a threefold honor is to be approved. The first is thanksgiving. For we ought to give thanks to God because He has shown examples of mercy; because He has shown that He wishes to save men; because He has given teachers or other gifts to the Church. And these gifts, as they are the greatest, should be amplified, and the saints themselves should be praised, who have faithfully used these gifts, just as Christ praises faithful businessmen (Mat. 25:21, 23). The second service is the strengthening of our faith; when we see the denial forgiven Peter, we also are encouraged to believe the more that grace truly superabounds over sin (Rom. 5:20). The third honor is the imitation first of faith, then of the other virtues, which everyone should imitate according to his calling. These true honors the adversaries do not require. They dispute only concerning invocation, which, even though it would have no danger, nevertheless is not necessary. ...

Moreover, even supposing that the saints certainly pray for the Church, yet it does not follow that they are to be invoked. Although our Confession affirms only this, that Scripture does not teach the invocation of the saints, or that we are to ask the saints for aid. But since neither a command, nor a promise, nor an example can be produced from the Scriptures concerning the invocation of saints, it follows that conscience can have nothing concerning this invocation, that is certain. And since prayer ought to be made from faith, how do we know that God approves this invocation? Where do we know without the testimony of Scripture that the saints perceive the prayers of each one? ... Nothing can be produced by the adversaries against this reasoning, that, since invocation does not have a testimony from God’s Word, it cannot be affirmed that the saints perceive our invocation, or that they especially perceive that God approves it. Wherefore the adversaries ought not to force us to an uncertain matter, because a prayer without faith is not prayer. For as they cite the example of the Church, it is evident that this is a new custom in the Church; for although the old prayers make mention of the saints, yet they do not invoke the saints. Although also this new invocation in the Church is dissimilar to the invocation of individuals.”

Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. XXI:4–7, 10, 12–13

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1: MARK 15:20–47

JUDICA

During this season of Passiontide, the last two weeks of Lent, our attention is focused upon the cross. This is why it is called “Passion” tide, because our Lord’s Passion is put before our eyes constantly. We will hear the Passion narrative many times in the next few days. During Holy Week each of the four Passion histories from each of the four Gospels will be read in the Divine Services throughout the week. In our daily lectionary, the Passion of our Lord is also commended to us.

The key moment in our Lord’s Passion is His death. With His death He atones for the sins of the whole world. The heavenly Father’s wrath is spent upon His One and Only-Begotten Son. He condemns His Son to death, and lets the criminals—us poor, miserable sinners—go free. Traditionally, in reverence to our redemption from sin, death, and the power of the devil, the Church genuflects in silence at the words declaring our Lord’s death.

“Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.” With these words you are saved from your enemies of sin, death, and the devil. With His death He crushes the power of Satan. The world and our own sinful flesh also lose their power. They can no longer bring accusation against us, for our Lord and Savior has conquered them once and for all. Therefore, let us remain silent, fix our eyes on His death, and bend the knee in worship when we hear His Passion, for His death speaks of an eternal life won for us.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Our Lord's silence in the presence of His accusers reveals His innocence. He has no need to defend Himself, for He has not committed the many things they testified against Him. Like a lamb who is silent before the shearers, so is He silent before His accusers.

When our Lord Jesus was a boy of twelve, He was found in the midst of the teachers of the temple, both asking questions and listening to them. Here on the day of His death He is silent. The time for questions and answers is over. He has come to the time of our redemption from sin, death, and the devil. He willingly gives Himself over to His false accusers so that by His death we might have life. He is silent before His accusers so that on the Last Day He might speak to all those who believe on His Name the proclamation that they will inherit eternal life with Him and all the saints and angels in Heaven.

Our Lord Jesus was silent on the day of His death to lead death captive. But now He speaks through His holy Word the good things He did for us by His silent, innocent suffering and death. He won for all people atonement for their sins. Those who believe on Him, who trust in His atoning sacrifice, can now open their mouths and sing His praise. We, the innocent ones through the washing of Holy Baptism, now proclaim with loud voices of praise the wonderful things our Lord has done for us by His silence and death.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## Lesson from the Book of Concord Invocavit Sunday

### Article XXI.

Of the Worship of Saints, they teach, that the memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works, according to our calling, as the Emperor may follow the example of David in making war to drive away the Turk from his country. For both are kings. But the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints, or to ask help of saints, since it sets before us Christ, as the only Mediator, Propitiation, High-Priest and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to, and hath promised that He will hear our prayer; and this worship He approves above all, to wit, that in all afflictions He be called upon [1 John 2:1]: "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father," etc.

—the Augsburg Confession

Jesus is on a mission to get to Jerusalem. After He is gloriously transfigured, time is of the essence—and Jesus is on the march toward Jerusalem. The whole scene from today’s reading seems rushed as Jesus moves with unwavering resolution toward His ultimate goal: the cross of Calvary that awaits Him in Jerusalem.

This urgency is prominently displayed as Jesus is traveling on His historic pilgrimage. The first man approaches Him and promises unconditional loyalty. One might think this would be music to our Savior’s ears, but instead Jesus replies: “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” The next man says he’ll follow, but asks to first bury his father, to which Jesus curtly replies: “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.” Lastly, the third prospective disciple merely asks for a short break to say goodbye to his family, to which Jesus answers: “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” None of these requests seems unreasonable. But in all these instances, Jesus is addressing the high cost and uncompromising priority of discipleship. Acutely aware of what He Himself must do, He passes on, in the strongest language possible, what it really means to be a follower of the Crucified One.

Prayer: The Son of God goes forth to war, a kingly crown to gain. His blood-red banner streams afar; who follows in His train? Who best can drink His cup of woe, triumphant over pain, who patient bears his cross below, he follows in His train. (TLH 452:1)

As we enter into Passiontide, the last two weeks of Lent, we see our Lord Jesus Christ in the full state of His humiliation. Here we see Him in the garden of Gethsemane praying to the heavenly Father. In His prayer in the garden we see His humanity on full display. He is troubled and greatly distressed. When we are faced with death, or the death of a loved one, we are no different. Our sorrow is like the Lord’s: He was exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.

Our Lord Jesus in His sorrow shows us how to be in our sorrow. To whom does He go in His sorrow? He goes to the heavenly Father—to His Father. The Father is the One who gives comfort. The Father is the One who reminds us that His will is for our benefit. Our Lord Jesus binds Himself to the will of the heavenly Father; that He makes the Father’s will His will also reveals His divine nature.

We struggle to conform our will to the Father’s will, especially in times of trouble and distress. Our Lord Jesus fulfills the will of the Father for us poor, miserable sinners. He willingly suffers and dies for us, even though, like His apostles, we have deserted Him and denied Him through our sinful actions, thoughts, and words. Our Lord Jesus endured the suffering and shame that we deserve so that we might see Him sitting on the right hand of the Power to take us to our eternal home.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord

## Judica Sunday

### Chapter VI. Of the Third Use of the Law.

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

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

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

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

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

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

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome, Art. VI

TUESDAY, MARCH 3: LUKE 10:1-22

INVOCAVIT

The high cost of discipleship is again illustrated in today's reading. This time it involves the sending of the seventy-two. Jesus doesn't pull any punches as He boldly states: "... behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road." Not only is their reception to be one of mostly rejection, but they'll have to trust that God will provide daily bread from the few who do receive them. Additionally, the urgency and priority of getting the message out is illustrated by "greet no one along the road."

And yet, as difficult as their calling would be, the situation is infinitely worse for those who reject the Gospel: "But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.' But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city."

In spite of the hardships and frustrations that surely await those who heed God's call to the Ministry, the need for their faithful service will always be great. More pastors will always be needed for the harvest, with nothing less at stake than eternal life or death.

Prayer: Hark! The voice of Jesus crying, "Who will go and work today? Fields are white and harvests waiting, who will bear the sheaves away?" Loud and long the Master calleth, rich reward He offers thee; who will answer, gladly saying, "Here am I, send me, send me?" (TLH 496:1)

Today, our subject again addresses priorities--First Commandment issues--that challenge our allegiance to Jesus. These "challenges" are not always vices, but can be things that are normally quite necessary and good. Martha is busy preparing a meal. Nothing is wrong with that, right? After all, we have to eat. And doesn't Jesus Himself encourage us to pray for "daily bread?"

But the preparation of earthly bread must always take a back seat over the receiving of heavenly bread. To the casual observer, Martha seems right in complaining that her sister Mary is "only" sitting at Jesus' feet, while she is doing all the work. But Mary knows the meaning of "Sabbath." It doesn't mean "be lazy," but instead means "rest in the Lord." Salvation is about receiving, not doing, and indeed Mary has chosen the better portion. You can work, play, and eat anytime, but when the Lord offers up Himself in Divine Service, there is only one choice. Let us make the First and Third Commandments our daily priority, that our lives may be properly balanced, and receive the heavenly food our soul craves.

Prayer: One thing's needful; Lord, this treasure teach me highly to regard; all else, though it first give pleasure, is a yoke that presses hard. Beneath it the heart is still fretting and striving, no true, lasting happiness ever deriving. The gain of this one thing all loss can requite and teach me in all things to find true delight. (TLH 366:1)

Preparation for Death

587 8s. 6L.

Schumann's Gesangbuch, 1539

Lord Je - sus Christ, true man and God, Who bor - est anguish,

scorn, the rod, And diedst at last up - on the tree, To

bring Thy Fa - ther's grace to me: I pray Thee, through that

bit - ter woe, Let me, a sin - ner, mer - cy know.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>2 When comes the hour of failing breath,<br/>And I must wrestle, Lord, with death,<br/>When from my sight all fades away,<br/>And when my tongue no more can say,<br/>And when mine ears no more can hear,<br/>And when my heart is racked with fear:</p> | <p>4 Joyful my resurrection be,<br/>Thou in the judgment plead for me,<br/>And hide my sins, Lord, from Thy face,<br/>And give me life, of Thy rich grace!<br/>I trust Thee utterly, my Lord,<br/>For Thou hast promised in Thy word!</p>   |
| <p>3 When all my mind is darkened o'er,<br/>And human help can do no more;<br/>Then come, Lord Jesus! come with speed,<br/>And help me in my hour of need;<br/>Lead me from this dark vale beneath,<br/>And shorten then the pangs of death.</p>             | <p>5 Dear Lord, forgive us all our guilt;<br/>Help us to wait until Thou wilt<br/>That we depart; and let our faith<br/>Be brave, and conquer e'en in death;<br/>Firm resting on Thy sacred word,<br/>Until we sleep in Thee, our Lord.</p> |

This text takes us back to Tuesday of this week, but now we read these events from the words of St. Mark. Mark is known for using few words and less detail. But, if we compare his account of the woman who anointed Jesus with that of St. Matthew, St. Mark includes two things that St. Matthew does not. Whereas St. Matthew says that the woman brought “fragrant oil,” St. Mark identifies it as “spikenard”; whereas St. Matthew says it was worth “much money,” St. Mark gives a value: “three hundred denarii” (Matthew 26:6, 9; Mark 14:3, 5).

He includes these details so that his readers will understand exactly what kind of gift this woman brought and how valuable it was. More than that, it shows how much more valuable the Lord Himself was to her, that she sacrificed this pricey oil for Him.

Later in this passage the Lord Jesus institutes the Holy Supper. In this Supper, the very flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine. He gives Himself to us in this way for the forgiveness of sins and for salvation. This blessed Sacrament is beyond all earthly value, so that our greatest possession—though it be worth a life-time’s wages—could not purchase it. The Church adorns the Sacrament with precious vessels of silver and gold to confess how far beyond price is the Lord’s own flesh and blood. We could never buy such a gift, so the Lord gives Himself freely.

Prayer: 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. Amen.

Today’s reading lies in the midst of challenges leveled against Jesus. The people continue to ask for authenticating signs, even though Jesus had just cast out a demon. In response, Jesus calls them an “evil generation.” Four times He refers to this “generation,” indicating a whole class of people who have hardened their hearts against Jesus being the Messiah. Even the challenging Ninevites were turned by the preaching of Jonah, as well as the Queen of the South by the witness of Solomon. In both cases, the Word brought by mere men converted Gentiles. But now, the Word made flesh is rejected by those who are supposed to be God’s special people; thus the statement by Jesus that their generation is “faithless and perverse” (Luke 9:41).

These characteristics are not only common to the people of Jesus’ day, but to people of any age. Wherever there is rejection of the Word, individually or corporately, the judgment is the same: everlasting destruction. Let us therefore avoid the trap that so entangled the people of Jesus’ day, seeking Him where He hasn’t promised to be found. Instead, let us immerse ourselves in the Means of Grace, where He is not only found, but brings us forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Prayer: O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels and all just works do proceed, give unto Thy servants that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Thy commandments, and also that we, being defended by Thee from the fear our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen. (Collect for Peace, TLH Order of Vespers)

In most cases it's an honor to be invited over for dinner. But for Jesus there always seemed to be a catch. In this instance, the issue is ceremonial washing: "And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner." The Pharisees are so conscientious about obeying their myriad of nitpicking rules, yet they fail in the fundamental rule of loving their neighbor. They're so concerned about their outer rituals that they ignore the inside motivation--a loving heart--that would compel them to act with unconditional compassion.

But their root problem isn't cured simply following the commandment to "love one another." None of us can love as we ought, even with the most sincere and earnest attempt. To love as God intends means that God must dwell within us. This can only be accomplished through the gift of faith, which God himself imparts. The Pharisees and lawyers of today's text rejected Jesus, and therefore the Divine relationship He brings to the believer, and all the gifts that come with it. Our plea to God should not be "help me try harder to be good." Rather, it should be, "create in me clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Only when our relationship with God is established and strong can we live the life He so desires.

Prayer: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

It is ironic what the leaders of the Jews choose to remember and what they forget. The Lord Jesus never told them in those clear words that He would rise from the dead on the third day (although He did speak clearly with His disciples in private). What He told the Jews was this: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). This was certainly a prophecy about His Resurrection, but the Jews had chosen to misunderstand it. Even at His trial, the false accusation they brought against Him was, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days'" (Matthew 26:61). Thus, they misunderstood and twisted His Words until He was condemned to death. Now that He has died, however, they conveniently understand Him correctly.

The devil is deceitful. It is one thing to oppose God's Word on all points; it is another thing to go back and forth, opposing God's Word at one time and agreeing with it at another time for one's own benefit. We are thus warned that not everyone who hears God's Word believes, and not everyone who quotes Scripture is faithful. The worst heresies are always those that use Scripture in their defense, though unfaithfully.

But, despite the Jews' preparation, the Lord Jesus did rise from the dead. Their wicked plans could not stop Him. Likewise, the Truth of God's Word will always prevail over those who use it falsely.

Prayer: 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. Amen.

The Lord Jesus Christ was innocent according to all laws, both Jewish and Roman. This was obvious even to Pontius Pilate, because “he knew that they [the Jews] had handed Him over because of envy.” But the Lord Jesus Christ would not speak in His own defense. St. John records that Pilate said to Him, “Are you not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release you?” (John 19:10). But still the Lord would not speak in His own defense. Pilate, it seems, wanted to release Him, and would have if the Lord had offered any evidence of His innocence. But, because of the pressure of the crowd, Pilate gave in to the Jews and had the innocent Man crucified.

Origen observes, “It was, indeed, matter of surprise to men even of ordinary intelligence, that one who was accused and assailed by false testimony, but who was able to defend Himself, and to show that He was guilty of none of the charges (alleged), and who might have enumerated the praiseworthy deeds of His own life, and His miracles wrought by divine power, so as to give the judge an opportunity of delivering a more honourable judgment regarding Him, should not have done this, but should have disdained such a procedure, and in the nobleness of His nature have contemned His accusers” (Against Celsus, Bk. 1). It was the Lord’s will to die for our sins. To accomplish His plan of salvation, He kept silent and allowed Himself to be condemned for us.

Prayer: 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. Amen.

In verses 22 and following we are advised how to handle earthly bread, as well as heavenly bread. In the case of earthly bread, Jesus uses the examples of ravens and lilies (both considered ordinary and plentiful) to show that God thinks highly of even the least of His creation. As He did in yesterday’s reading, Jesus uses the argument of least to greatest. If He provides for birds and flowers in abundance, how much more will He then provide for His highest of creation. Therefore, we shouldn’t be so concerned and worried about what we will eat or drink, as the pagans do. Rather, as Christians, let it be enough to simply pray for daily bread and be good stewards of the gifts God provides.

This leads to the more important subject of heavenly bread, which should be our chief focus: “Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” The formula is simple: rest in God, and let Him take care of the rest.

Prayer: Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of Thy holy Word we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen. (Collect for the Word, TLH Order of Morning Service)

# Lesson from the Book of Concord

## Reminiscere Sunday

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25: MATTHEW 26:36-75

LAETARE

### Article XIII. How Man is Justified before God, and of Good Works.

What I have hitherto and constantly taught concerning this I cannot in the least change, viz. that by faith (as St. Peter says) we acquire a new and clean heart, and God accounts, and will account us righteous and holy, for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. And although sin in the flesh has not been altogether removed and become dead, yet He will not punish or regard this.

For good works follow this faith, renewal and forgiveness of sins. And that in them which is still sinful and imperfect is not accounted as sin and defect, even for Christ's sake; but the entire man, both as to his person and his works, is and is called just and holy, from pure grace and mercy, shed upon us and displayed in Christ. Wherefore we cannot boast of our many merits and works, if they be viewed apart from grace and mercy, but as it is written, (1 Cor. 1:31): "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord," viz. that he has a gracious God. For thus all is well. We say besides that if good works do not follow, faith is false and not true.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

"Even My own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate My bread, has lifted up his heel against Me" (Psalm 41:9). In today's text the Lord Jesus Christ endures three different betrayals: two from Judas and Peter, who were His chosen disciples, and a third from the Jewish leaders, who were supposed to teach the people about His coming.

All sin is a betrayal of God. God created Adam and Eve holy and without sin, but they betrayed His goodness in the garden. We who are their children have inherited their Fall and we perpetuate their betrayal with sins of our own. In this way it is not only Judas, Peter, and the Jews who betrayed the Lord, but we ourselves who betray Him by our lack of fear, love, and trust in Him. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ endured betrayal for two reasons: to forgive us our betrayal of Him and to teach us that He will never betray us.

Forgiveness is always available, even for betrayal, as it is written, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful" (2 Timothy 2:13). The difference between Judas and Peter—as is revealed at the end of the text—is not that Peter's betrayal was somehow "less sinful", but only that Peter had faith, whereas Judas despaired. Peter was forgiven through faith in the Christ's sacrifice, while Judas refused forgiveness. Thus we are comforted to know that, even though we betray the Lord Jesus daily by our sins, we are forgiven through faith in Him who was betrayed for us.

Prayer: 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. Amen.

In Matthew 11 the Lord Jesus prays thus: “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes” (Matthew 11:25). In this passage the disciples are the ones who should be wise and prudent, who understand that the Christ is about to die for sins, but it is hidden from them. This happens when they complain about the “waste” of the fragrant oil, when Judas plots against Him, and when Peter fails to recognize his own weakness. They were the Christ’s disciples and should be wise, but in these moments of weakness they did not understand their own sin, nor the work of the Christ (although all is revealed to them after His resurrection).

In contrast, a certain nameless woman anoints the Lord Jesus with costly oil. She understands perfectly. She understands that she is a sinner in need of forgiveness. By anointing His head with fragrant oil, she confesses the Lord Jesus to be the Christ—for “Christ” means “the Anointed”. She understands He has come to die for her sins, for the Lord says in praise of her, “She did it for My burial.”

This is written for our comfort. We are not saved—thank God—by our own wisdom and understanding. Rather, we are saved on account of the sacrifice of Christ for our sins, this salvation being received through faith. Forgiveness only comes through faith in the Christ.

Prayer: 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. Amen.

We observe the Third Commandment by “remembering” the Sabbath. The Christian Church does not need to keep the ceremonial regulations that were established for Israel under Moses, and we certainly do not need to worry about the regulations that were established by hypocrites and false shepherds.

We obey the Lord and observe His Commandments by remembering that the Sabbath was established to teach us and give us rest in His gracious blessings. As soon as we start to think that our observance of laws and works is about how good we are, or how much worse others are by comparison, we lose sight of Christ’s teachings. He gives us His Word and His Spirit so that we may grow in His righteousness according to faith, and that we may help others to do likewise.

We suffer because He also uses those occasions to teach us and call us to remember that His grace is sufficient for us. Sometimes evil happens to people because they sin and reap consequences. But evil also happens just because we live in a broken world and we cannot avoid the cascade of others’ sins. Our Lord uses all these things for His greater good as He teaches us the most important thing, which is repentance and forgiveness in our Savior Jesus Christ.

Prayer: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Satan often tempts us to think that we are reasonable. He wants us to believe that we can have it all figured out. But one important aspect of our Lord's preaching in this reading is that all of our reasoning and all of our accounting have to be subject to God's will—not ours—if we are to be disciples of Christ Jesus.

A teacher who tells us to love others, even our enemies, but also says we must hate our family is offensive to our reason. A teacher who tells us to bear our crosses, but also teaches us to be mindful about the mockery of others seems confusing and inconsistent. And the idea of salt losing flavor and needing to be re-seasoned sounds like foolishness to some people.

But to have “ears to hear” means one has the Spirit of God and faith to submit to His will. A disciple of Christ does not place his own reason or reckoning above the Word of God. In spite of Satan's prideful teaching, faith from the Lord makes us understand how hate and love, suffering and honor, diplomacy and salt all can make sense according to context and perspective when one faithfully submits to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

St. Paul writes to the saints in Corinth, “When I came to you, [I] did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). Today's text presents the crucifixion of the Christ, which is the substance of our salvation: Jesus Christ was crucified for sinners, according to Holy Scripture.

Why did the Christ choose this kind of public and shameful death? He made a public spectacle of Himself so that, when He had risen from the dead, all would know that He has truly conquered death. There is no denying that He died. His resurrection from the dead is also witnessed by more than 500 people (1 Corinthians 15:6), therefore we can be certain that death and all its power has been destroyed in Him. St. Athanasius writes in the fourth century: “Our Lord and Savior Christ did not contrive death for His own body, lest he should appear fearful of some other death, but He accepted and endured on the cross that inflicted by others, especially by enemies, which they reckoned fearful and ignominious and shameful, in order that this being destroyed, He might Himself be believed to be Life, and the power of death might be completely annihilated” (St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, §24).

Prayer: 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. Amen.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord

## Laetare Sunday

### The Fourth Petition.

*Give us this day our daily bread.*

Here we are mindful of the poor breadbasket, namely, of our body and the necessities of the temporal life. It is a brief and simple word, but it is also very broad and comprehensive. For if you speak of, and pray for, daily bread, you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy the same, and also against everything which interferes with it. Therefore you must enlarge your thoughts and extend them afar, not only to the oven or the flour-barrel, but to the distant field and the entire land, which bears and brings to us daily bread and every sort of sustenance. For if God did not cause it to grow, and bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take bread from the oven or have any to set upon the table.

To speak briefly, this petition includes everything that belongs to our entire life in the world. For on that account alone do we need daily bread. But to our life it is not only necessary that our body have food and covering and other necessities, but also that we live in peace and quiet with those among whom we live and have our intercourse in daily business and conversation and in every manner possible; in short, whatever pertains to the interests of family, of neighbors and of government. For where these things do not prosper as they ought, the necessities of life also must fail, and life cannot be maintained. There is, besides, the greatest need to pray for temporal authority and government, as that by which, most of all, God preserves to us our daily bread and all the comforts of this life. For though we had received of God all good things in abundance, we should not be able to retain any of them, or use them in security and happiness, if He did not give us a permanent and peaceful government. For where there are dissension, strife and war, there the daily bread is already taken away, or at least diminished.

—The Large Catechism, §71–74

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11: LUKE 15:11-32

REMINISCERE

Our Lord Jesus teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses...” Food, sin, and forgiveness have a close connection throughout God’s Word. Adam and Eve brought death and sin to the world by taking and eating what the Lord commanded them not to eat. Adam’s consequences included the work and difficulty by which he would obtain his bread.

Our Lord used food to bless and teach thousands of people during His ministry. He also took the Passover meal that was established so Israel would look forward to His coming and instituted from it the Holy Supper of His flesh and blood. This greater meal would bring salvation and forgiveness to many, many more in His Church throughout the centuries to come.

Like the wayward, wasteful son, lack of daily food should remind us of our sins. If our bodies grow weak and hungry because we have no bread, how much more perilous is it for our souls if we lack the Bread of Life that is Christ Jesus? God gives food and other blessings to the righteous and to the wicked, but forgiveness and real life only come to those who receive the spiritual blessings of Jesus through faith. Whether our cross in life is to endure lack of bodily blessings, or if our devotion includes the discipline of fasting, God’s Spirit uses bodily hunger to teach us to hunger for the righteousness that comes through the Body and Blood of Jesus!

Prayer: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts.”

This call to repentance applies to everyone. Our Lord spoke it to the greedy, lustful Pharisees, but His words should stir our hearts also. We are all tempted by the devil to love other things more than our true Lord and Master. It is easy for us to be loyal to our corrupt desires and despise our Maker and Redeemer.

In our age, many people are concerned about governments or companies spying on what we do on our phones or computers, but so few people seem to remember that God knows our hearts. He sees all our thoughts, words, and deeds. Hypocrites despise this and hate the idea that they are accountable for their sins. They justify themselves and attack those who remind them of the truth. But if we are faithful according to God’s Spirit and Truth, He makes us to be humble and repentant. He makes us confess our sin and cling to His grace in Christ crucified, rather than try to justify ourselves.

Hypocrites think they can force their problems away by divorce, by arguments that dismiss the truth, by money or social power, or even by murder. Satan wants us to think that such self-justification in the world of men can hide our guilt before God. But the Lord makes it clear that we are only justified through faith in Christ, and we are only saved because He takes away our sin.

Prayer: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Pontius Pilate almost comes off as a sympathetic figure in the gospels. He repeatedly declares that he finds no fault in Jesus. He clearly knows that Jesus is an innocent man and he looks for ways to let Him go. After failing to convince the mob, Pilate tries to satisfy them by punishing Jesus, but letting Him live. When that doesn’t work, he goes through the ritual of washing his hands of the matter.

What is Pilate’s sin? It was that he knew the truth and tried to avoid it. He was warned not to have anything to do with this show trial. He knew the truth, and he turned away. He was given authority to proclaim justice, but he perverted justice. His desire to let Jesus go came to nothing. What was Pilate’s sin? It was cowardice. He had the power to subdue the mob, but he instead decided to follow the mob. His vocation was to administer justice and he abandoned his vocation.

Pilate is a warning to all of us in our vocations. We must treat them as God-given responsibilities. A leader must always take his role as one given to him by God. He must carry out justice in righteousness.

Prayer: 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 liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Notice that when Jesus prays in the garden some incredible things happen. First, He pleads that the Father “take this cup away from Me.” The cup, of course, is the cup of God’s wrath against sin. The cup of wrath has been filled to the brim. Jesus will take it all for us.

“Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.” This is no average time of prayer. Jesus is undertaking something that no one has ever done. He is undertaking something that no one has ever been able to do. The whole world pivots on His drinking that cup.

“Being in agony,... His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” It is unimaginable to be in this great agony. It is the agony of paying for the sins of the world. This is the Passion. Jesus not only dies the substitutionary death in our place, but lives the substitutionary life in our place. The second Adam lives in complete obedience to the Father and trades His life for ours. When we receive the cup at the Lord’s Supper we should think not only of the blood shed on the cross, but also the blood shed at his scourging, and the blood shed in the garden. As He drinks every drop from the cup of God’s wrath, He fills our cups with His life-giving blood.

Prayer: 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 liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Yesterday the reading contained a rebuke for the prideful who dismiss God’s Law and justify themselves as though they had no sin. Today’s reading gives a contrast to that. Our Lord confirms that sin and offenses will come, but we are to faithfully avoid being the cause of such offense. He teaches us that we are to repent and forgive when sins do happen.

The power of faith that God creates in us is focused on humble repentance and gratefulness for His forgiveness in Christ. Prideful hearts want to gain other powers and greater glory from faith. Satan would have us think that uprooting trees, overturning mountains, or performing other signs and wonders is more important than the power of humble obedience to God’s commands and loving service to others. Jesus teaches us that we ought not seek prideful glory or be driven by our own “felt needs”. Christ served in order to teach us how to serve. He loved in order to teach us how to love. And His lessons were not so we could overturn trees or manipulate others to achieve power and glory. All glory and power belongs to Jesus Christ our Lord. But as our Head He reminds us that we are the servants, and that in spite of our causing offenses or being truly unprofitable He makes us part of His kingdom and forgives our sins.

Prayer: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

The context around our Lord’s rhetorical question shows that hypocrites and false teachers were listening to His preaching. In spite of pious appearances, these people despised what Jesus had to say. Our Lord’s words were another call to repentance. The Pharisees and others tried to appear faithful and righteous, they seemed just and noble in their works and words, but the Lord’s truth showed that these people were unfaithful.

Those who cause offense in the name of God continue to be very active in our time. Many people want to give the appearance of faith and piety. They perform works in the name of Jesus that seem good. But when a pastor who has faithfully and humbly searched the Scriptures declares that sin is sin, it is common for hypocrites to condemn him and dismiss him as hateful. “You don’t know what’s in my heart! How dare you assume and judge as though you are God!”

Our Lord’s parable teaches the faithful saints to pray and not lose heart according to the patience and humility that His Spirit works in us. Praying always also includes repenting always! Whether we are praying the Lord’s Prayer or using other words and sighs, real faith makes us come to our Father humbly saying always, “Thy will be done..., forgive us our trespasses...,” in addition to all our other petitions.

Prayer: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Through the Eucharist we are dining at God’s table, not just as guests, but as family. There is a unity about it, a unity in the family of God. Jesus desires unity with us and the whole world. He longs for that unity like a lover who desires the object of His affection. Jesus longed for the world to come to Him and share this meal. He longed for the new kingdom to arrive. Not that He longed for the suffering, but He longed for the new reality to be accomplished. Jesus wanted to bring about the kingdom of God here on earth. And so He says to His disciples, “I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”

When would that be? When does the kingdom of God come? The kingdom of God came in the resurrection, on Easter morning. The life of the kingdom of God that broke into the world on Easter morning is communicated to us through the meal He instituted. The Eucharist is the climax of the Divine Service. That is not an accident. In it you receive a foretaste of what your relationship to Jesus will be in all eternity. Jesus longed for fellowship with us. He longed to see the kingdom of God come so that this fellowship would be possible. And now, it has come.

Prayer: 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 liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The unreal aspect of this parable is the fact that the owner keeps sending one servant after another to be beaten and cast out, and then sends his son who is killed. In real life, who would do such a thing? Would any owner go beyond the first incident of rebellion? After an owner got news of what had happened to his servant that represented him, the authorities would be on the case. In those days some executions would be meted out. In our day there would at least be some arrests made.

The unreality of the scenario was perceived by Jesus' audience as well. They knew what He was talking about. No man would be this forgiving, this persistent with rebels, this unrelenting in love. This was the otherworldly love of God. This was a love that was unknown to men. God gives, and gives, and gives, hoping against hope for some fruit, some harvest for His labor. For the chief priests, what should shock them only hardens them in their sinful rage. But God lets the Jews fill up the measure of their own guilt. And when that guilt and wrath has been filled up, it will spill over on them. Jesus is God's final word. And that word is, "I love you." To reject Jesus is to say to God, "but, I do not love you." May our current world turn back from its rebellion.

Prayer: 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 liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

## Lesson from the Book of Concord Oculi Sunday

### Article II.

Also they [the Lutheran pastors] teach, that since the Fall of Adam, all men begotten according to nature, are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence; and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through baptism and the Holy Ghost.

They condemn the Pelagians and others, who deny that the vice of origin is sin, and who, to obscure the glory of Christ's merit and benefits, argue that man can be justified before God by his own strength and reason.

—The Augsburg Confession

### Article II.

#### Of Original Sin.

The second article, Of Original Sin, the adversaries [the Roman Catholic theologians] approve, but in such a way, that they, nevertheless, censure the definition of Original Sin, which we incidentally gave. Here at the very threshold, his Imperial Majesty will discover that the writers of the Confutation [the Romanist response to the Augsburg Confession] were deficient not only in judgment, but also in candor. For whereas we, with a simple mind, desired, in passing, to recount those things which Original Sin embraces, these men, by framing an invidious interpretation, artfully distort a proposition that has in it nothing which of itself is wrong. Thus they say: "To be without the fear of God, to be without faith, is actual guilt"; and therefore they deny that it is original guilt.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession  
(The Augsburg Confession was written in 1530, the Roman Confutation responded to the Confession in 1530, and then the Lutheran Apology (Defense) was written in 1531.)

“They also brought infants to [Jesus]...” The word here for infant is βρέφη. It does not mean simply small children but, in fact, those who do not walk or talk yet. There may also have been toddlers and small children there, but at least some of those who were brought to Jesus were babes in arms. The parallel text in Mark 10:16 says, “And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.”

We also know what Jesus says about these infants. He says “of such is the kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God is made up of those like the infants He was blessing. The implication is that infants can be part of the kingdom of God, but how can that be since infants lack reasonable thought? Faith can work on other parts of our cognition, such as emotion and intuition, long before language and reasoning are present. Infants can have faith before their ability to reason.

Jesus speaks of the “little ones who believe in Me” (Mark 9:42), and John the Baptist leapt in the womb of Elizabeth at the presence of Jesus. Therefore, we should not doubt our Lord’s ability to give faith to the infant, to the senile, to the retarded. Neither severe brain trauma, nor the ravages of Alzheimer’s disease can strip us of faith, even if they strip us of reason. Our Lord has provided a way of saving faith for all.

Prayer: 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 liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

This triumphal entry looks something like a coronation. It looks like the beginning of a new social and religious order. But these Pharisees and Sadducees have already decided that the world is not big enough for them and Jesus. While the crowds were wildly praising and welcoming Jesus of Nazareth, the Pharisees and Sadducees are plotting His death.

Chapter twelve, verse nineteen of St. John’s Gospel is interesting in that it shows us the divisions that were found among the Pharisees. One faction must have advocated harsh treatment for Jesus for quite a while before His entry into Jerusalem. The other faction seems to have advocated a milder response, hoping that this Jesus would just fade out of the picture. The harsher faction scolds the milder faction, basically saying, “Now look what has happened! We waited, hoping for him to fade away and now he is bigger than ever! We have to do things our way now. We have to kill Him.”

The victory parade that Jesus leads on this day does ultimately end in life, victory, and glory, but before it gets there it goes to suffering and death. Jesus’ glorification includes the Passion; it includes the mocking, the torture, and the crucifixion. Jesus’ glory is inextricably tied up in His suffering and death, and His throne of glory is also the cross of our forgiveness.

Prayer: 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 liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.