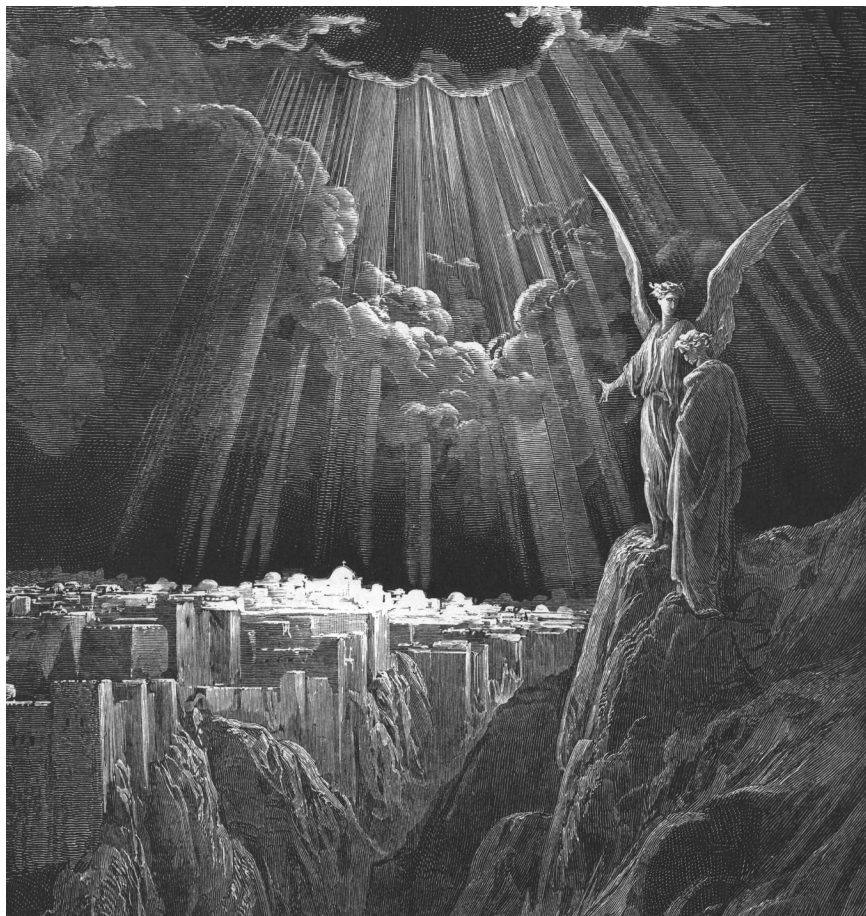


THE LUTHERAN HERALD



NOVEMBER 4–30, 2024

A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

The Calendar

The Lutheran Hymnal (1941): TLH; 2022 Supplement: ASBH

(Monday: M; Tuesday: T; Wednesday: W; Thursday: R; Friday: F; Saturday: S)

November 3	Trinity 23	ASBH 61
November 10	Trinity 25	ASBH 63
November 11 (M)	<i>St. Martin of Tours, Bishop & Confessor</i>	ASBH 109 (new series)
November 17	Trinity 26	ASBH 64
November 24	Trinity 27	ASBH 65
November 30 (S)	<i>St. Andrew, Apostle</i>	ASBH 109 (2022 Supplement)

St. Ignatius Lutheran Theological Seminary classes continue

Classes for the Fall 2024 Quarter will end on **November 15**. The classes offered this quarter are:

E000—Greek (3 hrs.)

S000—Prolegomena (2 hrs.)

H000—O.T. Survey (1 hr.)

H001—Classical Antiquity (1 hr.)

P000—Liturgics 1 (3 hrs.)

St. Ignatius currently has two students, Duncan Geldenhuys (Australia) and Jonathan Teo Zin Han (Singapore).

The Winter 2024 Quarter will begin **December 2**. The “Christmas Break” will begin Monday, **December 23**. Winter Quarter will resume on **January 6** (Epiphany) and will continue until Friday, **February 21**. Classes for the Winter Quarter are:

E000—Greek (3 hrs.)

S001—Lutheran Confessions 1 (3 hrs.)

E001—Hermeneutics/Law & Gospel (3 hrs.)

(Liturgics Practicum 1 is being deferred until Summer.)

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XVI.

Of Civil Affairs, they teach, that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and that it is right for Christians to bear civil office, to sit as judges, to determine matters by the Imperial and other existing laws, to award just punishments, to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to make oath when required by the magistrates, to marry, to be given in marriage.

They condemn the Anabaptists who forbid these civil offices to Christians. They condemn also those who do not place the perfection of the Gospel in the fear of God and in faith, but in forsaking civil offices; for the Gospel teaches an eternal righteousness of the heart. Meanwhile, it does not destroy the State or the family, but especially requires their preservation as ordinances of God, and in such ordinances the exercise of charity. Therefore, Christians are necessarily bound to obey their own magistrates and laws, save only when commanded to sin, for then they ought to obey God rather than men [Acts 5:29].

—The Augsburg Confession

ARTICLE IV. Of the Gospel

We will now return to the Gospel, which not merely in one way gives us counsel and aid against sin; for God is superabundantly rich in His grace. First, through the spoken Word by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world; which is the peculiar office of the Gospel. Secondly, through baptism. Thirdly, through the holy sacrament of the altar. Fourthly, through the power of the keys, and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren, Matt. 18:20: “Where two or three are gathered together,” etc.

The Smalcald Articles, Part III

We are inundated in our society with warnings about treacherous and ignorant people that are about to destroy our way of life. Beyond the fact that it is never good to feed oneself a steady diet of outrage and fear, it is also the opposite of what our Lord tells us. Jesus tells us that persecution will come, but we are not to worry about it. He says: “do not worry about your life” (Matt. 6:25). And again, our Lord says: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you” (Matt. 5:11).

Here in chapter 10, Jesus tells us what the people of His Church will have to endure. We will be torn up like sheep among wolves. The world will hate our perspective on everything because our worldview is shaped by Christ. They will try to silence us. And we are not called to mount a counter attack when it comes to defending the Gospel. Don't worry about whether or not you will succeed in persuading anyone. Bear witness to the Gospel as God will give you the words and works you need. It doesn't have to be eloquent. God will fit the words to His purposes, and He has taught us what deeds of love look like in Christ. We do not need to worry about our enemies. Our Lord will care for us.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Christians do not seek out martyrdom for the faith, as if it were something they would achieve for themselves. Martyrdom is not just a chance to prove one's devotion or display one's zeal. It will find those for whom our Lord has appointed it. As with all things, God appoints times and seasons for everything. For some, success and victory; for some, resistance; for some, remaining in the secret place; and for others, martyrdom. We are not greater than our Master. If He waited on the Father's time, so should we.

Sometimes it is prudent to avoid conflict. We should live in peace with the world as much as it is in our power to do so. Hostility will come soon enough. Sometimes patience and quiet witness works in the end. Jesus' own relatives from Galilee could not be counted as genuine believers at this time. Eventually, they did come to believe. When the time was right, Jesus stood against the powers of His day and won our salvation. Like our Lord, we are to submit to God and allow Him to choose our path. He will direct our steps at His right time.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

False prophets are producers of bad fruit. The bad fruit that they produce is their false doctrine, their false teachings. This is what Jesus is primarily warning against. There may be a sense in which the bad fruit is bad behavior, but it is primarily, and most importantly, doctrine. Jesus teaches us that we can tell who truly is a spokesman for God and who is a deceptive wolf. The way that we can tell is not through miraculous signs like prophecy, healing, or any other spectacular event. It is not even through good, godly behavior. The way we can tell the difference is by the doctrine that the pastor teaches. What he teaches or does not teach is proof positive of what kind of tree he is, either good or bad.

We shouldn't just look at how nice and peaceful a pastor or a group of people are. That doesn't really tell the story. Many people are enamored with groups like the Amish. People say things like, "aren't they just such nice people?" But it is their doctrine that matters, not how nice they are. It is really important that we discern who is true and who is false, because the consequences are more than just temporary.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Ministers must immerse themselves in the words of faith and good doctrine. Truth must be of the utmost importance. We should never just defend ‘our team’, regardless of the truth. Sound doctrine and truth must be cherished as precious treasures. If a minister devotes himself to sound doctrine and truth, he will be a blessing to the Church. A party man or ‘team player’ is useless without sound doctrine.

This applies to all Christians. We are not only to reject and shun false doctrine, but we are to “reject profane and old wives’ fables.” It is appropriate to carefully refute false doctrine with sound arguments. But these “fables” of old women, these rumors, these conspiracies, we should reject them. To put it in an even better way, we should disdain to be bothered with them. Don’t give them the dignity of a real response. A true leader, a true shepherd, doesn’t traffic in rumors and silly conspiracies. He leads his people to sound doctrine and truth. He leads his people to live above reproach with regard to piety and truthfulness. We cling firmly to sound doctrine, pious life, and truth.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

As Western Civilization dies, the “wisdom” of the unbelievers becomes more and more bizarre. Darkness envelops the mind of the worldly man. He believes absurd things and denies obvious truth. He looks down on the simple-minded Christian. In the end, the Lord will reveal who is truly wise and who is truly foolish.

In a more subtle way, we must beware of false “wisdom” in the Church. It is taught by those who have new programs and ideas about how to *save* the Church. Unlike those in the past, they “finally understand what the church needs.” They “understand how to reach the youth of today.” Such teachers want something new and demand that the old traditions be abandoned. But they not only abandon the old traditions, they question even the Scriptures. Many often compromise on moral teachings of the faith, claiming to have a more subtle or nuanced understanding. But in reality, they are succumbing to the spirit of the time, the social pressure they feel. They don’t wish to be fools in the eyes of their neighbors and colleagues. They become “wise” and sophisticated. They are “up to date” with the latest scholarship. But in the end, they make shipwreck of their faith and lead many others to destruction, as well.

In the Church we are faithful to Christ. Our wisdom is the Gospel of His righteousness and forgiveness, which is given to us on account of His cross. That alone is what saves the Church and guides our path.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

There are so many lessons to draw from this story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal, but I would like to focus on verse 40. "Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there." Notice that the sin of the prophets of Baal was so great that they had to be executed immediately. Sin is a serious thing.

The Western world today is functionally universalist. Many think all religions are equal and lead their followers to God. This is similar to the ancient world. What would Elijah say to this? We also do not believe that one institution like the Roman Catholic church is *the* Church, beyond which there is no salvation. We have the concept of fundamental and non-fundamental doctrine. Faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary. It is the difference between eternal life and death. Non-fundamental doctrinal errors can destroy faith and should not be indulged. However, heaven will be populated by many people who were in error over some non-fundamental doctrine.

We do not exclude people from our altars because we believe they are outside the faith, but because we are not fully in agreement on *all* doctrine. The altar is still the place where we exercise rigor. Heaven will not have the worshipers of Baal, Allah, or any of the other idols in men's minds.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity

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 [i.e., Thomas Aquinas, of the 13th century] that a monastic vow is on an equality with baptism. This is blasphemy against God.

—Smalcald Articles, Part III

“Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

People ‘church shop’. And what do they look for? Often it’s the nice building, the exciting youth group, the congregation that is full of “clean living” and “proper” folk. So when Jesus warns them about leaven, it is easy to think in Pharisee terms: it seems like Jesus is telling them to avoid unclean food. These days, it gets twisted another way: the Pharisees were sticklers for obeying rules, so it sounds like one should avoid that by ignoring unrepentant sin.

But no, these things were not what Jesus was warning them against. The danger was false doctrine. The Pharisees would have you believe that eternal life depended on your works. The Sadducees would have you believe there is no afterlife. We have plenty of advocates for these false doctrines today. Turn away from them. Jesus Christ died on the cross for you, so you could have eternal life as a free gift. Cling to Christ. Faithfully hold fast, in true repentance, to the promise of the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Collect: O God, who didst call Martin to preach the Gospel, grant to Thy servants steadfastness in the confession of the true faith that they would preach that unchanging Gospel in the midst of the darkness of this age; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands.”

Isaiah prophesies that the children of Israel would think themselves utterly forsaken by God. And little wonder: they were going to go into exile. Such is the nature of the drastic mercies of God. He will play hardball if that is what it takes to bring us to repentance. But the suffering and death of Israel was not the plan. He gave them hardship that they might repent and ultimately be saved. Salvation is always God’s desire.

Israel would not be forsaken, not *en masse*. Rather, Israel would be reduced down to One, in the person of Jesus Christ. He would be forsaken by God as He bore the wages of all sin. He even said so from the cross: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” With the nails that held Him to the cross, Israel was literally inscribed on His hands. And those are Israel who have the faith of Abraham, not those who are of the bloodline of Abraham. We are Israel who have faith in Israel’s Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Collect: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth.”

This principle of being separate is found throughout the Bible, even in the New Testament. 1 Peter 2:9 says that Christians are a “peculiar” people. 2 Corinthians 6:17 (quoting the Old Testament) admonishes us to “come out from among them and be separate.” Some Christians, misunderstanding the Lord’s meaning, have created for themselves their own “good works” in order to be different from the world and, in theory, pleasing to God.

Inventing our own good works is not pleasing to God. Listening to what He tells us good works are, these things we should do. And if we did what He said, if we were people among whom there was a faithful daily devotion to God, a respectful obedience to authority, no sexual immorality, no gossip, we would be quite different enough, without concocting man-made good works. God grant us so to love the salvation we have in Christ Jesus, that we would faithfully live out the gift of our holiness and so be discernibly different from the rest of the world.

Collect: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14: MAT. 24:29–35 25TH S. A. TRINITY

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”

Oh, how we treasure the things of this world! And yet, they will all pass away. We know it, but still these things allure us. Much of our life is involved in earning the money to buy things, and then taking care of the things, and also saving up enough so that in retirement we will still be able to acquire the things that we need or want. Can this be good stewardship? Yes, but sometimes “stewardship” can be an excuse for caring too much about the things of this world.

Our Lord Jesus speaks much to us about the Kingdom of Heaven, in His Sermon on the Mount, in His parables, even in the words He speaks together with the miracles He does. We lay hold of those words, which are the words of repentance and forgiveness through faith in our crucified Savior. So cling to those words! All else will pass away, but the words of the Lord will not. And since His words declare us forgiven and righteous, and bespeak eternal life to us, we endure unto all eternity, just as our risen Lord Jesus does, and just as His words do.

Collect: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”

Time and time again, false prophets and false prophetesses have arisen, claiming to know the day of our Lord’s coming again. Sometimes they are minimally more subtle. “It says we cannot know the day or the hour,” they say, “but we might still be able to figure out the month, or the year!” They think they have fulfilled our Lord’s precise words, yet they have overthrown His clear meaning. We do not know when He will return. We do not know. Make peace with that.

You are forgiven through faith in Christ. Eternal life is yours. Ultimately, this is what matters. Martin Luther once famously said, “If I knew the world would end tomorrow, I would still plant an apple tree today.” As the redeemed of the Lord, be about your vocations. Do today what He has given you today, whether the world ends tomorrow or a thousand years from now. It is not given us to know times and days, but only to trust that the Day will come, and to faithfully do our duties until then. God grant us to do them in the joyous certainty of our salvation.

Collect: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16: MAT. 24:43–51 25TH S. A. TRINITY

“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Our Lord gives us a most profound insight into the wisdom of God. “Why,” one might ask, “does He not tell us when the end will be?” We think, “If only He would tell us, we could be ready! We could prepare!” But let us unpack what that means. In reality, our old sinful flesh would be sorely tempted to procrastinate about preparation until the last possible moment (as many of us are tempted to do with so many things!). We would end up not preparing until we *had* to.

Instead, our Lord admonishes us to “be ready,” that is, all the time. If we do not know when it will happen, we find ourselves invited to be ready for it at all times, and this is wisdom from God. So consider what it means to be ready: to be sincerely repentant, to trust in Christ Jesus for our salvation, to be devoted to the things of the Lord, particularly His Word and Sacraments. God grant us this day (and every day) to be ready: repentantly ready, faithfully ready, sacramentally ready.

Collect: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twenty-sixth Sunday after Trinity

CHAPTER III, ARTICLE VI.

But they [Romanists] object, that love is preferred to faith and hope. For Paul says (1 Cor. 13:13): “The greatest of these is charity.” Now, it is in accordance with this, that to justify is the greatest and chief virtue. Although Paul, in this passage, properly speaks of love toward one’s neighbor, and indicates that love is the greatest, because it has most fruits. Faith and hope have to do only with God; but love has infinite offices externally towards men. Nevertheless we grant to the adversaries that love towards God and our neighbor is the greatest virtue, because the chief commandment is this: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God” (Matt. 22:37). But how will they infer thence that love justifies? The greatest virtue, they say, justifies. By no means. For just as even the greatest or first Law does not justify, so also the greatest virtue of the Law does not justify. But that virtue justifies which apprehends Christ, which communicates to us Christ’s merits, by which we receive grace and peace from God. But this virtue is faith. For as it has been often said, faith is not only knowledge, but much rather to wish to receive or apprehend those things, which are offered in the promise concerning Christ. Moreover this obedience towards God, viz. to wish to receive the offered promise, is no less a divine service, λατρεία, than is love. God wishes us to believe Him, and to receive from Him blessings, and this He declares to be true divine service.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, ¶104–107

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18: LUKE 19:11–27 26TH S. A. TRINITY

Jesus' parable of the minas teaches us about stewardship. The nobleman in the parable distributes minas to his servants with instructions to do business with them until he returns, and he expects those minas to earn some kind of profit. In this life, we see that we are not all equally talented, but all of us have some gift that God has given us that we can use to serve Him and help our neighbors. This parable cautions against hiding away our talents and failing to use them out of fear that we cannot do enough.

Like the nobleman in the parable, our Lord Jesus Christ will return in person someday—maybe soon, maybe not, but He will surely return—and He will reward those who have used His gifts faithfully. By the power of His Spirit, may we all be found faithful in the use of the gifts and talents He has given us, for His glory and for helping our fellow man. May we not be found to have hidden or despised the gifts and talents He has given us.

Collect: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here, and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

We should understand as believers that we were saved *from* sin, not *for* sin. But every once in a while we may need a reminder of this. St. Paul reminds us in his epistle to the Romans, and St. Peter reminds us in our reading for today.

Furthermore, if we still have friends who are not believers, they may not understand why we no longer have the same desires for our old sinfully self-indulgent ways, like the sinfulness associated with drunkenness, lewdness, and all that goes with it. Christ suffered and died for us; not so that we could give in to all of our sinful lusts and desires, but so that we could be free from them, and begin to live lives pleasing to God, doing good works according to His will. From a human standpoint, it may hurt us to have those we once counted friends speak ill of us because we refuse to participate in the same sins with them. But how much better might our testimony as Christians be that we should avoid those things? We should still pray for and seek their repentance and conversion. Would this not represent a better kind of friendship?

Collect: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here, and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

If anyone had reasons to boast in the flesh it was St. Paul. He lists a number of his fleshly qualifications in our reading for today: circumcised on the eighth day, born of the stock of Israel, specifically from the tribe of Benjamin. He had everything going for him, according to the flesh, and according to those who valued those things.

But St. Paul very specifically says that he counts all of those things not as gain to him, but loss. This is because our hope and our trust must be in Christ, and not in our own flesh. St. Paul understood this very well. This was why he warned the Philippians about the “dogs” who were encouraging people to return to the righteousness of the Law.

As St. Paul points out, true righteousness comes from faith in Christ, not through the Law. Even St. Paul, with all of his fleshly accomplishments, boasts not in his own merit and work. Rather, he would suffer the loss of those things and be found in Christ. It is this righteousness that comes from Christ through faith. This gives us the same hope that we too will share in Christ’s resurrection someday, and that we will spend eternity in glory with our Lord and Savior.

Collect: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here, and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

As strong as St. Paul's hope was in Jesus Christ, he understood that it would potentially be a long road before he attained that for which he hoped, and for which we hope: eternal life with Christ in the world to come. For St. Paul, a big part of looking forward to what that attainment would mean for him was leaving behind the concerns of the flesh, and the trust in the flesh, as was the focus of yesterday's reading.

It must have been hard for Paul to wait as he did, knowing what was ahead for him. He saw the trouble and travail that was caused by the false teachers that he had to contend with during his ministry. But waiting, pressing forward, and, most importantly, trusting in God to fulfill His promises are exactly the things that Paul encourages us to do. This is what Paul himself did, as an example for us and all the Church. We, too, when we feel weighed down by the troubles and cares of this world, can do what St. Paul did and be encouraged by the "upward call of God in Christ Jesus," and press on toward it in faith.

Collect: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here, and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Sometimes God allows great tragedies to befall people in this world. Our reading for today has two such examples: the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, and the eighteen who died when the tower of Siloam fell and killed them. It is tempting for us to believe that people who suffer such tragedies are worse sinners, and that they suffered so because of that. The message for us is clear: Repent! When we hear news of such tragedies we should consider whether we are doing something that we should not be doing. If we find that we are, we should repent of it. This is what we should be doing instead of trying to assess whether the people who suffered such things were more sinful than others.

God is even patient with us when we should repent, as is shown by the parable of the barren fig tree, also in our reading for today. The man pleads for another year for the fig tree, and gets it. Thus the fig tree has one more opportunity to bear fruit before it is destroyed. This shows how God is patient and merciful with us, as well. But let us not abuse His mercy and patience by continuing in sin for which we know we should repent.

Collect: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here, and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23: HEB. 10:26–31 26TH S. A. TRINITY

Today's reading is a terrifying warning for us if we return to, and persevere in, willfully sinning without repentance—that is, knowing that something is sinful, that we should not be doing it, and proceeding with it anyway, and do not repent. The author of the epistle calls this trampling the Son of God underfoot and insulting the Spirit of grace. May we never be found guilty of this!

We rightly and frequently preach God's grace and His mercy. We do this by His command. But in preaching the full counsel of God, we must also acknowledge that it is possible for us to reject God's grace, to turn our backs on Him and His mercy. When that has happened we should not look for or expect mercy. But if we are concerned that we have done this, it is likely that we have not, for the truly impenitent will not consider trampling the Son of God underfoot to be a serious matter. So let us carefully examine ourselves, to see if there is anything else for which we should repent. Staying close to God in Word and Sacrament is the best protection from this kind of fate. And let us watch out for each other and encourage each other not to fall into these kinds of sins.

Collect: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here, and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Last Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XVII.

Also they teach, that, at the Consummation of the World, Christ shall appear for judgment, and shall raise up all the dead; He shall give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils He shall condemn to be tormented without end.

They condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils. They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed (exterminated).

—The Augsburg Confession

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 25; MARK 13:32–37 27TH S. A. TRINITY

Our Lord tells us to “Watch!” We are to be humble, understand that we do not know all things, and respect His headship as our Maker and Savior. The time for resting will come later. Even Adam and Eve were given the divine example to work for six days and then rest on the seventh. They were commanded to work and be faithful, which is the same as being told to “Watch!” Eve and Adam thought they knew better and, leaning on their own assessment of things, they failed to watch out for the wiles of the Serpent. They forgot their place in the work of the Lord’s kingdom.

Our sinful hearts tell us to “Relax.” In our own eyes we think we know better than our God, and we seek to do things on our terms. Our Lord tells us to watch and work according to His gracious commands because He desires that His love be made known to as many people as possible before the Last Day. But we want to indulge our own carelessness and focus on serving our own pursuits. Being ready to face judgment is not just about you! His very good will for mankind is that we should all do the works of love and service for each other so that more people may be ready and watching in faith!

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Our Lord gives us an image of the glorious rest we will have in the life of the world to come. The present world is characterized by sweat, toil, tears, sorrow, pain, and death. He is still with us in this world; He continues to work and show His merciful love through His Church. But when Christ Jesus returns again in glory, and all the living and dead shall be judged, then we will see the old things pass away as He makes all things new according to His holy will.

We do not have to tire ourselves out trying to know the exact day and time of His return, or what it will all look like in detail. Our Lord tells us what we need to know, and He tells us to faithfully trust in His commands and His promises. That is enough for us! Just knowing that there will be a final, glorious day of rest is a great comfort while we work under the present harsh conditions. The sin, suffering, and death are realities that must be endured. We caused them, and we add to them. But the Lord has shown us in many and varied ways, by His Word and deeds, that He has overcome it all. He will continue to do as He promises, and we will have rest and peace on that great day!

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27: MAT. 24:1-14 27TH S. A. TRINITY

Our Lord Jesus did not give specific, precise details on the day and time of the end of the age. However, He did answer the disciples' question. He told them precisely what they needed to know. When our Lord speaks to us this way He is not playing petty games like we do with one another. He knows all and He has power over all. In His profound love for us, He tells us what we need to know, because He also knows that our sinful hearts and minds are always ready to abuse wisdom and power. He teaches us, protects us, and guides us in the best way, according to His holy will.

Furthermore, He has given us the clear and precise message of the Gospel for our salvation. We do not know exactly when the Last Day will come, but we do know how to be ready! Repent, be baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, observe all that He has commanded His Church, and watch! The trials and tribulations that our Lord told to His disciples have been fulfilled in various ways, so the end can come any time now. However, such things also happen again in subsequent times and places, so we also see that we may have to wait longer. We can't see or know it all, but our holy, benevolent Lord does, and He has made us ready!

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

In addition to watching, we are commanded by the Lord to “wait”. We are to wait according to His will, not our own. Sometimes Satan will teach people a twisted message about how they should “wait and hope,” but that pious-sounding message is about pride and manipulation, rather than submission to the Lord’s Word and authority. Here the prophet Zephaniah’s message is a reminder that we are to wait for God’s will to be done, for His judgment to be made clear, and for His justice to be carried out.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” (Is. 55:8-9). Satan taught Eve and Adam to trust in their own understanding, and he continues to teach that lie to all of us. Waiting and watching for the Lord’s will means we submit to His truth and His promises. He also tells us the waiting and watching will be difficult, but that doesn’t change the fact we are to submit to His good order. Our Lord Jesus indeed taught us to always pray to our Father, “Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven ... for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.”

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

We are to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. This does not earn our place in His kingdom; it shows that we *are* part of His kingdom. We are His sons and daughters according to the grace and work that Christ Jesus accomplishes for and through us. Godly fear knows that His wrath comes down upon the rebellious and unfaithful, so as we fear, love, and trust in Him we pray that He keep us steadfast in the faith that is safe from such wrath.

It is silly to think that man can understand and manipulate the things of God. We did not create the earth or the things in it. We did not teach the generations before us, or establish the end of things to come after us. We can't even control ourselves at all times! The command to fear and serve God is a good and gracious thing. We see from His Word and His good works that He takes care of man and desires a blessed end for us. Reverence to His will, and service according to His ways end up helping and loving others. Such work endeavors to bring them into the unshakeable safety of His Church. His wrath and His grace both show that He is above all. Thanks be to God that He saves us from His wrath by Christ's blood and makes us loving servants by His power!

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 30: MATTHEW 25:31-46 ST. ANDREW

Our Lord's kingdom is expressed in works of love. Again, to be clear, we do not earn our place in God's kingdom by any work that we do, no matter how loving it may be. Our sinful hearts are unable to love and serve God unless His Holy Ghost makes us able. He alone gets all credit and glory for making us part of His faithful people. But once we are made His faithful people, His kingdom, power, and glory are declared to others through the works of humble service that we do in reverence and godly fear.

St. Andrew and the other Apostles were called and equipped to their special vocation in God's kingdom. They were to take the message of God's love and kingdom in Jesus Christ even beyond Israel, and Moses, and the Prophets of the Old Testament. Andrew was among the future Apostles who asked the Lord to show them the signs and times concerning the fulfillment of God's kingdom (Mark 13:3). These men would later understand more fully that their work was to preach the Gospel of Christ crucified, to baptize and continue the Holy Supper of His Body and Blood, and to teach all nations to observe the commandments that show us how to truly love and serve in His kingdom. It is through the faithful service of St. Andrew, and the other Apostles, that we continue to hear and know these blessings so that we also may watch and wait in true faith.

Collect: O Lord, we humbly implore Thee that as Thine Apostle Saint Andrew didst heed the call of Thy Son Jesus Christ, Thou wouldst grant us Thy grace to serve Thee faithfully in our various vocations; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The End Will Come Unexpectedly and Suddenly. “God told Noah that He would grant the world 120 years in which to repent. This warning Noah diligently proclaimed, saying: God is angry and in 120 years will drown the entire world. Ah, how they must have wagged their tongues and put him down for a fool! The more he proclaimed and terrified, the more they said: Do you not see that God gives us food and drink? If He wanted to destroy us, He would not give us peace, security, and good things. So they let him preach and cry out, while they laughed. ... So the Sodomites caroused. And Lot told his sons-in-law: The Lord will overthrow this place. But they, too, laughed and asked him whether he was mad and demented. Why should the Lord be angry when He gave them time and opportunity to eat, drink, build, and marry? And they said: Why, you uncouth teacher, you impotent fool! He even announced the day and the hour to them. But after he had left, Sodom lay in hell.

So it will be at the Last Day, when the people in the world cannot get enough of eating, drinking, marrying, building, planting, worrying about their livelihood, scraping and scrambling. Under those conditions they should be frightened. But they will mock and ridicule us and go on with their eating and drinking. And then, when they think the final Day is a hundred years away, they shall in a moment stand before the Last Judgment.”

The Best Preparation for the End. “No one is better prepared for Judgment Day than the person who longs to be without sin.”

The Judge is Our Savior. “How can Judgment Day and dying be terrible to such a heart? Who will harm the man when the great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, to whom the Day of Judgment belongs, is on his side and stands before him with all His glory, greatness, majesty, and might? None other will hold court on the Day of Judgment than He who gave Himself for us. He will certainly not deny Himself but will declare that He gave Himself for your sins, as you believe. What, then, will sin do when the Judge declares that He Himself has taken it away? Who will accuse you? Who will judge the Judge? Who will overcome Him? He avails more than innumerable worlds with all their sins.”

—Martin Luther, from *What Luther Says*

Clergy of the ELDoNA, affiliated congregations and missions

Rt. Rev. James Heiser

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

Good Shepherd L.C., Tony, WI; Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI; Peace L.C., Ironwood, MI; Pure Blessings Lutheran Church, Brandon, WI

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; St. Bartholomew Lutheran Mission, Fort Myers, FL; St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC, Ormond Beach, FL

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Rev. Benjamin Henson

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

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