

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



AUGUST 3—SEPTEMBER 5, 2020

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

The Calendar

August 2	Trinity 8	TLH 517
August 9	Trinity 9	TLH 625
August 10 (M)	St. Laurence, Deacon and Martyr	
August 15 (S)	St. Mary Theotokos	
August 16	Trinity 10	TLH 420
August 23	Trinity 11	TLH 369
August 24 (M)	St. Bartholomew, Apostle	
August 30	Trinity 12	TLH 34

Summer Visitation Schedule

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.

Support for the Diocese and Seminary

With seminary classes beginning in approximately a month, and visitations currently underway around the diocese, this is a time when the need for ongoing financial support for the diocese is particularly pressing. If you would be willing to help meet these ongoing needs, support for ELDoNA (either general fund, or seminary) can be sent care of the diocesan treasurer, Pastor Michael Henson, c/o Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church 1000 North Park Ave. Herrin, IL 62948.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5: 1 THE. 4:8-12 12TH S. A. TRINITY

“Aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands.”

The Apostle encourages a quiet life, minding our own business, and doing something productive. Not very flashy, is it? Consider all the good works to which people were encouraged in the Middle Ages: going on pilgrimages, fighting in a crusade, becoming monks or nuns, venerating sacred relics. That stuff has some flash! But its allure should give us pause. What seems so flashy and spiritual often puts the spotlight on ourselves rather than on Christ! Where is Christ in the flashy things? Where is His cross?

That which distracts from Christ, rather than drawing us to Him, should most certainly not be received as “Christian”! Instead, we take the day-to-day chores associated with our vocations and sincerely seek to perform them to the glory of God. That completely changes them from self-aggrandizing works to God-glorifying works, as we humbly perform them in a spirit of sincere gratitude for the salvation we have in Christ Jesus.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“No one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.”

St. Paul suffered afflictions. He was opposed in his preaching by his fellow Jews, and he had to bear whatever his “thorn in the flesh” was. People who believe in a ‘theology of glory’ could easily look at those afflictions and be shaken by them, thinking, “If God were really with Paul, why didn’t God make it easier?” They ignore what God says about our crosses and suffering. Paul corrects such false assumptions. He reminds his Thessalonian readers that “we are appointed to this.”

The Lord had His use of Paul’s sufferings. He had use of Joseph’s many years of innocent imprisonment in the book of Genesis. And, of course, He had absolutely salvific use of our Lord’s sufferings. He will have whatever use He wishes of the sufferings to which He has appointed us, as well. Do not be shaken by the afflictions others endure; neither be shaken by your own. God is still with you, working in you to forge spiritual maturity, and using even the hardships you face to advance His gracious will in this world.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.



2020 Summer Visitations

As can be noted from the schedule in the July and August issues of *The Lutheran Herald*, Bishop Heiser is traveling extensively during these two months to carry out his visitations throughout the diocese. Here are a few snapshots from the visitations, with Pr. Mensing and the saints of Good Shepherd L.C. (Tucson, AZ) [left] and Pr. Rydecki and the saints of Emanuel L.C. (Las Cruces, NM) [below].



Recent Installations in the Diocese

In the course of his visitations, Bishop Heiser installed Rev. Brandon Warr as Pastor of St. Patrick Lutheran Church in Chipley, Florida [below] on July 22nd, and Rev. Floyd Smithey as Deacon of St. James Lutheran Mission in Knoxville, Tennessee [bottom image] on July 26th. Pastor Dulas of Saints Peter and Paul Lutheran Church (Simpsonville, SC) assisted in both installations. (Dcn. Smithey was called by Saints Peter and Paul L.C.)



THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3: 1 THE. 2:1-20 12TH S. A. TRINITY

“When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”

When the New Testament was being written, the Old Testament was the only Bible the Christians had. As the Evangelists wrote the Gospels and various Apostles wrote letters, and the early Christian congregations were strengthened by them, they began sharing what they had with each other. Before long we had a New Testament.

With these words above, the Holy Spirit makes it very clear that this was the totally right thing to do. The words the early Christians received from the Apostles and the Evangelists were not the words of men, but the Word of God. And we too must not be deceived by those who would try to drive a wedge between Jesus (as we know Him from the Gospels) and St. Paul. All these Words have been given to us by God, to the end that we would repent of our sins, trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of those sins, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit for the living of faithful lives.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

How often have you heard these words, especially at the beginning of a sermon? Have you ever stopped to consider their richness? The first thing to notice is the English: “Grace to you.” It sounds strange, so much so that Pastors are sometimes tempted to change it to “may grace be multiplied unto you,” or some other such. But there is no “may”. “May” changes it into a pious wish; “may grace be yours,” or “I hope grace will be yours.”

Long ago, when the Word of the Lord said “Let there be light,” light happened. Now, by way of the quill of St. Paul and the mouth of your pastor, the Word of the Lord says “Grace to you,” and grace happens. It happens especially by way of the faithful preaching of the Word. The Word of the Lord spoken into your ears delivers the grace and peace of God and the Lord Jesus every bit as surely as the Word with water on your skin, or the Word with the bread and wine on your tongue. They deliver Jesus to you, with His grace and His peace. These gifts are yours, today and always through His Word and Sacraments.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Article XIV. Of Monastic Vows

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

Article XV. Of Human Traditions

The declaration of the Papists that human traditions serve for the remission of sins, or merit salvation, is altogether unchristian and condemned, as Christ says (Matt. 15:9): “In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” And Titus 1:14: “That turn from the truth.” Also their declaration that it is a mortal sin if one do not observe these statutes, is not right.

These are the articles on which I must stand; and if God so will I shall stand even to my death. And I do not know how to change or to concede anything in them. If anyone else will concede anything, he will do it at the expense of his conscience.

Lastly, the Pope’s bundle of impostures still remains, concerning foolish and childish articles, as the dedication of churches, the baptism of bells, the baptism of the altar-stone, with its godfathers to pray and offer gifts. Such baptism is administered to the reproach and mockery of holy baptism, and should not be tolerated. Afterwards, concerning the consecration of wax tapers, palm-branches, cakes, spices, oats, etc., which nevertheless cannot be called consecrations, but are nothing but mockery and fraud. There are infinite other such deceptions, which we commit to their god, and which may be adored by them, until they are weary of them. We will not be confused by them.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

MONDAY, AUGUST 3: 1 COR. 12:12-31 8TH S. AFTER TRINITY

Can you even imagine it? Feet saying “I want to be the hands!” and ears saying, “I want to be the eyes!” More shocking, however, is how today’s culture would fully support such confusion. Unbelievers attempt to justify their interchangeability by demanding their version of diversity (i.e., men can date or marry men; women can date or marry women; men can identify as women and women can identify as men). A similar blurring of distinctions has reached its way into certain church bodies as well (i.e., anybody can carry out the duties of what only the pastor is called to do; along with some pastors supposedly being “more gifted”).

In describing the Body of Christ, the Church, by using a metaphor of a human body, St. Paul reveals the God of order. Just as there would be chaos within a human body if the parts started doing what they are not supposed to do, so it is in the body of Christ. God’s Church is ordered, unified, and properly operates as He brings the members to stay true to His Holy Scripture. Unified through God’s Law and Gospel working through His Word and Sacraments—always pointing to Christ’s fully atoning merits—the Body of Christ, although made up of diverse members, suffers together and rejoices together. In it God’s blessings are brought to serve the Church and the world.

Prayer: Grant to us, Lord, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without You, may be enabled by You to live according to Your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1: COL. 3:18-4:18 12TH S. AFTER TRINITY

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.”

There is a fairly simple truth that even an unbeliever can figure out: if you are going to do something anyway, you might as well be chipper about it. Doing your work with a grumpy attitude certainly does nothing to make the work easier! But the Apostle would encourage us even beyond the mere wisdom of men.

There really is a God, and through Christ Jesus we are one with Him. And so He is our first priority: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. As we do, we necessarily love what He loves, which leads us to the second great commandment: love your neighbor as yourself. Love for God entails loving our neighbor!

As we love God with all our heart, so too we engage good works “heartily”, as more than just kindnesses, but as confessions of the love of God. And we do so knowing God sees, and is Himself pleased with our faithful labors for other people, whom He also loves and would save. God grant us this day, both to be heartily pleasing to Him in our labors, and faithful confessors of His love to our neighbors.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”

What is Christ like? Many a Christian has wanted a better answer to that question than they have. So they start with the knowledge that He is both true God and true Man, and then get to thinking they can figure Jesus out that way. That is actually backward! Do you want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. In Him the fullness of God dwells bodily! Jesus portrays God to us. He is holy, truthful, so filled with love that He sacrificed Himself for the sin of the world, even for the many who refuse to believe, repent, and receive that forgiveness.

And do you want to know what Man is like? You’ve never seen a true human being like Adam was in the beginning; you’ve seen only fallen ones, sinful ones, flawed ones. Jesus did come to save us from being human, as we know it. He came to make real human beings out of us, bringing us into communion with God in His own person through His atoning sacrifice. Therefore, as we would be one with God, we cling to Christ Jesus as He comes to us in Word and Sacrament.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.”

For such words St. Paul gets called a male chauvinist. Yet, he was inspired by God to write about this practice, clarifying specific restrictions regarding the ministry. Our clergy and congregations uphold the authority of God and His Word, citing these verses, as well as 1 Timothy 2:9-14: “...in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.”

By the grace of God our fellowship does not disregard His institution and prohibition. Rather, we have men fulfill Christ’s Office, properly preaching and teaching God’s Word and faithfully administering His Sacraments. These blessings keep Christ’s fully atoning merits the object of faith, and the Church is truly edified and fed!

Prayer: Grant to us, Lord, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without You, may be enabled by You to live according to Your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians, God, through St. Paul, reveals the importance of love, proclaiming: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” (13:1-3)

In today’s reading St. Paul orders a financial collection for the saints in Jerusalem, and concludes with a final exhortation to “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love.” Christ Jesus and His fully atoning merits reveal God’s love toward man. Through God-created faith in His merits we are accounted forgiven, justified, and know we indeed have love from God, which is the most important love of all! Assured of His love we are brought to truly love our neighbor through good works, as well as giving financially what we are able. When all that is done gets done with true love, it is God’s doing through Christ!

Prayer: Grant to us, Lord, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without You, may be enabled by You to live according to Your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Article XX. Of Good Works.

In the twentieth article they [the Roman Catholics] lay down these words, viz. that they reject and condemn our statement that men do not merit the remission of sins by good works. This article they clearly declare that they reject and condemn. What is to be said on a subject so manifest? Here the framers of the Confutation [the Papists’ answer to the Augsburg Confession] openly show by what spirit they are led. For what in the Church is more certain than that the remission of sins occurs freely for Christ’s sake, that Christ and not our works is the propitiation for sins, as Peter says (Acts 10:43): “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins”? To this Church of the prophets we would rather assent that to these abandoned writers of the Confutation, who so impudently blaspheme Christ. For although there were writers who held after the remission of sins men are just before God, not by faith, but by works themselves, yet they did not hold this, viz. that the remission of sins itself occurs on account of our works, and not freely for Christ’s sake.

Therefore the blasphemy of ascribing Christ’s honor to our works is not to be endured. These theologians are now entirely without shame, if they dare to bring such an opinion into the Church. Nor do we doubt that his most excellent imperial majesty and very many of the princes will not allow this passage of the Confutation to remain, if they be admonished of it. On this topic we could cite infinite testimonies from Scripture and from the Fathers. But above we have quoted a sufficient number on this subject. And there is no need to testimonies for one who knows why Christ has been given for us, who knows that Christ is the propitiation for our sins. Isaiah says (53:6): “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” The adversaries on the other hand teach that God hath laid our iniquities not on Christ, but on our works. Neither are we disposed to mention here the sort of works which they teach. We see that a horrible decree has been prepared against us, which would terrify us still more if we were contending concerning doubtful or trifling subjects. Now since our consciences understand that by the adversaries the manifest truth is condemned, whose defense is necessary for the Church, and increases the glory of Christ; we easily despise the terrors of the world, and patiently will bear whatever is to be suffered for the glory of Christ and the advantage of the Church.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §78–82

These closing remarks from St. Paul bring us to the close of this week. The various pastors of the ELDoNA are the authors of these devotions. While each may have his own distinct style, when one reads these devotions there remains an underlying unity. While not inspired like Holy Scripture, the devotions written by members of the ELDoNA maintain a unity by directing the reader back to Jesus. In fact, every bit of what a pastor says and does should take you back to Christ. Every Bible study, every sermon, every exhortation by your pastor ought to deliver you to the foot of the Cross where you see what God has done for you in Christ.

Take time and go back to the beginning of Paul's letter to the Philippians and read his entire letter in one sitting. It is not all that long. By doing so, you will hear Paul continually taking you back to Christ. For Paul and for every Christian, it was, is, and always will be about Jesus.

As one of those pastors who has been blessed to be a member of Christ's Church and fellowship, and blessed to write the devotions for this past week, I leave you with these words: The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make His face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace. Amen.

Prayer: Grant, I beseech Thee, Almighty God, that the Word which I have read this past week may through Thy grace be so engrafted in my heart that I may bring forth the fruit of Thy Spirit. Amen.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.”

When making our way through this cross-ridden life of tribulation (this “valley of sorrows”, as Luther called it), these opening words of 2 Corinthians are such an absolute blessing to have memorized. Why? For the very purpose that is stated within the text—so that as we continue to be consoled in our afflictions. The Father of mercies, through His Spirit, consoles us with Christ, and we, then, know exactly what, and Who, we are to deliver to console others who are afflicted.

Another blessing is being brought to know where exactly God's consolation is delivered, so that we know where to send others—namely, to His means of grace. As Luther once stated: “Christ won forgiveness for all on the cross, but He did not distribute it on the cross. Rather, He distributes it here and now through the proclaimed Gospel and the enacted Sacraments.” (AE 40: 213-214)

Prayer: Grant to us, Lord, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without You, may be enabled by You to live according to Your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The disdain for Christians in the world is real. Although Christians in the United States are not getting ill-treatment at the same horrific lengths that are, sadly, happening to Christians in Syria or certain parts of Africa, it still takes place here. At one funeral the grieving family—who were, sadly, not familiar with the joyous Gospel of Christ and had likely never been to a Lutheran funeral—glared at me with looks of absolute hatred throughout the funeral service and afterwards. One member finally, angrily, confided in me that they wanted to hear about the good person that their loved one was, not what Christ did.

Thus, God’s Word rings true: “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.”

Rejoice that we poor miserable sinners—due to God’s will of breaking and hindering the devil, the world, and our sinful nature—are brought to repentance and belief in Christ’s merits, being declared unblemished, triumphant saints!

Prayer: Grant to us, Lord, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without You, may be enabled by You to live according to Your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Out of the countless Christians throughout history, the names of only a few are recorded in Scripture. In today’s reading Paul points to two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who had an important role in helping Paul establish the church in Philippi. While the details of their labors are not recorded, it is enough for us simply to know that they were of great help to Paul.

Since the time of Paul, countless people have also served their fellow Christians. Some of their names are recorded in the annals of history, while others after a generation or two are all but forgotten. Even though they may have been forgotten by this world, their work in the Church was, and is, important. Why? Because the works they have done were ordained by God before the foundation of the world. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

You, too, are “fellow workers” in Christ’s Church. When you were baptized you, too, were “created in Christ Jesus for good works.” Like Paul, you can say, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Though people may not recognize what you are doing, you can rejoice, for your “names are in the Book of Life.”

Prayer: Gracious Father, Thou hast granted us a place in Thy kingdom for Jesus’ sake. By Thy grace, grant that we may please Thee with the works Thou hast given us to do. Amen.

There are many people in the world who one might refer to as upstanding or model citizens. They are busy serving their communities and are known to be civic leaders. They help with fundraisers. They are on the forefront when there is a disaster. They are thought of as people you can count on. Paul was such a model citizen, a model Jewish citizen. He notes it when he wrote: “concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” Paul was everything a Jewish mom could want in a son. Yet, for all of Paul’s societal goodness, he understood that societal goodness, goodness in the eyes of the world, counts for nothing before God. Indeed, he regards all of his deeds as “rubbish”, or as the King James Version says, “and do count them but dung.”

To have true righteousness before God one must have the righteousness of the only One who is truly righteous, Jesus Christ. Try as you or I might at being righteous, there are always flaws. Before God the only thing that counts is perfection. Anything less is as St. Paul describes it.

So how does one get such perfection, such righteousness? It is ours through faith in Christ, as Paul notes, “which is from God.” In other words, what God expects from you, perfect righteousness, He gives to you through faith in Jesus and for Jesus’ sake. Thus, nothing of Paul and his life is taken into consideration by God regarding Paul’s salvation. God took Paul’s sins and placed them upon Christ as He hung on the Cross. The same goes for you who believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, send the Holy Spirit to direct and guide our lives in this world. Amen.

At the beginning of God’s Divine Service the words put forth for the minister and congregation to confess one’s sins contain the adjectives “heartily” and “sincerely”. “But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them.” I used to wrestle with why such qualifications were inserted in a confession of sins which God Almighty hears and knows whether they are said in faith or not.

The following Words of God brought clarification: “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

The sorrow of the world is outside of faith. It is a godless sorrow that is more concerned with one’s reputation before man. The sorrow that produces repentance leading to salvation is godly because God’s Word of Law is used to create it, aiming toward Gospel restoration. Through faith created by God, the one confessing the sins inevitably is “heartily” sorry and “sincerely” repents. Such a confession is only by faith, yearning for mercy before God and fleeing to the Mercy Seat supplied through Christ’s fully atoning merits. In Him is life!

Prayer: Grant to us, Lord, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without You, may be enabled by You to live according to Your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

The Seventh Commandment. Thou shalt not steal.

After our person and wife or husband, temporal property is the nearest good. That also God wishes to have secure, and has commanded that no one shall damage or injure his neighbor in his possessions. For to steal is nothing else than to get another's property wrongfully into our possession. This comprehends all kinds of advantage in all kinds of trade to the disadvantage of our neighbor. This is indeed such a widespread and common crime, but so little regarded and observed, that it exceeds all measure, so that if all thieves—who nevertheless do not wish to be considered such—were to be hanged to the gallows, the world would soon be desolate and would be without both executioners and gallows. For as we have just said to steal is not only to rob our neighbors' coffers and pockets, but to be too far-reaching in the market, in all stores and shops, wine- and beer-cellars, workshops, and in short whenever we trade or take or give money, goods or work.

As, for instance, to explain this somewhat roughly for the common mass of people, so that it may be seen how godly we are: When a man-servant or maid-servant does not serve faithfully, and does damage, or at least allows it to occur when it could be prevented, or otherwise from indolence, idleness or malice neglects the goods entrusted to him, to the spite and vexation of master and mistress. And when this is done purposely (for I do not speak of unavoidable casualties), you can dispose of thirty, forty dollars a year, which if another had taken secretly he would be hung by the rope. But you even bid defiance and make your boast of it, and no one dare call you a thief! ... Likewise also in the market and in common trade this course prevails to the greatest extent, where one openly defrauds another with defective goods, false measures, weights, coins, and by taking advantage by expert arts and uncommon transactions or dexterous inventions, in short by getting the best of the bargain and wantonly oppressing and distressing him. And who indeed can even recount or imagine it all?—The Large Catechism, ¶223-225, 227

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26: PHI. 2:19-30 11TH S. AFTER TRINITY

The doctrine of the call is important to the Church. As noted in the Augsburg Confession, Article XIV: “Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.” A man ought not preach of his own volition, but rather await God’s call through His Church, because God is a God of order and concord.

Yet, there is another aspect to the role of the pastor. We see this in Paul’s role with Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy and Epaphroditus were not only called by the Church to be Ministers, they were also sent by Paul. Paul’s concern is that people be served. Paul sends Timothy to “care” for them. Such care is bringing the best God has to offer, the forgiveness of sins for Jesus’s sake.

This “sending” is also a function of the ELDoNA’s seminary. Three years are spent training a man to be a pastor. Upon completion of his studies, a man is now prepared to be sent to the congregation that has called him. This is the people of God’s Church working together for the sake of good order, so that God’s people may be served by pastors. Sending also takes place with regard to mission congregations served by the ELDoNA. In communication with our bishop, a pastor or pastors are sent on a regular basis to serve those missions by bringing God’s gifts to them. We can all give thanks to God for our fellowship and the men God has called and sent to serve His people.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we beseech Thee to send faithful pastors to diligently preach Thy Word and administer Thy Sacraments. Amen.

“Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” Paul is imprisoned, yet his concern is for others and, most importantly, that the Gospel continued to be preached.

James reminds us that our faith is nothing, it is dead, if we are not concerned about our neighbor’s welfare. “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:15-17). While Paul cannot personally attend to the physical needs of others, he still brings the “one thing needful” to people, the Gospel, knowing full well that those to whom he is writing will fulfill what he cannot.

Likewise, a pastor may not be able to attend to physical requirements of a member in their time of need. Yet, he knows he can call upon his congregation to help. As the Gospel has its way with people, the Holy Spirit continues to move people to good works in service to their neighbors.

Lastly, as God’s people grow in faith so does the desire to be with Christ. Like Paul, the Christian wishes to “depart and be with Christ,” yet Christians realize that they reside in this world for the purpose of serving their neighbor. Self interest is outweighed by concern for our neighbor, knowing full well that our time in this world is left to God.

Prayer: Almighty God, bless us with concern for our neighbor, and patience as we await the time we leave this world to be with Thee. Amen.

St. Paul spent two chapters in his second epistle to the Corinthians urging them to finish gathering a generous offering for the saints in Jerusalem who were suffering scarcity as a result of a famine. He gives them one reason after another to follow through with the charitable aid they had promised. And we do well to note that his words apply, not to their divine obligation to support the local ministry of the Gospel, but to an offering that was above and beyond their local responsibilities. This offering was entirely free, and yet still subject to the guidance of God’s Word. We can apply his counsel especially to the charitable offerings we gather for other Christians or congregations within our fellowship.

Give, because giving itself is God’s gracious gift to you, as the Macedonian Christians had already proven by the generous offering they had gathered, even though they themselves were suffering. Give, because it proves the sincerity of your love. Give, because Christ gave everything for you, to the point of impoverishing Himself, and has made you rich with the gifts of forgiveness, adoption, access to God, and an eternal inheritance. Give if you said you would give and already expressed your desire to help.

Give, because it is a godly thing for Christians who have more of something to share it with Christians who have less. Some have more money, and some have less. Some, on the other hand, may have an abundance of something else which they can share with you, like prayer, thanksgiving, doctrinal insight, or love.

Prayer: O God of grace, we pray for all our fellow Christians who are suffering any need. Grant us the grace to supply their needs out of the abundance You have given us. Amen.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 11: 2 COR. 9:1-15 9TH S. AFTER TRINITY

St. Paul continues his admonition about the special offering the Corinthians were gathering—or were supposed to be gathering—for the saints in Jerusalem. Again, we can apply his instructions to our own charitable offerings to other Christians in their time of need. According to our own context and our own vocations, the Lord and His Church could say of us:

“Give, because I know you’re willing. You said you were willing. I know you want to help your fellow Christians.” “Give, because I’ve already boasted to others about your willingness and zeal to help, and I don’t want to seem to have deceived others about you.” “Give, because I’ve already boasted to others about you, and I don’t want you to be put to shame. You said you wanted to help. How shameful it would be for you if your fellow Christians learned that you chose not to help them.” “Give, not grudgingly, not out of a sense of obligation, but cheerfully, because God loves a cheerful giver.” “Give, not sparingly, but generously, because God will bless you far beyond what you give, sometimes with physical blessings, but always with spiritual ones.”

Give, because it supplies the needs of many, even beyond what you actually give, because God is able to multiply the little works that we do, even as Jesus once multiplied a few loaves of bread and a few fish to feed more than 5,000 people. Give, because it results in thanksgiving to God as the recipients of your giving may praise Him for working such love in you, and for providing for them through you.

Prayer: O Lord, increase in us the mind of Christ to keep us focused on fulfilling the needs of others, as You give us the means and the opportunity. Amen.

MONDAY, AUGUST 24: EPHESIANS 6:18-24 11TH S. AFTER TRINITY

“St. Tychicus Lutheran Church...” maybe I’ve missed it, but I haven’t heard of one. Tychicus is one of those folks we hear about in the Bible, yet we know very little about him. He is mentioned in several places in the New Testament, most notably as one who accompanied Paul and was also sent by Paul to churches, as our text for today mentions. However, perhaps the most notable comment we have about Tychicus is these words from Paul, “a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord.”

In these words Paul points out two important facts about Tychicus. First, Paul counts Tychicus as “a beloved brother.” That is no small declaration. Though Paul was an Apostle, a man specially chosen by Christ, Paul understands his status as an Apostle doesn’t make him humanly superior to Tychicus. Paul is but a sinner like Tychicus, and both of them owe everything of their salvation to Christ. What ought to draw our attention is the fact Jesus, who is perfect and holy, thus superior to us in every way, “is not ashamed to call [us] brethren” (Hebrews 2:11).

The second important fact about Tychicus is that he is called a “faithful minister.” While we know little about Tychicus’ personal life, Paul draws us to know what is of utmost importance. Tychicus is “faithful” in his ministry, a “faithful” steward of God’s Word and Sacraments.

God provides His Church with faithful pastors. You may not know much about your pastor, but that is not what is important. What is important is that He, too, is your “beloved brother... in the Lord” and is sent by God to bring you God’s gift of forgiveness from sin.

Prayer: O God, grant unto Thy Church faithful pastors. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XI.

Of Confession, they teach, that Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible, according to the Psalm: “Who can understand his errors?” [Psa. 19:12].

Article XII.

Of Repentance, they teach, that for those that have fallen after Baptism, there is remission of sins whenever they are converted; and that the Church ought to impart absolution to those thus returning to repentance.

Now repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which, born of the Gospel, or of absolution, believes that, for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience, and delivers it from terrors. Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. Also those who contend that some may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin. The Novatians also are condemned, who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance. They also are rejected who do not teach that remission of sins cometh through faith, but command us to merit grace through satisfactions of our own.

—Augsburg Confession

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12: 2 COR. 10:1-18 9TH S. AFTER TRINITY

It appears that some members of the church in Corinth were listening to the wrong people. Other ministers had come claiming to be apostles and had led them to distrust Paul, who would soon be coming to pick up their offering for Jerusalem. “Don’t worry about Paul. He only sounds tough in his letters. He won’t rebuke you harshly when he comes in person. He’ll be meek and mild.”

On the contrary, Paul promises that he will be “bold against some,” even as the “meek and mild” Jesus sometimes upbraided the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, or drove out the moneychangers from the Temple. Paul and the other apostles and ministers of Christ wielded God’s Word as a mighty weapon. No sin is off limits from being identified and condemned. No false argument is immune from being dismantled. No human idea at all is safe from being criticized and even brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Paul asserts his divine authority and insists that the Corinthians recognize it, especially since Paul was the very one who brought the Gospel to them in the first place, and who was in fellowship with the rest of the Lord’s handpicked apostles.

Ministers today were not handpicked by Jesus as the apostles were; their authority is governed by the authority of the apostles and prophets. But their authority is still valid, given to them by God in their call and ordination. They, too, have been armed with mighty spiritual weapons to address men’s behavior, ideas, and teachings and to make them conform to the Word of Christ. They do this, not to seek men’s approval, but God’s.

Prayer: O Lord, bless the ministry of Your ministers. Grant them wisdom and boldness to preach Your Word with power. Amen.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 13: 2 COR. 11:1-18 9TH S. AFTER TRINITY

Be very careful whom you trust, especially in matters of the faith. St. Paul scolds the Corinthians in today's reading for being too trusting of those who claimed to be apostles. They were proud of their "simplicity in Christ," proud of their gullibility, proud of accepting the preachers who came to them without passing judgment on them. After all, didn't Christ command us to "judge not"?

But the true apostle warns that by failing to judge the message of those preachers, the Corinthians were not doing well; they were leaving themselves open to being deceived and led astray to a different gospel.

It is possible to be overly critical of those who preach the Gospel; that flows from lovelessness and lack of respect for authority. On the other hand, it is very dangerous to be underly critical, because both Satan and his human ministers like to pretend to be something they are not. Satan pretends to be an angel of light instead of the demon of darkness that he is. His ministers pretend to be teachers of righteousness instead of the false teachers that they are.

The true apostles and ministers of Christ are known by their fruit, both their doctrine and their life. Paul's Scriptural teaching and Paul's insistence on not taking a salary from the churches in Corinth should have made the Corinthian Christians more trusting of him, and more critical of those who came with a different message and a different way of life. There is no virtue in the kind of intentional simplicity that says, "Jesus loves me, this I know—and this is all I want to know."

Prayer: Lord, keep us from being deceived by false prophets, and help us each day to grow in grace and the knowledge of You. Amen.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 22: EPHESIANS 6:1-9 10TH S. AFTER TRINITY

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

These verses function as part of Paul's "Table of Duties," and Luther uses them in the Small Catechism's Table of Duties for parents, children, workers, and employers. Here we see a helpful corrective to what our anti-authority culture sees as that ugly, "four-letter word": obey. However, as Christians, rather than recoil from it, we embrace it as the Word of God (and a much needed word at that, considering the times).

"Bondservants" would also seem to be an ugly word, but Luther applies this term and verses 5-8 "To Workers of All Kinds." In fact, Paul often uses the term "bondservant of Christ" to refer to himself. Note also that in the Small Catechism's Table of Duties these verses on "employees and employers" are not applied to pastors. Instead, the verses applied to pastors are a different set of verses, including one with that same "ugly word," obey. Hebrews 13:17: "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." This sounds very much like "the commandment with a promise," as Paul calls it, addressed to children. In fact, Luther includes pastors as fathers by extension in the Large Catechism's explanation of the Fourth Commandment. This is something that the churches of our day need to hear and take seriously.

Prayer: O God, You reveal Your almighty power chiefly by showing mercy and compassion. Pour out Your grace on us that we pursue Your promises and enjoy Your heavenly blessings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 21: GALATIANS 6:11-18 10TH S. AFTER TRINITY

“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.”

Paul points out the hypocrisy of the Judaizers in that they themselves do not even keep the law. Then Paul says that the demands of the world are meaningless to him. This was obviously true of Christ, and here Paul says it of himself. He asks his hearers to follow his example—his example of following Christ’s example. Thus, claiming to be Christian while behaving in worldly manners sets us up for the charge of hypocrisy as well.

Instead of all the nonsense about Jewish ceremonial law, Paul directs our attention to the thing that really matters: a new creation. This is the new reality for us in Christ that began in our baptism, when we were marked with the cross of Christ. Rather than the mark of circumcision on the body, Paul directs our attention to the marks on his body that are the result of being persecuted for Christ. In view of those marks, let all opposition now be silent! Finally, Paul concludes by pronouncing blessing, and by drawing their attention away from the body (the flesh) and toward the seat of our faith in Christ, the spirit.

Prayer: Holy Father, in baptism You united me with Christ, putting my old nature to death and bringing forth the new nature to walk according to Your Word and Spirit. By the same Word and Spirit, guide us so to walk in the newness of our life in Christ, which is now our new creation. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 14: 2 COR. 12:19-13:13 9TH S. AFTER TRINITY

No minister of God enjoys being harsh with his flock, just as no godly father enjoys having to speak harshly to his children. But sometimes it is necessary. When members of the flock are stubbornly living according to the flesh without repentance, the preacher has to rebuke them, as Paul feared he would have to rebuke the Corinthians when he arrived.

So he encourages them, ahead of his visit, to “examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” Use the Word of God to judge your own desires, attitudes, and actions. Do you recognize the self-centeredness of your flesh? Do you recognize your sins against God and man? Do you mourn over them and renounce them? Do you believe in the Lord Jesus who was delivered to death for your sins and raised to life for your justification? Do you wish to amend your sinful life? Are you filled with thankfulness toward God and committed to love your neighbor and especially your fellow Christians? Do you believe all the things God’s holy prophets and apostles have taught you to believe? Do you respect the ministers of Christ? Do you long to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd preached by His ministers? Do you long for the Sacrament of His Body and Blood? Do you struggle against your sinful flesh and hope for the coming of the Lord Jesus?

An honest “yes” to these questions reveals that you are “in the faith” and are not in need of a harsh rebuke from God’s ministers. But where rebuke or counsel is needed, know that God’s minister administers it for your good, that you may be eternally saved.

Prayer: O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, accompany us with Your grace, love, and fellowship. Amen.

Yet again, in writing to the Christians in Galatia St. Paul found himself having to defend his divine authority as an apostle chosen and sent by God to speak to men in God's name and on God's behalf. His authority was all-important because the Gospel he preached was all-important. If Paul could not be trusted to speak for God, then neither could his message from God be trusted.

So the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle, not only to defend his authority in this epistle, but to rebuke those who opposed him. He would teach them again the sweet Gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ, lest they be led astray to believe that there is any other way of being justified. Martin Luther, in his commentary on Galatians, beautifully summarized Paul's teaching:

“I teach only what has been divinely commanded. And I do not glorify myself; I glorify Him who sent me. In addition, I bring upon myself the enmity and indignation both of the Jews and of the Gentiles. Therefore my doctrine is true, pure, sure, and divine. Nor can there be any doctrine that is different from mine, much less better. Therefore any doctrine at all that does not teach as mine does—that all men are sinners and are justified solely by faith in Christ—must be false, uncertain, evil, blasphemous, accursed, and demonic. And so are those who either teach or accept such a doctrine.” (AE 26:59)

Prayer: Let Your merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Your humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as are pleasing to You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

Freedom is never absolute. The only freedom that is worthwhile is freedom from the things that harm us. No mature and sane person seeks freedom from the things that do us good. Those are things we keep, maintain, preserve, and conserve. Regarding the bad things in life, we should want to be liberated from them (not free to indulge in them); and with respect to the good and righteous things in life we want to conserve them for the benefit of all.

Not everyone understands or lives in Christian maturity, so we constantly hear contrary voices—not just from the world, but also from other people who call themselves Christians. To our dogged dedication to “obeying the truth,” they insist instead on “tolerance and love.” Dr. Martin Luther, in his own great commentary on verse 9 (“A little yeast leavens the whole lump”), offers this corrective: “A curse on a love that is observed at the expense of the doctrine of faith, to which everything must yield—love, an apostle, an angel from heaven, etc.!” (AE 27:35-39). Let all others go their way; we will stick with Christ and His Word!

Prayer: “Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word; Curb those who fain by craft or sword Would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son And set at naught all He hath done.” (TLH 261:1)

“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you...”

All pastors and parents can identify with Paul here. That is why 1 Corinthians 15:58 is so comforting: “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” Amen!

Paul wants the people to be as he is: in Christ. True pastors do not allow hero-worship or make direct followers of themselves per se. Instead, they lead by example by demonstrating how to be followers of Christ. Since God uses our weaknesses for His purposes, faithful congregations look beyond physical limitations of their pastors and receive the message of Christ through weak, human servants.

The real issue is the truth of the Gospel, but we see all over America something else. Namely, while God’s truth is still prized in the Church, it is not so for the world and worldly ‘churches’. They are like the Judaizers of Paul’s day, who added to God’s Word and tried to create their own criteria for association. False leaders in many compromised churches today have basically created their own stained-glass country clubs, wherein hero-worship and party-spirit are rampant. Instead, Paul emphasizes for us the true Gospel, true pastors, true fellowship in Christ, and the true Church—these all go together and are centered in Christ.

Prayer: Holy Father, keep us faithful to Your Son, His true Gospel, His true pastors, and His true Church. Help us to reach out with Your truth to all who are victims of various falsehoods that they might hear Christ Himself inviting them to return to You through forgiveness in Him alone. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Of Chapters and Cloisters.

That chapters and cloisters were formerly founded with the good intention to educate learned men and chaste and modest women, and ought again to be turned to such use, in order that pastors, preachers, and other ministers of the Churches may be had, and likewise other necessary persons for the administration of the government in cities and governments, and well-educated maidens for mothers and housekeepers, etc.

If they [i.e., chapters and cloisters] will not serve this purpose, it is better that they should be abandoned or altogether destroyed, rather than continued with their blasphemous services invented by men as something better than the ordinary Christian life and the offices and callings appointed by God. For all this also is contrary to the first chief article concerning the redemption made through Jesus Christ. In addition, that they also (as all other human inventions) have not been commanded, are needless and useless, and besides afford occasion for dangerous and vain labor, such services the prophets call Aven, i.e. pain and labor.

—Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article III

“We did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.”

In Galatians, Paul must deal with a distortion of the Gospel. However, we must keep in mind that the Gospel can be distorted in more than one way. Here, Paul must fight the distortion on the one side that imposes legalism (work-righteousness) onto the Gospel. In Corinth, Paul had to fight the distortion on the other side that imposes licentiousness (lawless tolerance) onto the Gospel, which is prominent in our culture and compromised churches today.

Thus, Paul says to the Galatians that through the law he died to the law, but this certainly does not mean absolute freedom from God’s moral law. This is why it is vitally important, when reading Galatians, to understand what Paul means by the law, and what does and does not apply to the Christian. Namely, these three things: 1) the law, as a total body of all of God’s legal codes, no longer condemns us, in so far as we are Christians; and 2) that portion of God’s legal codes which are ceremonial laws no longer binds us as Christians. However, 3) the moral law of God’s Word, while it has no saving or justifying power, still applies to the Christian as curb, mirror, and rule/guide.

Prayer: Holy Father, sanctify us through Your Word and Spirit so that we are led by the true Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Christ our Lord, and not led away by any false ‘gospel’ that the world puts forth. In His name we pray, Amen.

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?”

There is a play on words in the Greek text that does not come across in the English. Paul asks who has “bewitched” the Galatians—a term that speaks to deception through the eyes, like a slight-of-hand magician. Then Paul continues the visual imagery by reminding them of the surpassing sight that was “portrayed” before their eyes: Christ crucified for their sins. This is their true reality, and the former is a false substitute.

The issue here is how salvation in Christ is appropriated or received. The true means of receiving is “by hearing with faith” and “by the Spirit”; but the false substitute is “by works of the law” and “by the flesh.” The problem is that Paul has to argue against the Judaizing influence on Gentile Christianity that says salvation starts by grace in Christ, but then it is completed by following Jewish ceremonial laws about circumcision, table fellowship, etc. Paul speaks against the necessity of these ceremonial laws, while the moral laws (i.e., the Ten Commandments) are still binding. Paul also says that all of the law does not justify in any sense, before conversion or after. Christ alone justifies us by His perfect life and His death in our place on the cross, and we receive this by faith alone.

Prayer: Holy Father, we are thankful that You saved us purely by Your grace and brought us to faith through the power of Your Word and Spirit. Guide us by Your Spirit to fully trust in You and Your sustaining power, which is ours by faith alone in Christ alone. In His name we pray, Amen.