

Clergy of the ELDoNA, affiliated congregations and missions, and sister churches

Rt. Rev. James Heiser

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX
(Vacancy) Faith L. C., Beaverton, OR

Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Tony, WI; Alpha & Omega Lutheran Mission, Winter, WI; Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI; Peace Lutheran Church, Ironwood, MI

Rev. Ernest Bernet

Discipleship L. C., Mineral Wells, TX

Rev. David Carver

St. Paul L. C., Taylorsville, NC

Rev. Jerald Dulas

Sts. Peter & Paul L. C., Simpsonville, SC; All Saints Lutheran Mission, Myrtle Beach, SC; St. Michael & All Angels Lutheran Mission, Martinez, GA

Rev. Douglas Handrich

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Michael Henson

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL; Port Charlotte Lutheran Mission, Port Charlotte, FL; Memphis Lutheran Mission, Lakeland, TN

Rev. Daniel Mensing

Good Shepherd L. C., Tucson, AZ

Rev. Mark Mueller

Redeemer L. C., Cambridge, MN

Rev. John Rutowicz

St. Boniface Lutheran Church, Niles, MI

Rev. Paul Rydecki

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Las Cruces, NM; Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Mission, Silver City, NM

Rev. Josiah Scheck

Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

Rev. Eric Stefanski

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR; Emmanuel Lutheran Mission, Conway, AR; Lamb of God Lutheran Mission, Rogers, AR

Rev. Joshua Sullivan

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Kerrville, TX; Faith Lutheran Mission, Leander, TX

Rev. Timothy Tolar

St. Luke Lutheran Church, Kenai, AK
Homer Lutheran Mission, Homer, AK

Rev. Brandon Warr

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX
(Vacancy) Faith L. C., Beaverton, OR

Rev. Dcn. Floyd Smithey

Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Church, Simpsonville, SC; Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Mission, Knoxville, TN

International Fellowship:

Rev. Fillmore Alvarez

St. Mary's Lutheran Church
Navotas City, Philippines

Rev. Carlos Marin

Iglesia Confesional de Colombia
Medellin, Colombia

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



JULY 5–AUGUST 1, 2020

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The Calendar

July 5	Trinity 4	<i>Ev. Luth. Hymnary</i> (1913) #98
July 12	Trinity 5	TLH 548
July 19	Trinity 6	TLH 287
July 22 (Wed.)	St. Mary Magdalene	
July 25 (Sat.)	St. James the Elder, Apostle	
July 26	Trinity 7	TLH 41
July 29 (Mon.)	St. Olaf, Martyr	

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

Summer Visitation Schedule

June 14	Faith Lutheran Church (Beaverton, OR)
June 24	Pr. Sullivan & Holy Cross L. C. (Kerrville, TX)
July 1	Pr. Mensing & Divine Savior L. C. (Tucson, AZ)
July 3	Pr. Rydecki & Emmanuel L.C. (Las Cruces, NM)
July 22	Pr. Warr & St. Patrick L.C. (ChIPLEY, FL)
July 24	Pr. Dulas & St. Peter & St. Paul L.C. (Simpsonville, SC)
July 26	Pr. Carver & St. Paul's L.C. (Taylorsville, NC) Rev. Smithey, Knoxville, TN
July 28	Pr. Stefanski & Holy Trinity L. C. (Harrison, AR)
August 12	Pr. Scheck & Christ L. C. (Richmond, MO)
August 13	Pr. Mueller & Redeemer L. C. (Cambridge, MN) Pr. Ahonen & Good Shepherd L.C. (Tony, WI)
August 14	Pr. Ahonen & Peace L. C. (Ironwood, MI)
August 15/16	Pr. Rutowicz & St. Boniface L. C. (Niles, MI)
August 16	Pr. Handrich & Holy Cross L. C. (Peoria, IL)
August 17	Pr. Henson, Dcn. Harroun & Trinity L. C. (Herrin, IL)

Seminary Commencement

All are invited for the Commencement Vespers for the 2020-2021 Academic Year of St. Ignatius Lutheran Theological Seminary. The Vespers will be at 7 P.M. on September 6 at Salem Lutheran Church. (Clergy should bring cassock, surplice, and green stole.) Classes begin on Tuesday, September 8.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 1: 1 COR. 11:1-22 7TH S. AFTER TRINITY

Does Paul command women in every time and every culture to wear head coverings? Head coverings witnessed to the order of creation. Women are under their husbands' authority, even as their husbands are under Christ's authority, who Himself was under God the Father's authority. While head coverings can most certainly confess the order of creation, Paul does not demand that Christian women in every place and time do this. Paul encouraged this custom because it kept order in Corinth.

Would head coverings confess the order of creation today, especially as our world has upended anything resembling hierarchy? Absolutely. But to say they are divinely commanded would take a good confession in one area (order of creation) and make it a bad confession in another (Christian freedom). Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession, paragraphs 53-54 reminds us: "What, then, are we to think of the Sunday and like rites in the house of God? To this we answer that it is lawful for bishops or pastors to make ordinances that things be done orderly in the Church, not that thereby we should merit grace or make satisfaction for sins, or that consciences be bound to judge them necessary services, and to think that it is a sin to break them without offense to others. So Paul ordains, 1 Cor. 11:5, that women should cover their heads in the congregation, 1 Cor. 14:30, that interpreters be heard in order in the church, etc."

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in Heaven and Earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and give to us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Christians have communion with the very Body and Blood of Christ at the Lord's Table, therefore they are not to have communion with a demon at a pagan table. Such public idolatry is sin and sends, at best, an inconsistent confession. Christians can buy meat at the marketplace and eat as guests in others' homes without harm to consciences. However, if the host discloses that the main course was sacrificed to an idol, the Christian isn't to eat, for the sake of the host's conscience, not just his own. Christian freedom is tempered by love for others so that confused consciences are not vexed.

The rubric for Christian freedom is simply: "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being." The reason this is the standard for Christian living is because this is how Christ manifested Himself to us. The bruised reed He did not break. The smoldering wick He did not snuff out. He came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom. Christ did not seek His own good. After all, what could He have gained from becoming man? Rather, He came to serve us by atoning for our sins and earning a perfect righteousness for all who believe in Him. Christ still serves us by giving us what is profitable for us: His absolution, and fellowship with His very Body and Blood for forgiveness and strengthening.

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in Heaven and Earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and give to us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

Visitations are now taking place around the diocese, and I am having the opportunity to spend time with your pastors (and with many of you) discussing the life of the Church in these tumultuous times. The riots, economic troubles, and ongoing affliction of the pandemic are global in scope, and local in their impact. The fragility of a globalist economic system and irreality of post-modern political thought fuel the crises. The fact that many of the heretical churches have been quick to side with the rioters assaulting the foundations of civilization is simply further proof that when the salt has lost its saltiness, it is utterly worthless and must simply be thrown out; any Christians who remain in such assemblies must simply flee, lest they be consumed.

It is not our calling to 'take back' our country; it is our vocation to be a faithful witness to the Gospel in our families and immediate communities. The troubles of the present are a powerful reminder that our hope is not in the things of this fallen world; we await the end of this age, and the return of the Christ in glory. Our hope and consolation cannot be taken away from us by any plague, depression, or frenzied rabble. Our hope is in Christ our King, and His Kingdom endures forever.

Yours in Christ, Bishop Heiser



Bishop Heiser and Pastor Sullivan during the Visitation of Holy Cross Lutheran Church (Kerrville, Texas) on June 24.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Fourth Sunday after Trinity

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

Thou shalt not bear false witness.

Thus you see, in short, it is forbidden to speak any evil of our neighbor, and yet the civil government, preachers, father and mother are excepted, that this commandment may be so understood that evil be not unreproved. Just therefore as, according to the Fifth Commandment, no one is to be injured in body, and yet the executioner is excepted, who, by virtue of his office, does his neighbor no good, but only evil and harm, and nevertheless does not sin against God's commandment, because God has, on His own account instituted that office; for He has reserved punishment for His own good pleasure, as He has threatened in the First Commandment,—just so also, although no one has a right in his own person to judge and condemn another, yet if they to whose office it belongs refuse to do it, they sin as well as he who should do so without such office. For here necessity requires one to speak of the evil, to make accusation, to investigate and testify; and it is not different from the case of a physician who is sometimes compelled to handle and examine a patient in parts otherwise not to be examined. Just so governments, father and mother, brothers and sisters, and other good friends, are under obligation to each other to reprove evil wherever it is needful and profitable.

—The Large Catechism, §274–275

THURSDAY, JULY 30: 1 COR. 9:1-23

7TH S. AFTER TRINITY

The Office of the Ministry is work, no matter the size of the parish. It takes just as much effort to prepare sermons and Bible studies for ten people as for a hundred. Nor let anyone tell you that it's sinful for preachers to accept a paycheck for His ministry. St. Paul says, "Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel." Paul shows how the Levitical priests were provided for by eating of the holy things offered to God. Even the command not to muzzle the ox while he treads grain teaches us to provide for our pastors because they sow spiritual things among us.

Yet, St. Paul does not exercise this right. His reward is preaching the Gospel. Paul chose not to exercise this right out of love and concern for the Corinthians. So today, pastors may choose not to exercise this right and take secondary employment outside the parish because they love the flock and want to fulfill their calling of preaching the Gospel to them. Christians will show their love and appreciation by providing for the pastor what they are able, even if that is only a widow's mite. Love directs both pastor and parishioner to provide for the other, the pastor sows spiritual things, and the parishioner responds with material things as he is able. Thus the relationship between pastor and people is one of reciprocal love.

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in Heaven and Earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and give to us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Can Christians eat meat sacrificed to idols? Does this include Christians in the idolatry? Paul says, “an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.” Even if other beings can be called “gods” under certain circumstances, such as in Psalm 82:6, and even if the heathen made their ancestors “gods,” there is only one God, the Father and His eternal Son Jesus Christ. Paul sees that the issue isn’t about eating this meat, but about what such eating was doing to the conscience of Christians whose faith was weak. These Christians would see the knowledgeable Christians eating meat previously sacrificed to idols and be scandalized, imagining that they were partaking in idolatry.

Christian freedom is not always easy to understand and practice. Those who have understanding must be careful of those who are weak in understanding. If meat scandalized a brother, Paul would never eat it again. So we are to be careful not to use our freedom to scandalize others. However, neither are we to allow the weaker brother to remain in his weak state. Thus Paul can write that those with knowledge should temper their knowledge with love, while those who are weak should consider that there is, in fact, only one God. Let us love the brethren so we neither scandalize them in matters of the faith, nor allow them to remain in their weakness.

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in Heaven and Earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and give to us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

This situation could have been avoided easily if the centurion had listened to St. Paul in the first place. It is easy to see why the men on the ship were losing hope of survival. They had not eaten for many days and their ship was being beaten by a tempest. Paul, however, rescues them from their despair. He begins by reminding them of what he said before. This is not an “I told you so” proclamation by Paul. He is using his previous words, which they did not listen to, to show them that the words that he is about to speak should be heeded. An angel of the Lord has told Paul that none shall perish.

We see that some still doubted, for they tried to escape in a skiff, but the centurion who had come to believe the words of Paul cut the skiff away. Those men would have perished if they had left the ship. All of this is because of the words of Paul. His words are truth, because they are the words of the Christ. Paul encouraged the men to eat bread after not eating many days. But it is not bread alone by which man lives. It is by the bread of the Word of God. It is the truth of what our Lord Jesus has done for us. The Lord Jesus rescues us from the tempest of our sins, and feeds us with the bread of His flesh, so that all those who hear His Word and believe on Him do not perish.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Sometimes in the Early Church the Word of God was accompanied with miraculous signs. In the case of St. Paul, he was bitten by a poisonous viper and did not die. The people of the island of Malta reasoned in themselves that this was an act of vengeance from the gods. Paul also healed the father of Publius, as well as all those who came to him who were sick and had witnessed the healing. These signs served as a confirmation that what Paul preached was the truth.

The Word of God converts the hearts of those who hear it and do not reject it. The Gentiles on the island of Malta believed the Word preached by Paul. In Rome, Paul met the Jews, his own countrymen. We are told by St. Luke, the writer of Acts, that among the Jew there was great dispute. Some believed after Paul explained to them from morning until evening that the Lord Jesus was the Christ. Even after spending a whole day showing them this truth from the Law and the Prophets, others did not believe. The Gospel was accompanied by what was taught in the Law and Prophets.

We also have the Law and the Prophets confirming the truth of the preaching of what our Lord Jesus has done for us. Many of the Jews would reject the Lord Jesus as the Messiah. But the Gentiles would gladly hear that the Lord Jesus was the Christ, the Savior of the world.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

St. Paul offers valuable counsel for the married, the unmarried, and widows. His counsel is “as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk.” God calls each person to their vocation as husband, wife, single, or widowed. God calls to the office of parent, grandparent, and citizen; employed or retired. He calls some to the preaching office, and all to be hearers of His Word. Whatever holy callings God has distributed, so let us walk. How do we do this? We love and serve our neighbors in our vocations, seeking not only our own welfare, but the welfare of those around us.

Paul’s counsel continues in verses 29-31 and culminates with these words, “those who use this world as not misusing it.” We misuse this world when we use the things of this world for our selfish pleasure. We misuse God’s good gifts when we put them in God’s place so that we expect every good thing from them. It is God’s will that we find enjoyment in His gifts, in our vocations, and in our labors. But it is sinful idolatry to use God’s gifts and our vocations for our personal pleasure. This is hurtful to us and those whom we are supposed to be serving in love. May God grant that we walk as He has distributed to us, to His glory and the service of our neighbor.

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in Heaven and Earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and give to us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The devil, world, and our flesh want us to believe that our bodies are our own so that we use them for our own purpose and pleasure. St. Paul teaches otherwise. “Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” The body doesn’t exist for personal pleasure and gratification. The body is for the Lord and His service. Sexual immorality of any kind is especially dangerous because “he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.” This sin is insidious because it turns the sinner more and more upon himself so that he worships his desires and withdraws from loving and serving others.

The body is for the Lord, not only because He made our bodies, but because He has made them temples of the Holy Spirit by faith. The Holy Spirit dwells in all who believe to sustain their faith and to bear His fruit in them, especially the fruits of love toward others and chastity towards oneself. The Holy Spirit dwells in believers to guide them into good works and defend them from temptation. With this in mind, flee sexual immorality as something dreadfully hurtful, and pursue chastity in thought, word, and deed as something profitable. Use your body to serve others in selfless love, and thereby glorify God with your body and spirit, since you were bought with the price of Christ’s precious blood.

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in Heaven and Earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and give to us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

St. Paul says at the end of today’s reading that he is “ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.” Tomorrow he will complete that thought with the words, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.” In his introduction to his epistle to the Church at Rome St. Paul establishes why he desires to preach the Gospel to the Romans.

He has been called as an apostle. It is the call of the apostle, as St. Paul writes, to proclaim the Gospel. This Gospel reaches back into the Old Testament. As he writes, the Christ was promised before through the Prophets. In other words, this is not a new-fangled religion, as some were accusing Christianity to be at that time. It is an ancient religion. It is the religion of the Holy Scriptures as proclaimed through the Prophets. This religion has always preached the coming of the Christ, the Messiah.

This Messiah is revealed in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the man who was born according to the flesh of the seed of King David. In stating this St. Paul confirms the manhood of our Lord. But our Lord Jesus is also true God, as is testified by His resurrection from the dead. He is “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness.” The Holy Ghost declares our Lord Jesus the man to be true God. It is this Lord Jesus that St. Paul desires to preach at Rome; of whom he is not ashamed.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

This verse is often separated out from the previous verse. But as was stated yesterday, this is the reason for St. Paul’s desire and readiness to preach the Gospel to the people of Rome. His desire to preach the Gospel is so that those who hear might believe what he preaches. The Gospel is “the power of God to salvation.” “For everyone who believes” has salvation. Those who are justified have, and live by, faith. There is no salvation, no justification, apart from faith.

St. Paul explains this further in the rest of the chapter. The unrighteousness of man is revealed in their thoughts, words, and deeds. This unrighteousness in man has led to the rejection of the Lord God. They have denied the truth that is revealed both inherently in nature, and more clearly revealed through the Word of God. The preaching of the Holy Scriptures about the Christ reveals the truth. It is this truth that St. Paul desires to bring to the people in Rome so that they might hear, believe, and receive justification and salvation.

This is what preachers continue to do today: they unmask the lies of the world—the sins that people cling to—so that people no longer cling to their works, but cling to the perfect works of the Lord Jesus and not be ashamed to find salvation in Him alone.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XXVI.

It has been the general persuasion, not of the people alone, but also of such as teach in the churches, that making Distinction of Meats, and like traditions of men, are works profitable to merit grace, and able to make satisfactions for sins. And that the world so thought, appears from this, that new ceremonies, new orders, new holydays, and new fastings were daily instituted, and the teachers in the churches did exact these works as a service necessary to merit grace, and did greatly terrify men’s consciences, if they should omit any of these things. From this persuasion concerning traditions, much detriment has resulted in the Church.

First, the doctrine of grace and of the righteousness of faith has been obscured by it, which is the chief part of the Gospel, and ought to stand out, as the most prominent in the Church, that the merit of Christ may be well known, and that faith, which believes that sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake may be exalted far above works. Wherefore Paul also lays the greatest stress on this article, putting aside the law and human traditions, in order to show that the righteousness of the Christian is another than such works, to wit, the faith which believes that sins are freely forgiven for Christ’s sake. But this doctrine of Paul has been almost wholly smothered by traditions, which have produced an opinion that, by making distinctions in meats and like services, we must merit grace and righteousness. In treating of repentance, there was no mention made of faith; all that was done was to set forth those works of satisfaction, and in these all repentance seemed to consist.

Secondly, these traditions have obscured the commandments of God; because traditions were placed far above the commandment of God. Christianity was thought to consist wholly in the observance of certain holydays, fasts and vestures. These observances had won for themselves the exalted title of being the spiritual life and the perfect life. Meanwhile the commandments of God, according to each one’s calling, were without honor, namely, that the father brought up his family, that the mother bore children, that the Prince governed the Commonwealth,—these were accounted works that were worldly and imperfect, and far below those glittering observances. And this error greatly tormented devout consciences, which grieved that they were bound by an imperfect state of life, as in marriage, in the office of magistrate, or in other civil ministrations; on the other hand, they admired the monks and such like, and falsely imagined that the observances of such men were more acceptable to God. ...

Wherefore our teachers must not be looked upon as having taken up this matter rashly, or from hatred of the bishops, as some falsely suspect. There was great need to warn the churches of these errors, which had arisen from misunderstanding the traditions.

—The Augsburg Confession, §1–11, 18–19

Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul brings correction and rebuke. We have seen him lay the groundwork for this by stressing that the received knowledge of Christ and Him crucified is the wisdom that saves. Today, he makes it clear how that understanding shapes everything in the Church. In chapter 3 he minimized his own importance and that of Apollos. He showed that the glory for their faith goes neither to the one who planted, nor the one who watered, but to God who gives the increase, whose ‘crop’ the Corinthians truly are (1 Corinthians 3:5–9). Now he says, “if we are not to be glorified, what of the others who teach you,” and how dare they disparage others (1 Corinthians 3:16–17, 4:5–7)?

In verse 7, Paul emphasizes that the Corinthians did not invent or establish the Gospel of Christ, but received it. He will do so even more boldly as he goes on, especially in chapters 11, 14, and 15, where there was great division and great need to be established and comforted by the truth. “I delivered to you what I received,” he says in 11:23 and 15:3, and then asks them in 14:36 whether they think God’s Word was dictated to God by the Corinthians! The Corinthians in their worldly status had grown to think too highly of themselves and their preferred teachers. Paul threatened as a loving father to come to them bearing the rod, that they might humble themselves and simply receive, even as he and the apostles had received.

Prayer: Grant, O Triune God, that we do not glory in statuses or lack thereof, but hear the spiritual fathers You have given us, receiving what has been received from Your holy Word, unto Your glory and our salvation. Amen.

Many of the Jews relied upon their circumcision. They had the outward sign of salvation from the Lord God, but their hearts were far from Him. They were circumcised in the flesh, but not in the heart. They continued to do the same sinful acts that they condemned the Gentiles for doing. After all, they had circumcision, which they thought would save them. They looked down upon the Gentiles for not having been circumcised, even though outwardly they did the same acts as a Gentile.

St. Paul removes this thinking from them. One is not truly circumcised unless one is circumcised in the heart. Circumcision of the flesh avails nothing if it is not accompanied with faith in the heart. The same is true of us today. Many people have been baptized, but this outward sign avails them of nothing if they have not been baptized in the heart. If they do not have faith and cling to their Holy Baptism as a saving work of the Lord God to rescue them from sin, death and the power of the devil, they resist the very blessings they claim to want.

We who have been baptized have been baptized into Christ. We have been buried with Him in the waters of Holy Baptism. We have arisen with Him from the waters of Holy Baptism, and we have put on His righteousness which now saves us. In faith we cling to this promise. Through faith—through a circumcised heart—we have been made righteous and have been gifted with forgiveness and eternal life.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

There is no one who is righteous according to his own works. If one desires salvation by the works that he does, he will be sorely disappointed come the Last Day. Our works are soiled with sin. Even our good works are useless apart from faith. We should never place our faith and trust in the good works that we do. We should never think that we are “good Christians” simply because we live a certain way that pleases the understanding of the flesh.

Salvation is found only in the works of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is His perfect obedience to the Law and will of God that saves us. It is His sacrifice for us on the tree of the holy cross that redeems us. When we trust in our good works instead of the perfect works of the Christ, we are trusting in the wrong thing. When we, however, trust in the perfect works of the Christ, we are justified, made right with God.

True faith clings to the works and merits of the Christ. We cling to what He has done for us. In His blood shed for us He reveals His righteousness. He suffered and died without any guilt in Him. He died for us, though He was innocent of the charges against Him. This death reveals the true nature of His works, that He is truly righteous and without sin. This righteousness He gives to all who believe on Him and His works. Let us therefore confess our own unrighteousness and cling to our Lord Jesus, the Christ.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

St. Paul continues speaking about God’s wisdom today, wisdom that was hidden, but now revealed. Wisdom that is apparent—logical reasoning, or philosophers’ attempts to explain the world, or even ‘common sense’—was not the content of Paul’s preaching (or Jesus’ preaching). All of these break down at some point when dealing with a God whose thoughts are above ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). He is as He is in an absolute way since His existence is not contingent on anyone else (Exodus 3:14, Job 38:3-4, Isaiah 45:20-23). He is absolutely holy, absolutely loving, three, yet one; sacrificing for those who rebelled against Him and who can add nothing to Him: these things fall outside of human wisdom.

If man’s basic instinct is for survival, then that is most wise that causes us to survive. True wisdom is that which endures and which gives us its endurance (St. Matthew 24:35, 1 Peter 1:23-25). Such wisdom is only found in one theme: “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” According to our fallen nature, such a theme seems foolish; to our flesh, denial of self and embracing a crucified Christ seems contrary to our best interest. The world, certainly, opposes doing so. Yet, what the Holy Spirit has taught through the writing of His prophets and apostles—“the things which God has prepared for those who love Him”—the Spirit’s Word is powerful for bringing hearts of stone to life as God first designed it (Romans 1:16-17, Ezekiel 36:26).

Prayer: O Holy Spirit, by Your Words through the apostles, continue to give us the mind of Christ that, as He humbled Himself unto obedience and crucifixion, with humble minds and hearts we may trust at all times that the will of God is good toward us for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Far more than creativity or eloquence, what must be valued in preachers of the Word is their saying of the same thing, having a single understanding, expressed in the same judgment. The same is true of the laity: it is not the magnitude of their good works, but their agreement with God’s Word that is to be kept primary. From such unity in the truth works truly follow. But works that come from ignoring God’s Word do not produce unity, even if they falsely appear to do so. As many have feared from the advent of radio, through TV, to the rise of internet ‘blogs’ and podcasts, and now live streaming, ‘superstar’ preachers arise—often, because they scratch people’s itching ears (2 Timothy 4:3). Only Christ is to be ‘the attraction,’ and sometimes the ‘worst preacher’ is best at keeping Him so!

As he rejoiced at the thorn in his flesh keeping him from being overly glorified (2 Corinthians 12), St. Paul is glad that he baptized hardly anyone, lest there arise some cult of the baptized-better-than-you, making the cross of no effect. All the wisdom and eloquence of the world—and all the superficial attraction of the personality, etc., of preachers—is passing away. Only the message that is foolishness and a sticking point to the world—that God the Son offered Himself to be punished for you after living a perfect life in your place—is the true wisdom and strength that endures. It is not the preaching as a separate thing, but the “foolish” message preached that saves.

Prayer: O, Holy Spirit, help us glory only in the message of Christ’s cross, valuing pastors and parishes on the right basis: faithfulness to the wisdom that saves. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

X. Of Ordination and the Call.

If the bishops were true bishops, and would devote themselves to the Church and the Gospel, they might be allowed, for the sake of love and unity, and not from necessity, to ordain and confirm us and our preachers; nevertheless, under the condition that all masks and phantoms of unchristian nature and display be laid aside. Yet because they neither are nor wish to be true bishops, but worldly lords and princes, who will neither preach, nor teach, nor baptize, nor administer the Lord’s Supper, nor perform any work or office of the Church, but persecute and condemn those who being called discharge this duty; for their sake the Church ought not to remain without ministers.

Therefore, as the ancient example of the Church and the Fathers teach us, we ourselves will and ought to ordain suitable persons to this office; and (even according to their own laws) they have not the right to forbid or prevent us. For their laws say that those ordained even by heretics should be regarded and remain as ordained, as St. Jerome writes of the Church at Alexandria, that at first was governed in common by the bishops through the priests and preachers.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article X

In today's text we hear of what makes for righteousness. The Apostle Paul presents father Abraham in glowing terms of faith in God's holy promise. Paul's narrative culminates with, "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform." And what exactly does God promise that instills such great saving faith? He promised a Redeemer who will cover your sins with His holy precious blood. He promised a Lord who will provide you with all His holy Means of Grace, which bring you to just such a faith and sustain you in the same. He promised an Almighty God who will cover your sins with His holy robe of righteousness.

Saint Paul points Christians to the Old Testament by presenting faithful Abraham as one justified through faith, apart from works; through faith, without circumcision; through faith, not by the Law. Paul is making the point that faithful father Abraham was saved by faith, just as Christians are saved by faith--faith in Jesus as the promised Christ of God.

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.

Today, Paul teaches us how to view others and how to relate to them. It is by means of honest evaluation and by loving one for the sake of another. Thus, when he commends Phoebe as the helper of many, speaks of others as beloved, as fellow workers, as being of good repute among the company of the apostles, and so on, someone might say, "So, what is that to me? How have they helped me?" Yet, God could say the same of us, except that the blood of Jesus commends us to Him. We are loved—and that directly (St. John 16:26-27)—because the beloved status of the Christ has been given to us through faith in Him (St. Luke 9:35, 20:13, Romans 9:25, Ephesians 1:6, Colossians 3:12).

On the other hand, no matter their other works, those who cause division and stumbling by teaching contrary to sound doctrine are to be avoided and taken note of so that others do not stumble. As Luther says in the Large Catechism, publicly noting the false teaching of the Pope was no violation of the Eighth Commandment (Ten Commandments, section 284), but was his duty as an occupant of the Office of the Ministry (sections 274-275).

This avoidance involves no trifling, no seeking to 'Lutheranize' their false teaching, much less to ignore it in our midst. Instead, we must end it or separate from it, lest we become guilty of bringing others to fall away from Christ, just as Paul warns Timothy about ordaining pastors (or being in fellowship with them) without sufficient examination (1 Timothy 5:21-22).

Prayer: Teach us, O Father, to view others for the sake of Your Son and of the Gospel, that none may stumble, but rejoice in Your pure Word. Amen.

St. Paul speaks of being “hindered” from coming to Rome, hindered by the need for the Gospel to be preached elsewhere, and for the results of that preaching—an offering for the Christians suffering in Jerusalem—to be delivered. He subjects his will to God’s because he treasures the will of God that turned him from persecuting Christ and His Bride to, instead, gathering those he previously thought uninvited to the eternal wedding feast (vv. 15–16, Acts 9:1–30). Now, he asks the Romans to pray that he would truly continue in doing God’s will, and that they would join him in doing it, by their prayers and offerings, until he would come to them. In this they would be “striving” with him—doing battle like gladiators to bring Christ’s victory to the world.

With this view, Paul both writes them the very pointed things he does in his epistle and looks to enjoy refreshment together with them. It is with this same understanding that the Church continues to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:11–12) today. Each one of us participates in the battle through fulfilling his own vocations each day, and then we are brought back together for the refreshment of the Gospel and Sacraments. Each day, then, we see if either component is lacking, and even if we, like St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:4, see nothing that condemns us, we trust not in the deeds Christ has accomplished in and through us, but return for His grace at every opportunity.

Prayer: Lord, grant us such a thankful desire to strive together in carrying forth Your mission that we always be returned to the means through which You bring us Your grace in Christ. Amen.

The Apostle Paul presents what is the object of a saving faith: Jesus Christ and Him crucified for sin. This reality is beautifully summed up in verse eighteen of chapter five, “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.” The “free gift” of grace is contained in Jesus and His righteousness bestowed upon the believer through the “free gift” of faith in that grace.

This is the same justification that animated Abraham’s life of faith in the promise of God. Father Abraham looked forward to the fulfillment of the promised Redeemer, and you and I look back to the promise of the Redeemer fulfilled. Both perspectives look to the same Redeemer, the same promise, the same Jesus. Saint Paul in the Epistle to the Romans is making this point time and again. The Old Testament believer and the New Testament believer are both rejoicing in the exact same promise, and lamenting the exact same sin. Adam’s sin of unbelief plunged all of his progeny into condemnation before God Almighty, but Jesus’ righteous life, culminating in His holy sacrifice and glorious resurrection, won justification for all who receive the “free gift” of grace by faith.

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

WEDNESDAY, JULY 15: ROMANS 6:12-18 5TH S. AFTER TRINITY

What does it mean to have been set free from sin, and to be a slave of righteousness? In Martin Luther's seminal book *The Bondage of the Will*, the sainted doctor presents the answer to these questions and expounds on the realities of what the Apostle Paul presents in today's text. Saint Paul tells us that spiritually we start out as wretched slaves bound to sin (inherited "original sin," and our own faithless acts of omission and commission) and ruled by the sinner's master, the devil. We do not make this choice, it has been bequeathed to us by our ancestors, and we simply stumble along in it. But then into this miserable existence comes God the Father, who in His gracious mercy sends His incarnate Son to ransom you out of your pathetic slavery to sin and the devil by creating a regenerate spirit and faith within you through His Holy Spirit and His holy Means of Grace. None of this is your doing in any way. You are completely passive, but once this happens you are bought out of slavery to sin and the devil by the grace manifested in Jesus Christ as your Redeemer Lord. Now by faith you are a new creation (regenerate spirit) with a will that is bound to righteousness as its rightful master. This regenerate spirit implanted by grace looks in faith to its Lord and Redeemer, desiring only to please its Master out of love for what has been done and given by grace.

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.

MONDAY, JULY 20: ROMANS 14:1–15:3 6TH S. AFTER TRINITY

The destruction of common sense, of decency, of neighborliness, of civil discourse, and the like has been the topic of conversations and articles for decades. This year, however, has seen such destruction rise to new heights, largely because of the protracted period in which people had the opportunity to play 'Mimic the Pundits' on social media. The attacks on anyone—not only on their actions, but on their motives, the unseeable things in their hearts—over public health policy and how each one did or did not agree with what was happening in their state often neglected the truth of today's reading. By that neglect people led one another to an abominable thing: stumbling in the faith because of Christians' lack of charity toward one another (14:13).

Verse eight is often so emphasized that what comes immediately before it is lost. There we see that in things neither commanded nor forbidden by God, two Christians may do the exact opposite within the framework of living thankfully unto the Lord. In things that are "doubtful" (permitting differing opinions without violating Scripture), verse one tells us to receive one another—to submit to one another, as St. Paul writes to the Ephesians (5:21)—rather than condemning fellow servants in the Lord. We should not sin by leading others to stumble, but are, instead, to seek to build one another up, which is done by keeping God's Word the source and standard of our teaching.

Prayer: Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore, remove from us their burden sore, as we their trespasses forgive, who by offenses us do grieve. Thus, let us dwell in charity, and serve our brother willingly. Amen. (TLH 458:6)

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Sixth Sunday after Trinity

The Fifth Commandment Thou shalt not kill.

We have not completed the discussion of both spiritual and temporal government, that is, divine and paternal authority and obedience. But here we go forth from our own house to our neighbor's, to learn how we should live with respect to one another, everyone for himself toward his neighbor. Therefore God and government are not included in this commandment, nor the power which they have to kill. For God has delegated His authority to governments to punish evil-doers instead of parents, who aforetime (as we read in Moses) were required to bring their children to judgment and sentence them to death. Therefore this prohibition pertains to individuals and not to government.

This commandment is now easy enough, and is often treated, because we hear it annually in the Gospel of St. Matthew (5:21sq.), where Christ Himself explains and sums it up—namely, that we must not kill, either with hand, heart, mouth, signs, gestures, help or counsel. Therefore it is forbidden to everyone to be angry, except those (as we said) who are in the place of God, that is, parents and government. For it is proper for God, and for everyone who stands in His stead, to be angry, to reprove and punish, even on account of those who transgress this and the other commandments.

But the cause and need of this commandment is that God well knows that the world is evil, and that this live has much unhappiness; therefore He has placed this and the other commandments between the good and the wicked. As now there are many temptations against all the commandments, so the temptation in respect to this is that we must live among many people who do us wrong, that we have cause to be hostile to them.

As when your neighbor sees that you have better possessions from property, and more happiness from God, than he, he is offended, envies you, and speaks no good of you.

Thus by the devil's incitement you will have many enemies who cannot bear to see you have any good, either bodily or spiritual. When we see them it is natural for our hearts in their turn to rage and bleed and take vengeance. Thus there arise cursing and blows, from which follow finally misery and murder. Therefore God like a kind father anticipates, interposes and wishes to have all quarrels settled, that no misfortune come of them, nor one destroy another. And in fine He would hereby defend, liberate and keep in peace everyone against all the crime and violence of everyone else; and has, as it were, placed this commandment as a wall, fortress and refuge about our neighbor, that we do him no bodily harm or injury.

—The Large Catechism, Part I, §180–185

THURSDAY, JULY 16: ROMANS 7:1-25 5TH S. AFTER TRINITY

In chapter seven, we are presented with the dichotomy of being a Christian in a fallen world. This fact is the source of the Apostle Paul's almost poetic presentation on the constant battle between the new Adam and the old man that exists in each believer. The believer's regenerate spirit knows what is right and pleasing to God, and it earnestly desires to do these things—but there lurks in the flesh the "old man" who desires the things of the devil, and thus is diametrically opposed to the things of God. This tension is always present to a lesser or greater degree in the Christian as long as he remains in this life. The fallen, unregenerate nature knows nothing of God's righteousness, so it sees nothing as sin; but when the Law arrives it reveals the nature of sin to the unregenerate spirit. The unregenerate spirit learns what sin is through the Law and is condemned by the Law for embracing sin, thus the Law reveals sin and magnifies sin's consequences upon the spirit.

Thanks be to God that Jesus Christ delivers us from this body of death. For He entered into creation and died once for all to atone for sin, rose bodily in glory, and sent the Holy Spirit to call us to be His Elect through Word and Sacraments.

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.

Today we have the sainted Apostle Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, magnificently presenting the reality of the Christian's call to live a sanctified life. He accomplishes this while addressing the sinful human desire to justify itself. It is also important to note the author is addressing believers who have already been justified purely by grace. This sanctified living stems from the free gift of faith, and is thus the fruit of faith. He points to the fact that the physical work of circumcision serves no purpose without faith, faith that compels a man to live his life according to God's Word and will for His people.

On the other hand, the one who does not have the physical sign of circumcision, yet upholds God's Word and will for man, is truly circumcised, for he has circumcised his heart with the acts of repentance. The true believer does not do the works of faith according to the will of God to gain favor with God. He does them out of thankfulness and love toward a Lord who has mercifully shown unconditional love toward sinners while they were yet committed enemies of God. Here in chapter two the Apostle Paul focuses primarily on the emphasis that his prior life as Saul, a Pharisee among Pharisees, placed on the wrath of God toward the sinner. All of this is presented within the context of being merciful toward others as God is merciful toward us.

Prayer: Almighty God, grant that our numerous sins may be forgiven 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.

Today's text is summed up in verse five, "Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience." Subjection is not a word we Americans care for, because we love to shout loudly about our "rights." And too many Christians try to make the argument that "Christian Freedom" also gives believers the "right" to do various things because Jesus has set us free from any judgment. These positions are a horrendous corruption of what Scripture declares about the bride of Christ. Jesus declares of the Pharisees and Herodians, in the twenty-second chapter of the Gospel of Saint Matthew, that they are hypocrites for denying, among other things, the authority of the government. The Apostle Paul expounds on this divine declaration from God in chapter thirteen and fourteen of his epistle to the Roman church. Part of this is our appointed text for today. The Christian is truly set free from judgment by the redemption that comes in grace through faith in Jesus Christ and His holy Means. This freedom calls the Christian to be bold, not fearful—to pick up one's cross and follow his Lord and Redeemer as His faithful disciple. A Christian is Christ's disciple who strives to be a perfect copy of His Master, who came not to be served, but to serve. Thus, the Christian as a child of God (adopted in Christ) is beholden to none, and simultaneously servant of all. Servants are in subjection to their Master, and to those whom "God has appointed" to have authority within and without His church.

Prayer: O God, only by clinging to You and Your Word shall we be those who have faith, and thus persevere as Your servants unto glory through Your grace. Amen.