

## Doctrine and Practice

### The 'Gesima' Sundays

“The names *Septuagesima*, *Sexagesima* and *Quinquagesima* point forward to Easter, these Sundays falling within the seventh and the sixth decades and upon the fiftieth day before that great feast. The Propers of the three Sundays provide a transition from the joyousness of the Christmas and Epiphany cycles to the stern penitential season of Lent. Momentous historical events originally led to the choice of the Lessons and the composition of the Collects for these days. This accounts for the strongly individual character of these Sundays.

“In 568 Pope John III appointed these Sundays as days of supplication in view of the perils threatened by the invading Lombards. Fear of impending disaster and trust in God are alternately expressed in the Introits and Graduals and in the earnest petitions of the Collects for these Sundays. The prayers and other Propers were retained in the Liturgy after the long-continued threats of invasion had ended, and have now received a spiritual interpretation.

“... The Gospels for *Septuagesima* (the vineyard) and for *Sexagesima* (the sower) were originally chosen for early spring when the farmers prepared their vineyards and fields. The later extension of Lent pushed these selections back so that they now normally come at the end of winter.

“These Sundays have marked individuality and a Lenten-like intensity of spirit. This is announced thematically in the Introit for *Septuagesima*, which speaks of being ‘mercifully delivered’ and ‘defended in all adversity.’ The Epistle and the Gospel sound the warning that although many be called, few are chosen. The Gospel extols God’s goodness but the Epistle exhorts us to self-discipline and endeavor; an intimation of the approaching Lententide. In keeping with this, the Hallelujahs of the Graduals are replaced, beginning with this Sunday, by ‘tracts’ which continue in use throughout Lent.”

—Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 450-451

# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



THE PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD AND THE PURIFICATION OF MARY

**FEBRUARY 2–29, 2020**

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## The Calendar

February 2	The Presentation of our Lord/ Transfiguration	TLH 137
February 9	Septuagesima	TLH 377
February 16	Sexagesima	TLH 500
February 23	Quinquagesima	TLH 375
February 24 (M)	St. Matthias, Apostle	
February 26 (W)	Ash Wednesday	TLH 152

(Hymns of the Day are for the appointed Festival or Sunday. For February 2, The Festival of the Presentation and Transfiguration Sunday are of equal standing; the provided hymn is for Presentation.)

### FROM THE BISHOP

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

In January I had the great pleasure of conducting my visitation with Pastor Dulas and the saints of St. Peter and St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church in Simpsonville, South Carolina. Having the opportunity to observe The Festival Days of St. Timothy and St. Titus and the Conversion of St. Paul (and, of course, Epiphany 3) made for a memorable, joyous weekend.

#### 2020 Synod and Colloquium:

As noted last month, this year's Synod and Colloquium will be at Salem Lutheran Church in Malone, Texas, and will run from April 21-24. At present, it appears that we will have several applications for membership in the diocese to consider.

**St. Ignatius Seminary:** Classes resume in September; at present, we have two students beginning their studies. There is still time to enroll, but please contact me as soon as possible.

In Christ, *Bishop Heiser*



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 29: LUKE 9:1-27

QUINQUAGESIMA

Not everyone comes to the right conclusion. Jesus spoke about “the kingdom of God and healed those who had need of healing.” He even performed a miraculous feeding of the 5,000 in the wilderness. Nevertheless, when Jesus asks the disciples “Who do the crowds say that I am?” the answers were varied, but they were all dead wrong. Jesus doesn’t comment on their shortfall. He does ask the apostles, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.” Through Peter’s answer the apostles correctly identify Jesus as the promised Savior of the world. Jesus responds by attempting to teach those disciples the salvific work which the Christ of God would perform. The Savior would suffer and be rejected. He would die and be raised the third day.

Through that work Jesus would voluntarily lose Himself, but gain the atonement of the whole world. Earlier in St. Luke’s gospel, Jesus rejected Satan’s offer of “all the kingdoms of the world” (Luke 4:5-6). (Not that Satan could deliver on his promise.) Jesus denies Himself and takes up His cross so that through the preaching of the apostolic message we might believe and be justified.

The person who comes to faith in Christ will then “deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow” Jesus. Prior to faith we are enemies, but when the Word creates faith, we are given a new heart with new desires. Prior to faith a person desires to hold on to his sins, but he cannot save his own sinful life. After faith, the believer desiring to follow after Jesus, denies his own sins through daily repentance, and receives the salvation of his new life with Christ.

We pray: O Christ, let us not taste death, but see the kingdom of God. Amen.

The explanation of the parable of the sower directly precedes today's reading. Jesus concludes, "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience" (v.15). Believers come to faith through hearing the Word. And they remain believers through the hearing of the Word. Jesus says, "Therefore take heed how you hear."

Saving faith in Jesus is not the same thing as historical knowledge of facts. Faith in Jesus trusts God's promise concerning the historical event of Jesus Christ. It is a fact that the Son of God took to Himself a human nature and became a man. Jesus Christ suffered and died on a cross. But the Word of God presents to us the Gospel promise: Jesus Christ died FOR YOU. Through the promise God creates faith in the individual. As a result, that individual trusts that the effect of Jesus' death was forgiveness of his sins.

We need to hear the Word, because faith comes from hearing the Word; but we need to be careful how we hear. Not all hearing of the Word results in faith. Hypocrites are gathered around the Word, but they don't trust in the promise. We need to hear so the Law convicts us of our sins, not just exposes the sins of others. We need to so that the promise presents to us the Savior of our sins, not just forgiveness for others.

Trusting in the forgiveness of our sins, believers are given a voice to speak of this glorious new salvation to others. The Lord has lit their lamps, and He desires that others may see this light of the Gospel promise.

We pray: O Lord, give us a noble and good heart. Amen.

## Lesson from the Book of Concord Transfiguration Sunday

### Article III.

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

—The Augsburg Confession

When it comes to sinful people who think they are not so sinful, it seems impossible for anyone sent from God to reach them, much less please them. Such was the case with John the Baptist. All the more sadly, it was also the case with the Lord Himself. Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached repentance and the forgiveness of sins to the people. Same message, two very different personalities.

The result was both John the Baptist and Jesus were mocked by the people and received personal attacks as the result of their preaching. Should we be surprised? No. When one thinks they are doing well in the sight of God, as did the Scribes and Pharisees, one isn't going to warm up to the idea of having to repent. If you think you are basically a good person, why the personal attacks against John and Jesus? Well, the answer is quite simple. God's law is clear that God's standard is perfection and nothing less. It's impossible to refute God's clear Word. So rather than attack the message, the only option left is to attack the messenger.

Such has been the case throughout history. God sends people to proclaim His Word of Law, and people rebel against the messenger. They do this because they do not want to hear that they aren't "basically good." Thankfully, God has not left our hearing up to us. Out of His grace and mercy the Holy Spirit works faith in us to believe what God says in His Law and to lead us to repentance. Once convicted, the Holy Spirit brings the peace of knowing all our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake.

We pray: Heavenly Father, grant us ears to hear Your Word always. Amen.

John the Baptist is the forerunner of Christ, preparing the way of the Lord. John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John pointed out Jesus saying, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all prophesy. He came to save us by His perfect life and His innocent suffering and death. Jesus came preaching the good news of the forgiveness of sins. Through holy Baptism we are united with Jesus' death and resurrection.

Though different people with different offices, John and Jesus agreed completely that God saves through faith in Christ. Those who listened to John also listened to Jesus. Through John's baptism "all the people...even the tax collectors" declared God to be just and right, even the justifier of those baptized.

Nevertheless, "the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him [John]." Their excuses were inadequate and inconsistent. They rejected John for his self-denial, but they rejected Jesus for His lack of asceticism. St. Luke shows that it was not really the lifestyle of John or Jesus, but the will of God that they rejected. They rejected His will that they should confess their sins and trust in the promised Savior for the forgiveness of sins.

We ought not let the personality of our pastor, parent, or any other church member keep us from hearing the Word of God. We ought not seek another way besides confessing sins and receiving the forgiveness of sins through the Gospel message. When God's children follow their heavenly Father's Word, the good and gracious wisdom of God is shown to be right and just—even justifying sinners.

We pray: Strengthen and keep us firm in Your Word and faith until we die, O Lord. Amen.

The Augsburg Confession, article XXI says, “that saints should be kept in remembrance so that our faith may be strengthened when we see what grace they received and how they were sustained by faith.” The remembrance of the centurion in Luke 7 can surely strengthen our faith.

First, God was gracious to this gentile centurion. He had come to the knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures and the one true God. The nation of Israel had been given the Word of God, and yet many of them did not consider the blessedness of their nation. This centurion did! This centurion not only clung to the Word of God for himself, but he wanted to be a light to others, and thus he used his wealth to build a synagogue for the reading and preaching of the Word.

Second, this centurion knows his humble position of having received grace; and he sustains himself by faith in a loving Jesus. In repentance he confesses, “For I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof,” and yet confidently trusts that Jesus would lovingly heal his sick servant.

Third, this centurion trusts that Jesus’ Word alone can do whatever the Lord wills.

We have such a gracious God to give “great faith” to this gentile centurion. No matter our situation, God has been gracious to us as well. He has shown us our sinful condition by the Law, and He has assured us by the Gospel to humbly approach the throne of grace, knowing that we will be healed of our sinful infirmity and given eternal life.

We pray: O gracious Lord, grant us such a great faith that confessing our sins, we may be sustained by Your promise of forgiveness and help. Lead us to bear witness to others concerning the help we have received. Amen.

So what’s the big deal with the Sabbath? To understand the Sabbath, and to understand what is going on in the Divine Service is to understand the difference between a Holy God and sinful man.

Regardless of what any atheist tries to tell you, people know there is a God. Paul makes that clear in the first chapter of Romans. The natural inclination of man is to think it is up to him to please God, or better stated, to please the god he creates for himself. That thought process can carry over to Christians when it comes to Sunday morning. Because our sinful nature is selfish, it is easy to think about what you are doing for God, rather than what God is doing for you.

But as our Lord said, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27 NKJV). The Sabbath of the Old Testament, and by extension the Sunday Divine Service we celebrate in the New Testament era of the Church, are the times God would have us receive from Him His gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30 NKJV). Indeed, God draws us to Himself so that we can have real rest from the worries of this life.

We pray: Heavenly Father, for Jesus’ sake grant unto us the peace that the world cannot give. Amen.

People are led to believe that demon possession is only like the horrifying spectacles depicted in movies. We are numbed and blinded to the reality that evil spirits manifest themselves all the time around us. The lies, vanity, and rebellion that come from evil hearts and minds are worse than any special effects that Hollywood puts on the screen.

The Pharisees were eager to twist what Jesus said and did so they could try to condemn His authority and protect their own. Such an exchange was not just a difference of opinion or miscommunication. It was the work of the Evil One. The Pharisees were possessed by the lie that they had the right to ignore Jesus' teaching and undermine His works. Their own works were corrupt, yet their mouths insisted that they were acting righteously. That is the power of demons.

Our Lord teaches us to pray "Deliver us from evil..." which can also be understood as "Deliver us from the Evil One..." The devil has been attacking us and sowing lies in our midst from the beginning of our human race. And the only reason we have not been overwhelmed by his unceasing attacks throughout the thousands and thousands of years is that God saves us from the power of the devil.

Our Lord's work of casting out demons is not about the gross spectacle of a twisted human form, nor is it about the vain spectacle of a wonder-worker who does supernatural shows of force. Christ's work is the holy work that takes place constantly with Word, deed, bodies, and souls, throughout history, as He alone is the One who has the power to crush the Evil Serpent and save us from sin and death.

We pray: Heavenly Father, deliver us from the Evil One and protect us in Your Son. Amen.

A test of whether someone is a true disciple of Christ is whether they love their enemies. There are not two kinds of Christians, so that some love their enemies and some don't. All Christians love their enemies because their heavenly Father loves His enemies. It's not that love makes us a son of God. Instead, love for our enemies shows us to be a disciple, who has been taught to be like our loving Savior and Teacher, Jesus Christ.

The description of what our enemy does is found in Luke 6:22, "Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil." How Christians are to behave in response to these actions is found in v. 35-36, "Love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore, be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."

Only a hypocrite would be unconcerned about saying one thing and doing another. For example, praying, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," but then not forgiving our enemies. When we find that we have not perfectly loved our enemies, then we will know that we are not yet "perfectly trained" (v.40). Thus, we hold on to our forgiving Lord who not only continues to mercifully forgive us, but continues to teach us to love our enemies.

We pray: Forgive us, merciful Lord, for our failure to follow Your teaching to love our enemies. Change our hearts so that we do good and love even those who will not return a measure of good and love. Amen.

St. Luke's account of Jesus' sermon includes four beatitudes. Each beatitude describes the present condition of a Christian, and then follows that statement with a reason for which the Christian is to be considered blessed.

The Christian knows that because of sin he is spiritually poor, but through faith in the promise of the Gospel he possesses all the riches of the kingdom of God. The Christian knows that he hungrily desires righteousness, but through faith he is completely filled with the forgiveness of sins. The Christian knows that in repentance our eyes weep over our sins, but through faith in the promise of the Gospel we have the joy of eternal joys, even laughter over the unexpected gift of salvation.

As long as we remain in this world our blessedness is the result of the gift of ongoing trust in Christ, through whom we received all blessings. We never move beyond faith. There is not a Christian perfectionism in which the person no longer hungers or weeps, and thus no longer needs to be satisfied and hear the good news of forgiveness. Our salvation is from faith to faith.

The final beatitude explains that there will always be those who hate Christians because of our connection to the Son of Man. Nevertheless, our blessedness consists in our heavenly reward, which we presently have by faith, and then will receive on the Last Day by sight. We are both reviled by the world, and blessed by the gift of a heavenly reward.

We pray: Heavenly Father, lead us by Your Law to see our need, so that we never cease receiving Your promise of the forgiveness of sins through the Gospel. Through Christ we are blessed. Amen.

“On the same day Jesus...” So begins today's reading. Immediately following His encounter with the Pharisees, we find Jesus being faithful to His calling. He cares for His people by giving them the most important thing, His Word.

While there may be particular details one may not understand, His people will “get it” when it comes to knowing that Jesus is their Savior from sin and death. That is because He sends His Spirit to call His people, to gather them, to enlighten them, to sanctify them, and to keep them in faith. Jesus leaves nothing undone when it comes to your salvation.

He makes that abundantly clear when He tells His disciples, “But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear” (Matthew 13:16 NKJV). Without God's blessing, we would not hear His call to repentance and those wonderful words of forgiveness of sins. Without God's blessing, we would not have the faith to see all that He does in our lives. Without God's blessing, we would simply be deaf and blind to what God does.

During this season of Epiphany we are once again reminded that we are blessed with eyes of faith to see that Jesus is God come in the flesh to save us from sin and death. We are blessed with ears to hear how God has pulverized our stony hearts into good soil, wherein the seed of faith can flourish and grow. Indeed, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phillipians 1:6 NKJV).

We pray: Heavenly Father, keep uw in the true faith. Amen.

Herod is a consummate politician. He is called out by John for taking his brother's wife as his own. So what does this powerful man do? Herod puts John into prison because John dared to speak the truth. Yet, Herod knows he can't push the issue too far because he doesn't want to get the people upset. So Herod hopes to have his cake and eat it, too. John is silenced and the people can't complain.

But when opportunity knocks, Herod seizes the moment. He now has an excuse to do what he knew he couldn't dare do previously for fear of the people. You can almost hear Herod telling the people, "I had to have John beheaded because I gave my word to Herodias' daughter. A king can't go back on his word." How little the life of another person means when it doesn't fit your own ambitions.

How different with our Lord! While Jesus knows the religious leaders are out to get Him, He remains focused on His work. He has compassion on the people. He feeds the multitude with a few fish and loaves. He calms the storm because He cares for His disciples. He heals the many, many people who are brought to Him.

But most importantly, He sacrifices His own life for people who justly deserved God's wrath and punishment. Jesus doesn't find excuses to get out of the situation. He meets the challenge head on by defeating our enemy, death, through His own death.

We pray: Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift that really does "keep on giving," your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Lesson from the Book of Concord Quinquagesima Sunday

### Chapter II, Article IV.

[B. What is Justifying Faith?]

The adversaries [Roman Catholics] feign that faith is only a knowledge of history, and, therefore, [they] teach that it can coexist with mortal sin. Hence, they say nothing concerning faith, by which Paul so frequently says that men are justified, because those who are accounted righteous before God do not live in mortal sin. But that faith which justifies, is not merely a knowledge of history, but it is to assent to the promise of God, in which, for Christ's sake, the remission of sins and justification are freely offered. [It is certainty or the certain trust in the heart, when, with my whole heart, I regard the promises of God as certain and true, through which there are offered me, without my merit, the forgiveness of sins, grace and all salvation, through Christ the Mediator.] And, that no one may suppose that it is mere knowledge, we will add further: it is to wish and to receive the offered promise of the remission of sins and of justification. And the distinction between this faith and the righteousness of the Law, can be easily discerned. Faith is the divine service, which receives the benefits offered by God; the righteousness of the Law is the divine service which offers to God our merits. By faith, God wishes Himself so to be honored, that we may receive from Him those things which He promises and offers.

But that faith signifies, not only a knowledge of history, but the faith which assents to the promise, Paul openly testifies, when he says (Rom. 4:16): "Therefore it is of faith, to the end the promise might be sure." For he judges, that the promise cannot be received, unless by faith. Wherefore, he compares them correlatively, and connects promise and faith. Although it will be easy to decide what faith is, if we consider the Creed, where this article certainly stands: "The forgiveness of sins." Therefore, it is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, was raised again, unless we add also this article, which is the final cause of the history: "The forgiveness of sins." To this article, the rest must be referred, viz. that, for Christ's sake, and not for the sake of our merits, forgiveness of sins is given us. For what need would there be, that Christ be given for our sins, if for our sins our merits can give satisfaction?

—Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §48–52



In today's reading, we encounter three men—a leper, a paralytic, and a tax collector—whose plights seemed beyond hope in the minds of many people. For the first two, they were living with a death sentence hovering over their heads, while the tax collector was in little better shape, since they were lumped with the 'sinners' as those who were seen as the impenitent.

And each one was spiritually restored: the leper was sent to the temple; as Jesus said to him, "But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded." The paralytic received the gift of absolution before the Lord had even healed the infirmity in his body; "When He saw their faith, He said to him, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.'" And to the tax collector, Levi (that is, Matthew the Evangelist), the Lord granted a new vocation: "And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he left all, rose up, and followed Him." Thus it was, when the Pharisees and scribes expressed their shock at Jesus eating and drinking "with tax collectors and sinners," that the Lord spoke of the repentance which had been worked in their hearts: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." The one whom the Pharisees and scribes so callously dismissed would be the instrument through which the Lord would cause His Gospel to be written—a miracle as great (or greater) than the purification of a leper and the restoration of health to a paralytic!

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

As we conclude our readings for this week two things remained consistent. One, the church leaders of Jesus' day were still nit-picking at Him. Two, the church leaders of His day were not winning their war of words with Jesus.

But before we get to thinking too highly of ourselves in comparison to the Pharisees, maybe we do well to ask ourselves the same question Jesus asked Peter, "Are you also still without understanding?" It is so easy to forget that the only reason we can understand anything about what God is telling us is because God has opened our ears to hear.

The judgment of God is clear. We deserve nothing. Yet for Jesus' sake we are given everything we need for life in this world. Most importantly, we are given faith to believe our sins are forgiven for His sake. Daily, God must show us that "out of the heart [our sinful vile hearts] proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19 NKJV). Were it not for the Holy Spirit leading us to repentance each and every day of our lives in this world, our hearts would return to being stoney and cold.

Thus we sing with King David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." The constant reminder from God to us is to bring us time and time again to the understanding that our salvation depends totally on Him.

We pray: Heavenly Father, grant us clean hearts for Jesus' sake, and keep us ever in the true faith unto life everlasting. Amen.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord Septuagesima Sunday

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21: LUKE 4:14–44

SEXAGESIMA

## CHAPTER XI. OF GOD'S ETERNAL FOREKNOWLEDGE [PRE-DESTINATION] AND ELECTION.

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

### AFFIRMATIVE

The Pure and True Doctrine concerning this Article.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Therefore we should judge concerning this our election to eternal life neither

"And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; but He said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.'" Today's reading is a reminder of the centrality of the proclamation of the Word to our Lord's ministry. There were many who took note of the signs which Jesus did—after all, was this not the point at which the people of Nazareth took offense?—but the signs were a testimony to the faithfulness of His doctrine.

The people of Nazareth were filled with rage at Jesus because He told them the truth. They had been very eager to hear Him, until He told them the truth. Then they were filled with wrath and sought to kill Him.

When the Lord performed signs in Capernaum, the demons acknowledged who it was that cast them out—but He commanded them to be silent. The evil ones would not be permitted to corrupt their hearers, nor to defile the name of the Lord.

We should not marvel when there are many people who reject the Word today. If the unbelieving thus reacted in the years of our Lord's ministry prior to His crucifixion, we should not be surprised that they want to "kill the messenger" today. But their anger does not refute the Word, and it does not silence the messenger. The Law will stand against all who do not repent, and the Gospel will console those who hear and believe.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Attempting to appear wise, the Sadducees revealed themselves to be fools, for they sought to make the idea of the resurrection look ridiculous, and all they accomplished was embarrassing themselves in public. Like modern atheists, they made a big show of their chop-logic argument against the resurrection, but Jesus refuted them with a direct reference to one of the best known passages of Holy Scripture, declaring: “But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken.”

The scribes, on this occasion, demonstrated wisdom concerning the Law, and heard Jesus declare to one of them: “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” Nevertheless, because of their lack of faith and their hypocrisy, the Lord said concerning them: “These will receive greater condemnation.”

But it was not the scribes and the Sadducees—those who were held in high esteem by many from among the people—whom the Lord praised on account of faith. Instead, it is the faithful, impoverished widow whom the Lord commends, for the hypocrisy of the rich and of the scribes is far from her: “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.” The Lord discerns the hearts of all, and beheld in this one a faith which trusts in the Lord.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

from reason nor from the Law of God, which would lead either into a dissipated, dissolute epicurean life, or into despair, and would excite in the heart of men pernicious thoughts (and such thoughts cannot be effectually guarded against as long as they follow their own reason), so that they think to themselves: “If God has elected me to salvation, I cannot be condemned, although I do whatever I will.” And again: “If I am not elected to eternal life, it matters not what good I do; for my efforts are nevertheless all in vain.”

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

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

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

12. Moreover, a Christian should apply himself to the article concerning the eternal election of God, so far as it has been revealed in God’s Word, which presents Christ to us as the Book of Life, which, by the preaching of the holy Gospel, He opens and spreads out to us, as it is written (Rom. 8:30): “Whom He did predestinate, them He also called.” In Him, therefore, we should seek the eternal election of the Father, who, in His eternal divine counsel, determined that He would save no one except those who acknowledge His Son, Christ, and truly believe on Him. Other thoughts are to be entirely banished, as they proceed not from God, but from the suggestion of Satan, whereby he attempts to weaken or to entirely remove from us the glorious consolation which we have in this salutary doctrine, viz. that we know that out of pure grace, without any merit of our own, we have been elected in Christ to eternal life, and that no one can pluck us out of His hand; as He has promised this gracious election not only with mere words, but has also certified it with an oath, and sealed it with the holy sacraments, where we can call to mind in our most severe temptations, and from them comfort ourselves, and thereby quench the fiery darts of the devil.

“Who touched my clothes?”

Our Lord is on His way to the home of Jairus, an important synagogue ruler. He is surrounded by a “multitude thronging” Him, and all of a sudden He asked, “Who touched my clothes?” It is a strange question, but Jesus sensed that power had gone out of Himself. So he asks, and someone confesses. Who? A most unimportant person, at least in the eyes of the world. A woman with a flow of blood.

With such an affliction, she probably felt tired all the time. Even worse, she would have constantly been ceremonially unclean, ineligible to participate in the worship life of Israel, and untouchable as far as any faithful Israelite man was concerned. By faith, she touched Jesus’ garment and was healed.

Moreover, this woman who was so unimportant to everyone else mattered to Jesus. We think in terms of the objective and the obstacles, but sometimes the distraction becomes the purpose. God grant us not only to set faithful goals, but faithfully to look for the opportunities in the distractions as well.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Why did the Lord curse the fig tree? It had the appearance of fruitfulness, but it bore no fruit because it was not the right season. This is not a matter of Jesus forgetting when it was fig season. Nor is it a visceral emotional response. Jesus was hungry and, despite appearances, the tree bore no fruit, so He said to the fig tree: “Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.”

The story of the fig tree is wrapped around that of Jesus’ return to the temple in Jerusalem, and the second cleansing of the temple. We read the account of Jesus’ first cleansing of the temple in John 2. Jesus’ first cleansing of the temple therefore provided an occasion for Him to prophesy His resurrection from the dead. And now, when He returned to the temple to cleanse it a second time, “Then He taught, saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”

The purpose for the temple had been abused; it still had the appearance of being a house of prayer for all nations, but it was barren. The proclamation of the divine doctrine led the scribes and chief priests to conspire to destroy the Son of God.

It was thus that Jesus and His disciples returned to the fig tree. “Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, ‘Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away.’” The Word of the Lord was fulfilled.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

St. Mark teaches us that the disciples did not blithely follow the Lord as they approach Jerusalem: “Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid.” And the Lord spoke to them concerning all those things which were to come to pass, so that, at the right time, they would understand what He had said to them.

James and John seem to misappropriate what the Lord has said, perhaps imagining that their fear has been misplaced and that Jesus would soon openly establish His kingdom in this world. He replies to their self-promotion by teaching them how clueless they actually are: “You do not know what you ask.” It is thus that the Lord has taught us to pray the Lord’s Prayer, that we might offer petitions which are God-pleasing, for it is not infrequent for Christians to offer up petitions even more misguided than those of James and John.

Blind Bartimaeus is the model of faith. He cries out to the Lord, and faithfully hears the Lord’s invitation through men: “Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you.” In faith, he asks for his sight, and receives the word of the Lord: “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way; your faith has made you well.’ And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road.” Saved through faith, he beheld and followed his Savior.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“And He marveled because of their unbelief.”

Jesus was in His home region. He began to teach, and the reaction of the people goes quickly from amazement to contempt. It says He could do no mighty work there. It’s not that faith pulls miracles out of Jesus; faith simply receives what Jesus gives. But unbelief refuses His gifts. The long promised Messiah was among the people, but they were so fixated on Jesus’ familiarity that they could not see, and in fact refused, what God was trying to give them.

We see that same issue around us today. Pastors are ordinary enough men. They make use of ordinary water, and ordinary bread and wine. They speak ordinary sounding words. How easy it would be to “fixate on the familiar” to such an extent that we did not see, or even refused, the spiritual treasure that God would use them to impart to us. Be not so! Heed the call to repentance, rejoice in Jesus’ mighty work of forgiveness, and live this day looking forward to heaven.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.”

Jesus has just fed the 5,000. He sends the disciples off so that He can have some solitary time to pray (a topic worthy of devotional reflection all by itself!). Jesus sees His disciples having a hard time rowing on the sea, so He walks out to them--on the water! He gets in the boat, the winds die down, and then we read “they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled.” And that, because they had not understood about the loaves.

What is there to understand? Plain and simple, it is the fact that Jesus is true God. God alone can make a little bread and fish into enough to feed thousands. And God alone rules wind and wave. They didn't understand the one, so they were amazed beyond measure about the other as well. What they did not yet understand, they eventually would; and we must. The divine nature in Christ is necessary for our salvation. For Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to have unlimited capacity to take away the sin of the world, it had to be the sacrifice of an infinite, unlimited man--the God-man. God grant us faith to see this, and so to know the true Jesus, our Savior.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.’” The close association between this verse and the Baptismal rite contributes to the familiarity of this passage.

Read in context, we see that Jesus addressed the broader topic being a child of God in the world. The rich young man heard words which establish the context for them all, as Jesus declared: “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Do not defraud,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’” The man did not recognize his violation of these commandments, but still “went away sorrowful” because of his love of money. “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!”

Even as he fights temptation, the one who is baptized knows Christ Jesus has atoned for all sin, and trusts in His Savior. When Peter thought of the loss of all that the world treasures, the Lord taught him concerning all that which the children of God have gained through their baptism and the faith which the Lord establishes: “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord

## Sexagesima Sunday

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13: MARK 7:1-30

SEPTUAGESIMA

### Article VII.

Also, they [the Lutherans] teach, that One holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church, it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: “One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,” etc. [Eph. 4:5, 6]

### Article VIII.

Although the Church properly is the Congregation of Saints and true believers, nevertheless, since, in this life, many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith, it is lawful to use the Sacraments, which are administered by evil men; according to the saying of Christ: “The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat,” etc. [Matt. 23:2]. Both the Sacraments and Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, notwithstanding they be administered by evil men.

They condemn the Donatists, and such like, who denied it to be lawful to use the ministry of evil men in the Church, and who thought the ministry of evil men to be unprofitable and of none effect.

—The Augsburg Confession

### XII.

#### Of the Church.

We do not acknowledge them [the Roman Catholics] as the Church, and they are not; we also will not listen to those things which, under the name of Church, they either enjoin or forbid. For, thank God, today a child seven years old knows what the Church is, viz. saints, believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children repeat: “I believe in one holy Christian Church.” This holiness does not consist in an alb, a tonsure, a long gown and other of their ceremonies devised by them beyond Holy Scripture, but consists in the Word of God and true faith.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article XII, The Book of Concord

“He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.” (Mark 7:37)

The Gospel according to St. Mark gives us its theme in the very first verse: “the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” So we go looking for “Son of God” in this account. What do we find? The Father declares it, both at Jesus’ baptism and His transfiguration. And the demons catch on, and tremble. But no human being ever calls Him “Son of God” until the very end, as Jesus hangs dead on the cross. Then the centurion says it, “...surely this man was the Son of God.”

In our reading Jesus performs a mighty miracle. And people are pleased with such a benevolent display of power. “He has done all things well,” they say. But those things are not the real point. They only move us on to the far more important issue of His crucifixion. Knowing that Jesus is the Son of God matters because of what He did: the Son of God died on the cross for us. And that’s where it matters that we confess it.

Knowing Jesus as a wonder working Son of God, even if anyone had said it, would still not have been saving. Confessing Jesus as the crucified Son of God finally confesses Jesus Christ as our Savior. God grant us to know Him, and confess Him.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him.”

Our Lord fed the 5,000 two chapters earlier. Then, earlier in this chapter, He feeds the 4,000. In between, we see Jesus healing many people. Now, the Pharisees want “a sign from heaven.” What does it take to convince them? Jesus has clearly shown that He is the One greater than Moses. But none are so blind as those who do not want to see. Jesus refuses them.

Why were the Pharisees trying so hard not to believe in Jesus? Surely it is because faith in Him would have been most inconvenient. They would have to forsake ego, and the egotistical doctrine that they could be saved by their own meticulous religious observances. They would lose their place in society and among their friends. They would have to admit they were wrong.

Faithfulness entails allowing Jesus to inconvenience us. Before Him and one another, we acknowledge our sins. And with the help of God we actually rejoice as those forgiven by the blood of Jesus. We amend our sinful lives, with all the inconvenience entailed by cleaning up our moral and spiritual messes. God grant us to love Jesus more than our own convenience.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!”

Our Lord takes Peter, James, and John up on the mountain. There, He is transfigured, and He holds discourse with Moses and Elijah. Moses represents the Law, and Elijah the Prophets.

Jesus is indeed fulfilling their work, fulfilling all that was written in the Law and in the Prophets. And Peter is so overwhelmed that he proposes to build three tabernacles; one for each of them. The voice from heaven speaks otherwise: “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” Peter would have engaged in a self-chosen work of piety; God would have him (and us) listen to Jesus’ Words. He would have us “hear Him.”

This is important, especially as we approach Lent. A lot of people engage in self-chosen works that they think are pious: giving up chocolate, or tobacco, or some waste of time TV show or computer game. But what God really wants us to do is to listen to Jesus. And we do that by going to Church, attending Bible classes, and studying His Word at home. God grant us grace this coming Lent, and always, to listen to Jesus, and to treasure His Words of forgiveness and eternal life on account of His being lifted up on the cross.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.