

(continued from page 3)

I know the financial strains which have hit many homes. Some people have been less directly affected, either on account of being in an “essential” job, or because they are on a fixed income. Please remember the support of your congregation: as this situation continues, there will be an impact on salaries, mortgages, utilities, and other congregational expenses, which must continue to be met.

Diocesan Relief Resources

Laymen and clergy from several congregations have asked about setting up a diocesan fund to assist pastors and laity who are experiencing financial hardships at this time. I would anticipate that, as pertains to local circumstances, you will be in contact with your pastor to ascertain any increased needs he may have at this time, or the needs of other laymen within your congregation. (Again, remember that many have lost their employment on account of various ‘lockdowns’.) If possible, please consider individual or congregational donations to the diocese which will be distributed to meet these needs as various circumstances are brought to our attention. (Contributions designated for emergency assistance may be sent to ELDoNA c/o the treasurer, Pastor Henson, at Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, 1000 North Park Ave. Herrin, IL 62948.) If you have any questions concerning this matter, please feel free to contact me by email, bishopheiser@me.com.

Summer Family Camp

At this point, I believe that there has not be any change to our camp schedule. 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!

Yours in Christ, *Bishop Heiser*

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



APRIL 6–MAY 2, 2020

A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF
NORTH AMERICA

The Calendar

April 5	Lent 6-Palmarum	TLH 146
April 9	Maundy Thursday	TLH 163
April 10	Good Friday	
April 11	Holy Saturday	
April 12	Easter	TLH 190
April 19	Easter 1	TLH 208
April 25 (S)	St. Mark, Evangelist	
April 26	Easter 2	TLH 436
May 1 (F)	St. Philip and St. James, Apostles	

(Hymns of the Day are for the appointed Festival or Sunday.)

FROM THE BISHOP

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

Upcoming Synod and Colloquium

When I wrote to all of you last month, the threat of the Chinese coronavirus disease, COVID-19, was just emerging as a matter of global significance. As I wrote to you then: “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)”

All of the societal changes which we have experienced since then have not changed this fundamental reality. This troubles associated with this crisis will be felt throughout the globe for a very long time to come, but our hope never changes.

One thing which became clear with President Trump’s decision to extend the guidelines on social distancing is that it

SATURDAY, MAY 2: JOHN 6:41-59

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI

As any of us have most likely experienced, there are always an endless number of people who grumble at the words of Jesus when it comes to Him being the only bringer of peace and life in this fallen world. Try as they may, there will never be a separation of Jesus from the fulfillment of God’s Old Testament promises. It was the will of God that His people in the wilderness not perish; so manna from heaven was sent by Him with the intended purpose that, should they eat of it, they would not die. In fact, this is a repeated theme in the Old Testament.

It was God’s will that He send His Son to be that Living Bread which gives life, and should His believing people partake of it (Him) they might have eternal life. Over and over Jesus keeps proclaiming the location of true peace—and it is Him! What a blessing to realize that the Father has drawn (and continues to draw) us to the true location of peace and life. He not only brings us to trusting in Christ’s fully atoning merits, but to taking and eating His true body, which was delivered unto death for you, and to taking and drinking His true blood, shed for you, all for the forgiveness of sins. Partaking of Jesus is truly knowing peace and gaining life—right from His very wounds!

Prayer: O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

I once was told “All that really matters is ‘knowing’ God. All of the other more difficult stuff is minor. 90% is ‘knowing’, while the other 10% He allows us to fluctuate on with time.” What this person meant by 10% was the Sacraments. They considered them minor—and fluctuating. It begs the question, “How can any man be confident that they really ‘know’ God if the ‘knowing’ is left up to man? And worse, 10% is always left in question?” That’s not comforting.

Thanks be to God that He reveals how He desires to be known right within His very Word. How joyous are we in having a firm confession of what God has revealed through His Word. You are not left guessing. It is the Holy Spirit who works through His Word and Sacraments, ever pointing to Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Christ is the key to God’s Holy Scripture.

This is what Jesus is disclosing within yesterday’s, today’s, and tomorrow’s assigned readings. He is conveying how He is the One being pointed to as Bread from Heaven from the past, and yet He is also imparting how He is the very Bread of life who will continually feed His sheep in the future, as well. How blessed are we to be brought to believe in—and truly know—our Good Shepherd!

Prayer: O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

will not be feasible for the diocese to meet for its colloquium and synod, as these had previously been scheduled. The meeting at Salem Lutheran Church will not take place in April. Instead, the clergy will explore options for a stopgap meeting by video conference or telephone conference to address several necessary matters. The colloquium will have to take place later in the year.

Parish Life

At this point, the impact of the pandemic has been felt by every parish affiliated with this diocese. What have often been challenging circumstances of congregational life have been further burdened with the realities of ordinances limiting the size of services, or even the possibility of services.

I know that every member of the diocese is laboring to bring the Word and Sacraments to the Church; how this may be accomplished varies with local circumstances. Ultimately, the decisions regarding such matters must be made by the stewards of the mysteries of God, the called and ordained servants of the Word who serve the Lord of the Church in bringing the means of grace to you. It is incumbent on all of you to abide by their decisions in this matter. They, in turn, must necessarily give attention to restrictions, and recommendations, which the magistrates are making with regard to gatherings. As local pastors have so desired, I have endeavored to offer such counsel as I can with regard to local efforts which may be employed to meet these challenges which now confront us.

There was not a seminary class on “Ministering to the Saints in a time of Plague”; the clergy are applying principles which may be gathered from Scripture and the historical experience of the Church, as we seek to address the current situation.

I implore all of you to continue to keep your pastor and his family in your prayers. Many (possibly all) of them are working even longer hours in service of the Church. Many of them are now offering multiple services per week, or are preparing online services and devotions. And they are doing so while many of them are deprived of their regular secular employment. The concern for care of our families is not a minor matter. (*back page*)

Lesson from the Book of Concord Palmarum (Palm) Sunday

Article III.

Also they [the Lutherans] teach, that the Word, that is, the Son of God, did take man's nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are Two Natures, the divine and the human, inseparably conjoined in one Person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the Virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, that He might reconcile the Father unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but for all actual sins of men. He also descended into hell, and truly rose again the third day; afterward He ascended into Heaven, that He might sit on the right hand of the Father, and forever reign, and have dominion over all creatures, and sanctify them that believe in Him, by sending the Holy Ghost into their hearts, to rule, comfort and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and the power of sin. The same Christ shall openly come again to judge the quick and the dead, etc., according to the Apostles' Creed.

—The Augsburg Confession

THURSDAY, APRIL 30: JOHN 6:16-29

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI

Everyone experiences the darkness of this world through various tensions and trials of life, all because of sin. Christ's disciples experienced this while out on the water. Yet, Jesus comes to them and everything changes. Immediately they were safe.

Some say of such a section of God's Word (among other sections where Jesus has compassion and helps those in need), "Well, how nice of Jesus to go out and help His disciples who are in tumultuous times. It sure would be nice if He showed up in my life to calm things down and bring peace to me." Compassion has a location. Rescue has a location. Peace has a location. Jesus is that location, and in this text He is beginning to use language about a food which remains unto eternal life that cannot be separated from the Bread from heaven, which Jesus will ultimately identify as Himself. Jesus is actually beginning to reveal how the giver of the food is also the very food that is given. Again, compassion, rescue, and peace have a location.

So, right in the very midst of the darkness of life—in the fray and tensions—how overjoyed we believers can be that God draws us to the proper location and object of faith, Jesus. He's right where He promised He would be: in His Word and Sacraments.

Prayer: O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Just as it is Moses and all of Old Testament Scripture that testify of Christ Jesus, so it is Jesus and all of the New Testament Scripture that testify of His fulfilling that which was spoken before. As the saying from St. Augustine goes, “in the Old the New lies concealed, in the New the Old is revealed.”

The Jews searched the Scriptures, for in them they thought they had eternal life. Meaning, they thought they would win salvation by their efforts of rigidly following the Law contained within it, and strictly conducting all the ceremonies, as well. Prideful flesh easily gets caught up in works, getting blinded to the truth of God’s Word and missing Jesus who is that truth! Using these devotions (or going to God’s Divine Service) for the sake of merit would put anyone in the same league as the Jews, thinking that such works win salvation. Thankfully, by God’s grace, He teaches us to not miss the One who is the truth. He brings us to trust alone in the fully atoning merits of the One sent from the Father for the forgiveness of sins; the One who is the key to all of God’s Holy Scripture and the only One in whom there is eternal life: Jesus! It is through the means of His Word and Sacraments that the Good Shepherd continues His search, and rescue!

Prayer: O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

We are reminded that the Son of Mary is also the Son of God, incarnate for our salvation, when John records that Jesus was not surprised by any of the events presented. Neither is Jesus surprised at being confronted by the betrayer in the flesh and seeing in the disciple who ate His bread the embodiment of the will of Satan.

The quiet majesty with which Christ takes the initiative, goes to meet His captors, questions them, and gives Himself into their hands has a shattering effect on them. They came expecting to arrest a meek peasant and instead were met in the dim light by a majestic person. He loves His own to the end; the Good Shepherd goes freely into death in order that His flock may live. He remains to the end the obedient Son who cannot but drink the cup of suffering which the Father has given Him.

Our gracious Lord’s commitment to redeem us from our sin stands in stark contrast to Peter’s denial of our Redeemer. Jesus continues to be denied by His called people even today; yet He, as our long suffering Lord, continues to be faithful in His redemptive work as our mediator and savior.

Prayer: O God, for our redemption You gave Your only begotten Son to the death of the cross and by His glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of the enemy. Grant that all our sin may be drowned through daily repentance and that day by day we may arise to live before You in righteousness and purity forever; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus answered questions about His doctrine and practice by simply pointing to those who have heard and seen Him as a clear testimony of His word and life. May we by God's grace be so steadfast in our walk and speech that we could likewise point to our life with such confidence of its confession. Our lives should point to Jesus Christ's doctrine and life!

Even the kind of death our Lord was going to die made a clear confession. Jewish execution was by stoning, but Jesus' death was to be by crucifixion, whereby he would bear the curse. The Romans, not the Jews, had to put Jesus to death. God made the whole process serve His Word and teaching. The crucifixion fulfills the prediction that He would be "lifted up," for this was the Roman form of punishment, while stoning was the Jewish form of punishment for blasphemers.

In spite of Christ's unwavering life and doctrine Pilate asks "What is truth?" This is the same response the world still uses for its rejection of Christ. Teaching the truth was not (and is not) a criminal offense. It was not only His people that sought to kill the King and quench the Light. Judas, who became a willing tool, may have the greater sin, but the Gentile world also took part in the wickedness and shared the guilt. Jesus comes to bear witness to the truth of God that sets men free from sin—and for this He went to the cross.

Prayer: Lord may we always cling to You in faith through grace, and be ever ready to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship. Amen.

Spiritually blind flesh will always think that the Law is doable, yet the Law reveals sin and only brings death and condemnation. Proponents of a Law-based belief sometimes even try to use Christ's words regarding Judgement Day (from verse 29) as proof that salvation is determined by works (namely, doing good or doing bad).

By the grace of God, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther was made aware of how prideful man's flesh can be, how it takes credit for all works produced—including good works that necessarily pour forth because of faith in Christ. That is why he warns believers to fear even their good works. Proper focus is not on works; it is on Christ! Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep; knowing His sheep, and being known by His own. As He says in today's text, "he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life."

Good works necessarily pour forth because you hear the proper proclamation of His Law condemn your flesh to death; while His Gospel and the right administration of His Sacraments bring your New Man to trust alone in Christ's full satisfaction of the Law and full atonement for your sins. Thanks be to God for continually fixing our eyes on Jesus!

Prayer: O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Gospel according to St. John reveals a major issue between the Law and Jesus. John was inspired to write in the very first chapter, “For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). The very first confrontation with the Jews regarding the Law, however, doesn’t happen until today’s assigned text, when Jesus heals a paralytic on the Sabbath.

The difference between the Law and Jesus gets displayed at the pool by the Sheep Gate. Those who were able scuffled to put themselves in the water. They not only exhibited a sort of trust in their own strength, but a great selfishness is demonstrated by them as well, for no one came to the aid of (or loved) the man who could not help himself. When it comes to the benefit of one’s neighbor, Christ—being the Good Shepherd and the only completer of the law of love—reveals how the Law gets trumped by Him who is love, even on the Sabbath.

Love still triumphs today! We have received forgiveness of sins through the means of grace which He has given in His Divine Service. Christ Jesus sends out the believing, baptized children of God to walk with faith toward God and a fervent love toward neighbor—all because Christ helped us who were hopeless to ever help ourselves.

Prayer: O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jew and Gentile both take part in the struggle against God, and share the guilt and condemnation of rejecting God’s Christ. Pilate, representative of the Gentile world and holder of a power given him from above, was chosen to be custodian of God’s wrath upon the wrongdoer. But he did not use that power to protect the Man whose innocence he repeatedly attested. The divinely appointed guardian of truth and justice shrugged off his responsibility with a skeptical, “What is truth?,” and consented to the unjustified crucifixion of the incarnate grace and truth of God. He aligned himself with the Jewish religious authorities and their hypocrisy in rejecting their duty to proclaim and uphold God’s truth before the world. Judas, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, and Pilate, as well as others in the crowd commit this same sin of rejecting God’s Words and will.

Sin is sin. No amount of symbolic hand washing or rationalizing can wash away its stain—only repentance and faith by grace can receive absolution and deliverance from its judgment. The world united in a sinful attempt to overcome the Light, and Pilate spoke far truer than he knew when he presented the scourged and thorn-crowned King of the Jews, robed in purple, with the words, “Behold the man.” He is indeed the man. Not the Jew merely, but the Man on whom the sin of mankind is heaped, in whom the hope of the world lies.

Prayer: O God, the protector of all who trust in You, without whom nothing is strong and nothing is holy, multiply Your mercy on us that, with You as our ruler and guide, we may be found to be faithful to Your Word and will. Amen.

The opening verse of today's text refers to the Jews' threat toward Pilate with the taunt that if he does not condemn Jesus he is no friend or supporter of Roman authority. Pilate tests their resolve to reject God and His chosen Christ with the proclamation, "Behold your King!" With this challenge Pilate speaks more truly than he, by his mocking words, intends. The Jewish leaders and the crowd show their resolve to resist God and His Word with, "We have no king but Caesar."

The powerfully ironic truth expressed in this exchange is that they have rejected the true heavenly God of their fathers in favor of the earthly idol of the pagan world around them. This is the sad rebellious confession that continues among so many today. Worshiping the proverbial golden calf continues, as will the judgment of God upon such idolatry.

The people rejected any suggestion that they were rebels against Rome, but freely expressed their true spiritual condition. However, Pilate's "What I have written I have written" presented God's governance of history; Jesus was rightly identified as the King. The stubbornness of the Roman governor, weary of altercations with the people, ensured the proclamation of the truth. Nathanael's confession at the beginning of Jesus' ministry finds a strange echo at its close: "You are the King of Israel!"

Prayer: Lord Jesus, multiply Your mercy on us that, with You as our Lord and Redeemer, we may be founded on the solid Rock, and thus pass through things temporal in such a way that we lose not the things eternal. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Misericordias Domini Sunday

Article XIV.

Of Ecclesiastical Order, [the Lutherans] teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.

Article XV.

Of Rites and Usages in the Church, they teach, that those ought to be observed which may be observed without sin, and which are profitable unto tranquility and good order in the Church, as particular holydays, festivals, and the like.

Nevertheless, concerning such things, let men be admonished that consciences are not to be burdened, as though such observance was necessary to salvation. They are admonished also that human traditions instituted to propitiate God, to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are opposed to the Gospel and the doctrine of faith. Wherefore vows and traditions concerning meats and days, etc., instituted to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.—The Augsburg Confession

Article IV. Of the Papacy.

That the Pope is not, according to divine law or according to the Word of God, the head of all Christendom (for this name belongs to Jesus Christ solely and alone), but is only the bishop and pastor of the Church at Rome, and of those who voluntarily or through a human creature (that is a political magistrate) attach themselves to him, not to be under him as a lord, but with him as brethren and associates, as Christians; as the ancient councils and the age of St. Cyprian show.

But today none of the bishops venture to address the Pope as brother; but they must call him most gracious lord, even though they be kings or emperors. Such arrogance we neither will, can, nor ought with a good conscience to approve. Let him, however, who will do it, do so without us.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part II, §1–2

Many of the Samaritans that came out to hear Jesus believed in Him because He told the woman all that she ever did. With this Jesus demonstrates His divine omniscience, much in the same way He had done for Nathaniel in chapter one. For both Nathaniel and the Samaritan woman, the miracle brought them to the beginning of faith that Jesus was the Messiah.

Jesus wanted to move the crowd beyond a faith that believes because of what someone else says to a faith that believes because of what He says. He taught this crowd of Samaritans about original sin and rebirth through water and the Spirit as He had taught Nicodemus in chapter three. After staying with them for two days, “many more believed because of His own word.”

Jesus still wants people’s faith to be in the Word He gives through the Holy Scriptures, which are His very words written by the Apostles and Evangelists. He doesn’t want us to believe in Him just because of what He’s done for other people. He wants us to believe because of what He has done for us. He has taken on our human flesh and weakness, lived a perfectly righteous life, died as our substitute under God’s wrath, and was raised to life to justify all who believe in Him. We believe because He has done these for us and proclaims them to us in His Word.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s Resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus completed what He came to do, as evidenced by His final loud cry of “It is finished!” As further proof of God’s providential control over all things, the Christ “gave up His spirit,” indicating an act of will on His part, as opposed to being overtaken by death.

The Passover meal had been on Thursday evening, the day of Preparation was Friday, and the approaching Sabbath was the special high holy Sabbath of Passover. The Jews did not want bodies hanging on crosses this day, so they asked to have the legs broken to hasten death. Blood and water flowed from Jesus’ pierced side as solemn testimony that Jesus was already dead when the spear pierced the pericardium (the sac that surrounds the heart) and the heart itself. In this blood and water some see symbolism pointing to the Lord’s Supper and Baptism. John obviously considered the incident important, and comments that it was well attested.

John was divinely inspired to record God’s ruling over these events as the fulfillment of Scripture. It was extraordinary that Jesus was the only one of the three whose legs were not broken and that He suffered an unusual spear thrust that did not break a bone. John tells us that all of this takes place that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Prayer: Almighty God, grant that our numerous sins may be covered through Your holy Means of Grace; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The closeness of the tomb to the place of crucifixion was important because the fast approaching sunset brought with it the beginning of the Sabbath day. The body had to be interred before sunset, when the Sabbath would start and no work could be done.

Verse 38 references all that had taken place during Friday, which closed with the crowds in Jerusalem fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah: “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn” (12:10). Also, “On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness” (13:1). Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and even the disciples cowering in the upper room did not seem to fully understand this second prophecy as it was graciously fulfilled with the sacrificing of the Lamb of God for the sin of the world.

By God’s grace we look to the sunrise of Sunday with great hope and joy, for we already know the tomb cannot restrain the Christ of God, for He is the Holy One of God who shall not see decay in the grave, nor languish in Sheol. This reality makes the day indeed a Holy Saturday, for the sunrise of our Lord and Redeemer fast approaches.

Prayer: O God, only by Your grace shall we have faith and thus persevere unto glory through Christ, our Savior. Amen.

In John 4:6 we learn that Jesus was fatigued from His journey, arriving at noon as the sun was at full strength. While the disciples purchase food, Jesus ministered to the Samaritan woman with the Law and Gospel. The disciples return to find a crowd of Samaritans around Jesus, who is vigorously teaching them the Gospel. Although He had been fatigued, doing His Father’s work sustained Him and revitalized His strength.

The apostles join Jesus in His labors on the night of His resurrection when He breathes on them, giving them the Holy Spirit and the Office of forgiving and retaining sins. They will go into the field of the world after Pentecost and reap a bountiful harvest that they did not sow themselves. This ministry is labor that wearies body and soul, but it can also be refreshing as they gather fruit for eternal life, namely, more and more people for God’s kingdom.

Christ still sends workers into the harvest--His called and ordained pastors--to sow the seed of the Word, to water it, and to harvest it. They do this through preaching the Word and administering Christ’s sacraments. Like all labor, the ministry will bring fatigue. Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest that He would refresh your pastor’s spirit through the Gospel, so that he may always sow the Word with joy, and ask Christ to bless your pastor’s sowing with a bountiful harvest in you.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s Resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus offers the Samaritan woman living water. The living water He gives is the Gospel of His Father's love for mankind. He gives His own merits and the Holy Spirit who pours out these blessings into the life of believers. This water will refresh the conscience dried out by guilt and thirsty for peace. But the woman does not understand, nor does she seek to understand. Jesus shows her how spiritually parched she really is by telling her to call her husband. When she admits she has no husband Jesus reveals her sins. She's had five husbands and now she's living with a man outside of marriage, willfully sinning. Jesus awakens in her a spiritual thirst for the living water he freely offers.

This is how Christ still works upon sinners. He offers the living water of God's love, Christ's merit, and the Holy Spirit, but people do not understand their need for these things. The world and the sinful flesh teach people to deal with their sins by ignoring them or by rationalizing them. Like the Samaritan woman, countless people willfully sin by cohabiting outside of marriage, only to rationalize their sin by calling it "trial marriage" (which isn't true, but sounds nice). Whatever our sins, the Law confronts us with them so that we see our need for living water, which He gives freely to all who repent of their sins and flee to Him for mercy.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's Resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Easter Sunday

Chapter IX.

Of the Descent of Christ to Hell.

There has also been a controversy among some theologians, who have subscribed to the Augsburg Confession concerning the following article: When, and in what manner, the Lord Christ, according to our simple Christian faith, descended to hell, whether this was done before or after His death? Also, whether it occurred according to the soul alone, or according to the divinity alone, or in body and soul, spiritually and bodily? Also, whether this article belongs to the passion or to the glorious victory and triumph of Christ?

But since this article ... cannot be comprehended by the senses or by the reason, but must be grasped alone by faith, it is our unanimous advice that there should be no disputation concerning it, but that it should be believed and taught only in the simplest manner; according as Dr. Luther of blessed memory, in his sermon at Torgau in the year 1533, has, in a very Christian manner, explained this article, separated from it all useless, unnecessary questions, and admonished all godly Christians to Christian simplicity of faith.

For it is sufficient that we know that Christ descended to hell, destroyed hell for all believers, and delivered them from the power of death and of the devil, from eternal condemnation [and even] from the jaws of hell. But how this occurred, we should reserve until the other world, where not only this point, but also still others, will be revealed which we here simply believe and cannot comprehend with our blind reason.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

Consider the disciples who walked with Jesus, but didn't recognize Him, in spite of how familiar He seemed (v. 32). Sadness restrained them from seeing Him because, in their sight, He simply couldn't have been there! Even as He explained how things must be, expounding on Moses and the prophets concerning Himself, they wallowed. Only when He did what no one outside of that upper room on Thursday evening yet knew about were their eyes opened; and then He vanished from their sight!

According to the Greek language, 'mystery' is defined as that which we cannot know or understand unless it is revealed to us. In 1 Corinthians 4:1 the Holy Spirit says through St. Paul that your pastor's role is as the steward of the Mysteries of God; then He says that a steward must be found faithful. The pastors of our diocese have struggled with how best to serve you with these gifts of God when they have to preach, teach, and administer the Sacraments, but also to try to preserve parishioners from being exposed to a virus that has the ability to end earthly lives (and in some places, preserving the parish from violations of state law).

The Gospel in Word and Sacrament keeps us from being swayed onto a path that is not heavenward. At times when sight is especially terrifying, in plague or famine or war or disaster, what our Lord has instituted for our salvation is what calms our hearts by fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Completer of our faith.

Prayer: Lord, grant us Your Spirit to trust in You with all our heart and lean not on our understanding. Let us not be wise in our own eyes, but acknowledge You in all our ways; through Jesus Christ. Amen. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

After teaching Nicodemus how sinners are regenerated through water and the Spirit, Jesus and his disciples travel throughout the land of Judea. "He remained with them and baptized." Can you imagine being baptized by Christ Himself? There would be no doubt then that you were God's child and that your sins were truly forgiven. There would be no reason to dispute whether or not your baptism was valid if it had come from the hand of Christ Himself.

But John 4:1-2 clarifies this comment. "Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples)." The reason Jesus did not baptize was that He didn't want anyone making a distinction between His baptism and the baptism administered through His disciples. He didn't want anyone relying on the person administering the baptism rather than the baptism itself.

The fact that Jesus didn't baptize, but baptized through His disciples, teaches us that when His called servants baptize, it is Christ who is doing the baptizing. His called servants are His humble instruments who administer the water and Word by which the Holy Spirit makes us reborn, forgives all our sins, and brings us into God's covenant of grace. It matters not who baptized us, for all true baptisms are done by Christ through His called servants. Because Christ is the one who baptizes us, we should be certain each day of the gifts and blessings it gives.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's Resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Jews ask for a sign by which they can know that Jesus has the authority to cleanse the temple. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” They think Jesus speaks of the Jerusalem temple. Even at the crucifixion they still fail to understand, and say, “You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself!” (Matthew 27:40). Ironically, they fulfill the sign Jesus gave. They destroy the temple of His body, and He will raise it up in three days. Jesus’ death and resurrection is the sign that shows His authority to cleanse the temple.

Jesus’ death and resurrection is also the sign that demonstrates His authority to cleanse our hearts. Jesus has authority to forgive sins because He made satisfaction for all sins on the cross. He cleanses our hearts and makes us temples of the Holy Spirit. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19). The Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts by faith so that we fight temptation, practice chastity toward ourselves, and love toward our neighbors. Being temples of the Holy Spirit we live with the promise that Christ will raise us from the dead on the Last Day, even as He is risen from the dead unto eternity.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s Resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The events of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion primed Pilate to hear and believe the truth of the resurrection, so the Jewish leaders couldn’t risk any confirmation getting back to him. They bribed the soldiers not to recount their becoming like dead men at the appearance of the angel. Instead of miraculous intervention, they would confess to dereliction of duty, and the leaders would fix things with the governor so they wouldn’t lose their jobs over such a ridiculous lapse as to be overpowered or outwitted by Jesus’ ragtag bunch of disciples.

Of course the soldiers took the money and told the lie: telling the truth not only would cost them this profit, but would validate an unacceptable religion. As with the scribes, Pharisees, chief priests, and elders of the people, their lives would change in a way for which they were unprepared. Otherwise, they would have been watching the tomb hoping for Jesus to exit and would have received a greeting from the angel similar to that which the women received: “Do not be afraid.”

That wonderful greeting! And then: “He is risen, as He said.” Believe His Word, as He has proven it all to be true! The women believed it enough that they ran to tell the disciples, though they marvel and remain in fear. On the way, Jesus Himself greeted them and established an order illustrated again with the disciples on the way to Emmaus, and throughout these forty days: the Word is proclaimed, and then Jesus appears to prove it again, that the disciples might be prepared for when He would no longer appear, trusting His Word to abide forever.

Hymn: Blesséd are they that have not seen and yet whose faith hath constant been, In life eternal they shall reign: Alleluia! Amen. (TLH #208:8)

True and accurate eyewitness testimony often differs a little from witness to witness. Part of this is our lack of perfect recall. Part, though—and this is true also for those whose testimony is accredited by the Holy Ghost as perfectly accurate—is simply that different aspects of what has been seen grab the attention of each witness differently. The testimony of the writers of the Gospels may differ from one another a little bit, but it never truly contradicts. Rather, each report supplements the others, so that all the reports together make a unified whole.

In today's reading John emphasizes Mary Magdalene to the exclusion of the other women. It makes sense when we consider her history (Luke 8:2) and the devotion to Jesus that has her run ahead of the others (like John did) and blurt out a testimony (like Peter did) that isn't completely thought out at first. Peter and John run to the tomb to see what it means. John the Beloved outruns Peter, but doesn't go in until Peter has rushed past him. The love is evident, as is the desire to see and experience what was proving too much for their faith. Also evident is the reverent awe in which they still held Jesus: Mary still calls Him "the Lord"; John still hesitates to intrude.

As with the angel's testimony, the scene declares the reality to be what Jesus had promised. This was no work of grave robbers, whether friends or foes. There is no evidence of haste whatsoever, but the burial cloths lie there, the face cloth even lying separate and folded—Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!

Hymn: He who slumbered in the grave is exalted now to save; Now through Christendom it rings that the Lamb is King of Kings. Hallelujah! Amen. (TLH #190:5)

On the night Jesus was betrayed Peter publicly denied his Lord three times, committing several sins. He demonstrated distrust in Christ and faintheartedness. He lied. He cursed himself as he denied the Lord repeatedly. He scandalized others who believed, yet saw Christ's chief disciple deny him. After the rooster crowed he went out and wept bitterly in repentance, remembering the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:33, "Whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."

In Luke 7:47 Jesus said of the repentant woman, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." The sinful woman loved Christ fervently because He forgave her many sins. So it is with Peter. He loves Christ "more than these" other disciples because Christ had forgiven his many and grievous sins. Jesus restored Peter and cast his sins into the depths of the sea of God's mercy.

The more we consider our sins and rebellion against God, the more we love Christ our Savior. Let us daily consider our sins of thought, word, and deed, and confess them to Christ freely, so that He may freely forgive us. May we see the magnitude of our sins and what they deserve, then steadfastly fix our eyes on this, that "with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption" (Psalm 130:7).

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's Resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Quasimodogeniti Sunday

THURSDAY, APRIL 16: LUKE 24:1-12

OCTAVE OF EASTER

Article V.

That we may obtain this faith, the Office of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justified those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others, who think that the Holy Ghost cometh to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

Article XXV.

Confession in our churches is not abolished; for it is not usual to give the Body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are most carefully taught concerning the faith and assurance of absolution, about which, before this time, there was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by His command. The power of the Keys is commended, and we show what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences; that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from Heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.

Aforetime, satisfactions were immoderately extolled; of faith and the merit of Christ, and the righteousness of faith, no mention was made; wherefore, on this point, our churches are by no means to be blamed. For this even our adversaries must needs concede to us, that the doctrine concerning repentance has been most diligently treated and laid open by our teachers.

But of Confession, they teach, that an enumeration of sins is not necessary, and that consciences be not burdened with anxiety to enumerate all sins, for it is impossible to recount all sins, as the Psalm testifies [19:13]: "Who can understand his errors?" Also Jeremiah [17:9]: "The heart is deceitful, who can know it?" But if no sins were forgiven, except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see, nor can remember.

—The Augsburg Confession

St. Luke gets all of the historical details, especially the embarrassing ones. As Moses reported Abraham's repeated lying to Pharaoh, Luke demonstrates his veracity by reporting the slowness to believe of the women and the Eleven.

The women went to embalm Jesus. Yet, had He not said that He would arise? The tomb was open and they were perplexed; angels appeared, and they bowed their frightened faces. Yet the Risen One is greater than these; why did they not fear and hear Him? "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ... Remember how He spoke to you?"

The visible Church often seems like these ladies: they love Jesus, but they forget why. His Words must be kept if one is to be His disciple indeed (John 8:31). Jesus had told Martha that "the better part" is hearing Him (Luke 10:42). Service must come from and be subject to listening, to doctrine, to believing.

The women's report —the angel's words!—seemed like idle tales to the Eleven, like nonsense. Their Office is to speak Christ's Word so that hearers actually hear Christ through them (Luke 10:16). Yet, the chief power of Christ's Office is His Word, and they must accept being reminded of it. They must hold it purely, so they both believe it themselves (1 Corinthians 9:27) and proclaim it "in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). Finally grasping this, Peter runs to the tomb and marvels. What they said was true; what He said was true!

Prayer: Because You live, O Lord, we, too, shall live; grant that we seek Your life ever in Your gracious Word, wherever you proclaim it through Your servants, absolving us and feeding us with Your own Body and Blood. Amen.

Today's verses follow the Easter Monday Gospel, continuing the theme of Jesus opening the Scriptures to His disciples. "These are the words which I spoke to you," Jesus says, and demonstrates that what was done to Him was "necessary." Without His suffering and death, there could be no repentance. Without remission of sins, repentance could never be complete: no matter how sincerely we might feel convicted and be sorry for our sins, we would have to suffer for all eternity, as we could never make up for our rebellion against God.

The disciples marveled in joy, but they were not yet really believing that He had risen bodily: it was, to them, impossible. Therefore, Jesus made it clearer than even touching Him could make it, by taking some food and eating it. The food was clearly gone, so this must be neither an apparition nor the deception of their senses. What is impossible is exactly what was necessary for the salvation of mankind, so why should any part of Jesus' work seem 'normal'? Even His most normal activities had a hidden, impossible (for us) reality: He did it all without sin. His cry from the cross of "Why have You forsaken Me?" shows that the impossible is what is normal in saving mankind. The Innocent was forsaken for the sake of the guilty, God died for the ungodly.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, as You work all things together for our good, even the actions by which the wicked disown You redounding to Your glory, grant that we never despair or misbelieve, but trust always Your will for us in Christ. Amen.

The disciples believed neither Mary Magdalene, nor the disciples who ran back to them from Emmaus, though the reports were exactly what Jesus had prophesied! Now, Jesus appears to them and rebukes them for their hardness of heart. If they didn't believe this joyous news, how would they trust in Him through the adversity that would come upon them, when putting them out of the synagogues and killing them would be thought of as doing service to God?

We derive great benefit from the disciples' slowness to believe. First, it shows how thoroughly the resurrection was confirmed to them that they would later believe so strongly, even unto their own death for clinging to it. Second, we see that we also can be forgiven for sometimes lacking in faith. We have heard the Word of God given through these former doubters and have believed it. Yet, our flesh also has trouble believing the Word of God. We live in the reality of being a new creation in Christ, and we must live out what Baptism signifies: "that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die, with all sins and evil desires, so that a New Man, in turn, should daily emerge and arise, to live forever before God in all righteousness and purity."

Prayer: We thank You, O Triune God, that you have saved us not by any works of righteousness we have done, but by Your mercy, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which is not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward You, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.