

**Clergy of the ELDoNA,
affiliated congregations and missions**

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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

Rev. Douglas Handrich (Emeritus)

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Benjamin Henson

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Michael Henson

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Martin Jackson

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Rev. Mark Mueller

Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cambridge, MN

Rev. John Rutowicz

St. Boniface Lutheran Church, Niles, MI

Rev. Josiah Scheck

Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

Rev. Eric Stefanski

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR; Emmanuel Lutheran Mission, Conway, AR

Rev. Timothy Tolar

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

Rev. Brandon Warr

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Jacob Henson

St. Henry Lutheran Mission (WI and MI), especially Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI

Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Dcn. Floyd Smithey

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

Rev. Daniel Mensing

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



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The Calendar

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

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

July 6	Trinity 3	ASBH 41
July 13	Trinity 4	ASBH 42
July 20	Trinity 5	ASBH 43
July 22 (T)	St. Mary Magdalene	ASBH 95
July 25 (F)	St. James, Apostle	ASBH 96
July 27	Trinity 6	ASBH 44
July 29 (T)	St. Olaf, King and Martyr	ASBH 97
August 3	Trinity 7	ASBH 45

St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary

Summer Quarter is taking place, with the Liturgics Practicum Intensive having concluded. Regular classes will run from June 16 to August 22. Summer Quarter classes are: E000—Greek (3 hrs.); S003—Theology (Trinity) (2 hrs.); E002—Pentateuch (3 hrs.); and P002—Liturgics 2 (3 hrs.) St. Ignatius currently has two students, Duncan Geldenhuys (Australia) and Jonathan Teo Zin Han (Singapore).



PSALTER FOR THE ASBH NOW AVAILABLE

A companion volume for the *Augustana Service Book and Hymnal* is now available. *The Psalter* provides all of the Psalms in the KJV, pointed and set to Gregorian Psalm tones in modern notation. In addition to the Psalms, *The Psalter* has the prayer offices (Matins, Vespers, Litany Office) and the diocesan and daily lectionary. (Note: the prayer office and various lectionaries will be published in the final edition of the ASBH. *The Psalter* was created as a resource for congregations and individuals who desire to have the prayer offices and Psalms available in a single volume. Matins, Vespers, and the Litany Office *will* be published in the ASBH, as well.) *The Psalter* is available for \$20 on Amazon; congregational cost is \$15/copy, delivered. For congregational orders, please contact Bishop Heiser.

UPCOMING EPISCOPAL VISITATIONS

Bishop Heiser will conduct his annual visitation of Pr. Dulas, Dcn. Smithey, and Sts. Peter & Paul Ev. Lutheran Church in Simpsonville, South Carolina on the weekend of **June 28 and 29** for the celebration of the Festival of Sts. Peter and Paul. He will visit Pr. Warr and the saints of St. Patrick Lutheran Church in Chipley, Florida on Wednesday, **July 2**, for the celebration of the Festival of the Visitation.

Visitation with Pr. Mueller, Pr. Ahonen, and Dcn. Jacob Henson will occur **July 23 through 25**; a Vespers will be held at Apologia Lutheran Mission, observing the Festival of St. James.

Visitation with Pr. Benjamin Henson, Pr. Em. Handrich, and Pr. Rutowicz will take place **July 26 and 27**.

Our Lord repeats the phrase “where ‘Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched’ ” three times. This quote from Isaiah 66:24 is repeated for emphasis and for teaching. This section of Isaiah 66 is talking about the Last Day, when the Lord will reward all the faithful with eternal life, but the unbelievers will be condemned. On account of their faithlessness “their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” These are the ones who have not placed their trust in the Lord Jesus, but continue to trust in themselves—in their own works and righteousness.

This is why our Lord recommends such drastic measures as cutting off one’s hand and foot, and plucking out one’s eye. He does not mean this literally. Rather, He is talking about figuratively cutting off and plucking out all that prohibits our faith and trust in Him. Whatever in this life we place our trust in apart from the Christ must be cut off and plucked out. Trust in our own works and righteousness prevents us from fully trusting in the Lord Jesus. This is why we need to live daily in repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. Cling in faith to the Lord Jesus, and He will deliver you from the worm that does not die and the fire which is not quenched.

Collect: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; 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 Third Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XII. Of Repentance.

In the twelfth article they [the Romanists] approve of the first part, in which we set forth that, to those who have fallen since baptism, the remission of sins can be imparted at whatever time, and as often as they are converted. ...

Let any one of the adversaries come forth and tell us when the remission of sins takes place. O good God, what darkness there is! They doubt whether it be in attrition or in contrition that remission of sins occurs. And if it occur on account of contrition, what need is there of absolution, what does the power of the keys effect, if sin have been already remitted? Here indeed they also labor much more, and wickedly detract from the power of the keys. ... For if the power of the keys do not console us before God, what then will pacify the conscience?

Moreover, the power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which is the true voice of the Gospel. Thus we also comprise absolution, when we speak of faith, because “faith cometh by hearing” (Rom. 10:17). For when the Gospel is heard, and the absolution is heard, the conscience is encouraged, and receives consolation. And because God truly quickens through the Word, the keys truly remit sins before God, according to Luke 10:16: “He that heareth you heareth Me.” Wherefore the voice of the one absolving must be believed not otherwise than we would believe a voice from heaven. And absolution properly can be called a sacrament of repentance, as also the more learned scholastic theologians speak. ... Thus faith is conceived and strengthened through absolution, through the hearing of the Gospel, through the use of the sacraments, so that it may not succumb while it struggles with the terrors of sin and death. This theory of repentance is plain and clear, and increases the worth of the power of the keys and of the sacraments and illumines the benefit of Christ, and teaches us to avail ourselves of Christ as Mediator and Propitiator.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §1, 5, 7, 39–41, 42–43

In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus reveals the heart of our heavenly Father. The younger son squanders his inheritance on reckless living, reflecting our own sinful rebellion. Yet when he returns in repentance, the father runs to him, embraces him, and completely restores him. This is grace—unearned, undeserved favor.

In this parable the father represents God the Father, who finds joy not in judgment but in mercy. The love bestowed upon the son at his return is not earned; instead, the father's love compels him to forgive his wayward son. In the same way, it was the memory of the father's love that brought the prodigal son back to his senses, just as God's Word inspires faith. Likewise, we come to God not through our actions but through faith, receiving His forgiveness because of Christ.

The elder son, while appearing outwardly obedient, reveals a self-righteous heart. He resents the father's mercy, forgetting that all he possesses is also a gift. How easily do we fall into this legalism, expecting rewards for faithfulness rather than trusting in God's grace alone! In Christ, God runs to us, covers us in Christ's righteousness, and calls us His beloved children. Rejoice! The lost are found, the dead are alive. This is the Gospel: salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Collect: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The scribes and the Pharisees trusted in their own righteousness. Many people today are not much different. Mankind has a tendency to pat ourselves on the back for our good deeds. We are always comparing ourselves to other people. Usually, we are doing much better than other people in our own minds. It is easy for us to turn a blind eye to our own failings. We love to paint ourselves in the best light. We love to trust in our own righteousness. This is “the leaven of the Pharisees.” They teach men to look at one's own works as a sign of one's righteousness.

Our Lord would rather have us trust in Him. The disciples were worried about not bringing bread with them. They failed to learn the lesson our Lord taught through the miracles. Here our Lord sets it out in plain language. One needs only to trust in Him. He is the One who fed the thousands from a small amount of loaves and fishes. If He can feed thousands with just a little, can He not also supply the needs of the disciples?

The same is especially true of our Lord's spiritual gifts. He richly and abundantly gives them to all who cling in faith to Him. It is His righteousness that truly saves. Let us not trust in ourselves, but cling to our Lord, whose righteousness is perfect, and will bring us to perfection in everlasting life.

Collect: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Good fathers love their sons and desire their sons to love them. This is why our heavenly Father begins the Commandments not with “Thou shalt fear the Lord Thy God,” but with “Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God.” He desires us to love Him just as He loves us. But His children—His sons—are obstinate and unloving. We, His children, daily break and transgress His Commandments. We are like the two sons in the parable our Lord tells today. We either refuse to go at first, and then change our mind, or we say that we will go, and then do not.

Our Lord Jesus would have us be like the tax collectors and harlots who heard the preaching of St. John the Baptist, repented of their sins, and sought to live lives worthy of repentance. The scribes and Pharisees, with all their “righteousness”, refused to hear and believe the preaching of John. He was sent to them, to preach to them, to prepare the way of the Lord for them, and they would not hear him. They had hearts of stone and refused to repent, even after seeing others who were in a worse state repent and believe.

Let us love our heavenly Father, who loves us, by daily humbling ourselves and confessing our sins, so that we may turn from ourselves and cling in faith to the Lord Jesus, from whom all righteousness flows.

Collect: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In today’s reading parents bring their children to Jesus. The disciples, thinking they protect Him from inconvenience, rebuke them. But Jesus is indignant. “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.” This passage supports the doctrine that salvation is by grace alone, not by human effort. Children contribute nothing to earn Christ’s favor; they are weak and dependent. Yet Jesus receives and blesses them, illustrating how all believers receive the kingdom of God, like helpless children.

This passage also demonstrates how young children are embraced in the kingdom of God. It shows that infants can receive the gifts of God’s grace and are not excluded from them. Given that Baptism is a means of grace (Titus 3:5; Acts 2:38–39) and that Jesus welcomes infants into the kingdom, it reasonably follows that infants should be baptized. He does not say children are excluded until they understand, choose, or confess. Instead, He receives them, granting them faith and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Through Baptism Christ imparts His complete grace, even to infants, as Baptism is *His* act, not ours. In a world that prioritizes achievement and status, Jesus inverts all expectations. The kingdom is intended not for the strong, wise, or deserving, but for those who show humility and place their trust exclusively in Him.

Collect: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus speaks a sobering word of judgment upon Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum—towns that had witnessed His mighty works, yet did not repent. Despite His presence and miracles, their rejection of Christ leads to a greater condemnation than even pagan cities. These words remind us that rejecting Christ is rejecting the very One who sends Him—the Father Himself.

This passage encourages sober reflection. God’s mercy is abundant, yet it should not be taken for granted. We live in the time of grace, hearing Christ’s Word and receiving His gifts. Neglecting or growing cold to these treasures means treating the eternal lightly. This aligns with the ancient prayer: “O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee... Increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy...” We are reminded that without Christ, we have no strength or holiness. We require God’s mercy daily to navigate the temporal—our trials, distractions, and temptations—while focusing on the eternal, which is the salvation Jesus has prepared for us.

Christ still speaks through His Word and Sacraments. He sends His called servants, and to hear them is to hear Him. Let us not despise His voice, but cling to Him in humble faith.

Collect: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

On Sunday, our Lord told those listening to His Sermon on the Mount that their righteousness should exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. At first glance it looked like He was praising their righteousness. Today, we have an example of their “righteousness”. They come to question the Lord about the great trespass of the disciples who ate with unwashed hands.

Notice that they do not say “the tradition of Moses,” but rather “the tradition of the elders.” They have exchanged the Word of the Lord God for tradition. Moses instructed the Israelites to neither add nor subtract from the Word of God (Deuteronomy 4:2). This is the point that our Lord makes when He shows how they break the Fourth Commandment by their tradition. People are prone to make up their own rules, ones which are easy to follow. Then they say that they have kept the Commandments. Their righteousness is great in their own eyes.

Our Lord requires perfection from the Law. He does not want us making up our own list of rules that we can point to and claim how righteous we are. This is supplanting the Lord. There is no true righteousness in these made-up works. Our Lord Jesus would rather have us trust in His perfect works and merits. Through faith in them we have His perfect righteousness credited to us.

Collect: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

King Olaf II was raised as a pagan and was a Viking warrior until his conversion and baptism. After he became a Christian, he was influential in bringing Christianity to Norway. As king, he used his power and authority to bring in missionaries from England to help bring the Word of God to Norway. However, when King Canute promised the Norwegian nobles that he would rule more indirectly than King Olaf, Olaf was forced to flee to Russia. He returned to reclaim his kingship, but was killed in the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030.

Our Lord, in the reading for today, tells His Apostles just before He sends them out to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” to “not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” Our Lord is telling them to have faith above all in Him. He is the One who protects and guards us from all evil. He is the One who allows His Word to be spoken in the light and preached on the housetops. It was the Word preached by the missionaries whom Olaf supported that brought Christianity to Norway.

Even though there were some who rejected that Word and drove him from his lands, Olaf did not fear returning to bring the light of the Gospel again. He lost his life in the effort, but Norway had received the Word and became a nation filled with those who clung in faith to Jesus.

Collect: O Lord, grant steadfastness in a faithful confession to those among the magistracy whom Thou hast gathered into Thy holy Church, and direct the hearts of the faithful to support them in their vocation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In today’s reading, the Pharisees accuse Jesus’ disciples of breaking the Sabbath by plucking grain to eat. Jesus responds by pointing the Pharisees to Scripture—David eating the showbread, priests working on the Sabbath—and concludes with a profound truth: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” He declares, “The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

This text illustrates Christ’s authority concerning the Law and its proper application alongside the Gospel. The Pharisees were fixated on external compliance, which caused them to overlook the essence of God’s Law. They turned the Sabbath—a blessing for rest—into a burdensome obligation. So focused on legalism, they neglected the spirit of the Law and failed to recognize that Jesus is the Giver of the Law and its fulfillment.

Jesus, our true Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:9–10), shows that God’s Law is fulfilled in Him. Works done in faith and mercy, even on the Sabbath, are not sinful. Christ does not abolish the Law but reveals its true meaning and fulfills it perfectly on our behalf.

We must beware of a Pharisaical heart that values man-made laws over mercy. As Lutherans, we rightly distinguish between Law and Gospel. The Law reveals our sin, while the Gospel points us to our Savior, showing mercy to sinners and offering us rest in Him.

Collect: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In these verses Jesus teaches that a great transition has taken place. The era of the Law and the Prophets—pointing forward to the Messiah—has reached its climax in the coming of John the Baptist. John is the last prophet of the old era, preparing the way for Christ and fulfilling all that the Law foreshadowed.

Dr. Paul Kretzmann noted on this passage, “Jesus tells the Pharisees that the Law and Prophets were in power until John the Baptist, who stands in the threshold between the Old and New Testaments.” The kingdom of God is being preached and sinners are entering it, not through the Law, but through the Gospel. Yet this does not mean the Law has failed or been abolished. Jesus says, “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.” The Law stands—holy, righteous, and good—but it finds its fulfillment in Christ, who kept it perfectly for us.

The distinction between Law and Gospel is clear. The Law reveals our sin and inability to attain righteousness, while Christ fulfills the Law through His life, death, and resurrection, establishing the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–34). In Christ, we are no longer under the Law’s condemnation but are forgiven and made heirs of the kingdom by faith.

Collect: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In the Gospel reading for yesterday our Lord Jesus states that unless one’s righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, that person cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. This is not a plea to do better with one’s keeping of the Law. Our Lord is not telling us to look inside of ourselves and do a better job of keeping the Ten Commandments to make our righteousness better than the scribes and Pharisees.

Our Lord is rather urging us to look outside of ourselves to find true righteousness. The reading for today shows the baptism of our Lord. He is the One in whom the heavenly Father is well pleased. It is through His works and merits that one finds salvation. Only through His righteousness can a person hope to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

In Holy Baptism, through faith, we put on the righteousness of the Christ. We bear His righteousness. In Christ our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, because it is His righteousness, and therefore it is perfect righteousness. It is our Lord’s righteousness which we have on account of faith in Him. Through faith we are in Him and He is in us, therefore our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Collect: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; 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 Sixth Sunday after Trinity

The Fifth Commandment **Thou shalt not kill.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

SATURDAY, JULY 12: JOHN 8:42–47 3RD SUNDAY A. TRINITY

In this piercing exchange Jesus confronts the religious leaders who claim to be children of God while rejecting Him. He reveals a deep spiritual truth: to deny the Son is to deny the Father. Though they boast in Abraham and Moses, their hearts are closed to the One who fulfills the Law and the Prophets. Jesus speaks plainly; they cannot hear because they do not belong to God.

By nature, we are blind to God's Word and hostile to Christ. No one can love God or hear His truth unless they are born from above (John 3:3). It is not reason or effort, but God's mercy that opens ears and hearts. This is exactly what we confess in the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, as taught in Luther's Small Catechism: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in, or come to Jesus Christ my Lord; but that the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel..." (Henkel Translation). This ties beautifully to the prayer: "O God... without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy..." We are not strong enough to believe or love Christ apart from divine grace. God's mercy in Christ rescues us from the devil's lies and makes us children of God. As we walk through temporal trials, we cling to Jesus—our strength, our holiness, our eternal life.

Collect: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, 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 Fourth Sunday after Trinity

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

Thou shalt not bear false witness.

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

—The Large Catechism, §274–275

SATURDAY, JULY 26: LUKE 9:18–26 5TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Immediately upon Peter's confession, Jesus both begins to elaborate upon what it means that He is the Christ, and upon what confessing Him will entail. Luke's presentation of these realities is stark, featuring those parts of the conversation that can set up hour upon hour of pondering when viewed in conjunction with this week's Collect. One must understand from Scripture (and contrary to what many of those in Israel were wrongly expecting) "the Christ of God" must suffer many things, and only after His being killed and being raised the third day will He come in glory. That glory will be both His own and His Father's, because that glory is one, even as the Father and the Son are coequal and coeternal persons of the same divine essence (Athanasian Creed, ASBH, p. 39).

The Son's words are what distinguish those who confess rightly from those who do not. We bear our crosses after Him by confessing His promises. Our conduct in sacrificially serving other bears witness that our heart's only treasure is Christ and what He earned and gives.

Collect: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus responded to the sons of Zebedee without mentioning their claimed ability, but He foreshadowed both how unable they were, and how supremely able the strength of Christ's work on their behalf was to uphold them. St. Paul confesses this in 2 Corinthians 12:9–10, "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Such strength obtains because the Son of Man came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for the multitude of sinners. With our ransom paid, we have no need of vying for an office or position to make God pleased with us, a place of closeness to the throne to have favor bestowed upon us. Rather, we have His favor purely by mercy, for Jesus' sake. Because of this, we can simply, freely, joyously serve our brethren without worrying over our status in God's Kingdom. As St. James and St. John then did, our pastors and bishop are to model this today, going even to extremes in study and travel to serve Christ's Bride. Faithful service doesn't glory in the position of lordship, but shows what Christ's Lordship entails: the servants rejoice to share the favor poured upon them in Christ, so that every Christian may learn to do the same in his own vocations.

Collect: O Almighty God, who hast built Thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Head Cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto Thee; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's call for us to love our enemies often causes much consternation—but when we fully understand the kind of love Jesus commands in this text we can see and understand His divine intent more clearly. If we can see things as God does, at least to some tiny extent, we will see with far greater clarity. The Greek word recorded in this passage is ἀγαπάω which can be described as a parental tough love with long-term desires and goals. Think of parents' desire for their child to be a good and holy person, to live a pious life of grace, eventually reaching eternal paradise with the Lord. To love your enemies in this way is to hope the same for them—to hope for their repentance and humble reception of the grace of Christ in faith.

This type of love is nothing less than hoping for their conversion and praying that they become true disciples of Christ. By loving them, you strive to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect, and desire their justification by grace in faith—"not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Collect: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

TUESDAY, JULY 15: ROMANS 14:7–17 4TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

The Apostle Paul delivers a powerful proclamation of the sanctified life of the Christian in our appointed meditation. He reminds us that we, and all Christians, live and die in Christ Jesus, who redeemed us from sin, death, hell, and the devil by grace. Verse 10 reminds us that we will be judged by the measure we judge others, and that all must stand before the Lord's Judgment Throne.

In verse 15 of today's text we once again have the Greek word "*agape*", which denotes a form of love that describes God-focused intent that drives Christian concern and discipleship. It is hard to miss the emphasis on good works (fruits of the faith) that the Holy Spirit produces in the true believer and disciple of Christ. The text also resounds with the divine truth that it is not us that works, but Christ who works through us by His grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. This creates a living faith that cannot help but produce fruit (good works) that benefit the neighbor and give glory to God in this temporal life. Once we understand this grace-filled working of God in us, it becomes possible to joyfully persevere in daily good works.

Collect: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

THURSDAY, JULY 24: LUKE 9:51–56 5TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

When a pastor must sadly declare an impenitent sinner is no longer able to commune, we may read Matthew 18:15–18 and wonder what it means to "let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." Certainly it doesn't mean that his refusing to hear Jesus (Luke 10:16) when the pastor brings God's Word to him should bring down fire from heaven! Rather, the Lord's work continues with the hope that the sinner sees how the Lord has given all to save him and repents.

Conveying this to people while firmly maintaining what God's Word says about their sin is more difficult than ever. Mindful of our own unworthiness under the Law, and with a spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1) as if carrying an infant to the font, we give as we have received. Serving with kindness, without shrinking from God's Law, we declare with Jesus that we truly wish not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. Understanding what He has done for us, our lives are to be ordered after the compassionate imitation of Christ's own self-sacrifice for all sinners. This is something beyond our flesh's ability, so it ever fixes us on our own need for His mercy, delivered in His Absolution and Supper.

Collect: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; 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 will see St. Peter's confession again on Saturday, so we'll address the second part of our reading. We need to consider Peter and his confession (which confession, St. John Chrysostom says, is the rock Jesus refers to, and not to Cephas himself), and to whom Jesus entrusts His 'keys.'

When Jesus says "to you" in our reading, He speaks in the singular, so that we know He is speaking specifically to Peter with the giving of the Office of the Keys... just as He is when He calls Peter "Satan" a short while later! We know that He was not giving this office to Peter exclusively, as the similarity of language in Matthew 18:18 makes clear.

In case anyone makes the mistake that Rome does, St. John also testified of Jesus affirming after His resurrection to whom the office is given. In his 20th chapter, John records Jesus giving this gift of Holy Absolution (and its opposite, excommunication, which is the binding of sins that sets one outside of both the congregation and the whole of the Church) using the plural. It is given to the Church through all those in the Office of the Holy Ministry—even to Thomas, who wasn't present when He said it, but doesn't need it repeated to him when he finally sees the Lord (John 20:19–29).

Collect: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Today's reading describes the godly procedure of Church discipline and its goal of bringing back the straying member of the family of God. It follows the Scriptural formula of requiring two or more credible witnesses' testimony regarding the facts of the case prior to any action being taken.

Leaven will eventually leaven the entire lump if it is not removed effectively and promptly. The fault or offense committed against one member is committed against all members (the whole body). This testifying is a judicial presenting of the evidence, that a binding judgment may be arrived at for the sake of the offended and the offender.

Additionally, how would a lack of Scriptural discipline look regarding what we are to be in the world and confess to the world by our words and actions? The judgment is officiated through the Office of the Keys and excommunication, in the hope of bringing the offender to repentance and eventually reconciliation with the offended brother, and the body as a whole.

Christ is in the Church and the Church is in Christ; the two cannot be separated without doing harm to salvation. Also, where you have one person of the Holy Trinity you have all three, thus if the body is full of sin, it cannot be the body of Christ, for the Holy Spirit will not dwell in an unclean temple.

Collect: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The priests were likely those who were serving that week in the temple. The captain of the temple guard was a member of one of the leading priestly families, next in rank to the high priest. The Sadducees were a sect whose members came from the priestly line. They did not believe in the resurrection or a Messiah, but held that the Messianic age was the present time period and must be preserved. The high priest, one of their number, presided over the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a mixed group, who were always maneuvering with each other for power.

The doctrine being proclaimed by the disciples challenged all of these groups' authority—and they could not allow it to stand. The fact that 5,000 men believed this “dangerous” Christian doctrine proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah demanded disciplinary action be taken before the teaching spread further. The rulers, elders, and teachers of the Law mentioned represent the three main groups making up the Sanhedrin, Israel's supreme court. These powerful leaders were not going to allow this challenge to their authority to stand. The Holy Spirit did not allow the blasphemous activity against the Gospel to stand, though. Saint Peter was compelled to boldly proclaim the Christian faith before the entire assembly and teach the only path to eternal salvation that is provided for man by God.

Collect: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

This reading has long been the Gospel for the Festival of St. Mary Magdalene, in spite of never mentioning her name. St. Luke says that Jesus had cast seven demons out of Mary (Luke 8:2), but the evangelist does not say specifically that she was the same woman known by the hosting Pharisee to be a notorious sinner. Perhaps, though, she was so known and this is simply the first time she had been seen by this crowd since the demons had been cast out.

As with the lives of the Apostles and other saints that are not completely detailed in the Bible, such haziness regarding the lives of the saints is actually a good thing: it keeps us mindful of the fact that their festival days are not really about them, but about Jesus! If Mary was not only demon possessed, but an open and notorious sinner, how much more glorious that she is made completely free from sin through faith in His atonement—and is even privileged to go to the tomb on Easter morning. More, as many of the fathers point out, this woman is a picture of the whole Church: despised sinners made righteous through the blood of Christ, cleansed by the “washing of water by the Word.”

Collect: O gracious God, who didst work repentance and faith in the heart of St. Mary, so lead us by the working of Thy Holy Spirit that we may walk before Thee in repentance all our days and have consolation through Thy absolution, which Thou dost grant to be proclaimed unto Thy Church, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

MONDAY, JULY 21: ACTS 5:27–32 5TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Peter tried to take the easy path at the trial of Jesus—and ended up in tears of greatest sorrow for disowning the Lord! The high priest wished to take the easy path, pretending the Jewish leadership hadn't stirred up the people at Jesus' trial to cry out "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25). Peter and the Apostles now stand resolute: they must declare the things of which they were eyewitnesses, the things Jesus did and suffered to save us.

Pastors can't take the easy way out with this reading, either. It's easy to misrepresent what Peter says if one doesn't understand the Greek words St. Luke records that get translated as 'ought' and 'obey'. 'Ought' is not today's idea of "we ought to, but we don't have to." Nor does it translate as 'owing a debt,' as some do; it's the same "it is necessary!" word that Jesus uses concerning His suffering and death (Matthew 16:21). Couple that with the word translated as 'obey', which is not the usual one (which means "act in accord with what you have heard"), but an even stronger, "be governed by what has convinced you, what you follow as supreme, what shapes your life and being"—a fitting thought as we pray this week's Collect about the necessity of God's grace governing our prayers and all that we do!

Collect: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

FRIDAY, JULY 18: LUKE 6:36–42 4TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

As is so often the case, our Lord reminds us that our goal as Christians (disciples of Jesus) is to strive for God's perfection, and the Lord should be our example in all aspects of faith and life. This admonition to be like our Father in heaven removes any foolish argument that Christians cannot judge anyone for their behavior. Jesus does not relieve His followers of the need for discerning the difference between right and wrong, but He does condemn unjust and hypocritical judging of others. The misconception is the same as the false opinion that Christians are not supposed to get angry; but we are called to avoid *unrighteous* wrath, as opposed to righteous anger. The true believer should be angered by sin and disrespect toward their Lord, as well as toward His holy Word and doctrine.

The "bosom" in verse 38 is literally the fold of the loose garment as it falls from the chest over the girdle; this pouch-like gathering of material was used as a pocket, presented here for carrying grain. The comparison between a speck and a plank should be seen as Jesus using hyperbole to sharpen the contrast and to emphasize how foolish and hypocritical it is for us to criticize someone for a fault while remaining blind to our own considerable faults against the Lord.

Collect: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Verse 6 makes it clear that the scribes and Pharisees brought this woman and this question into the midst of the crowd before Jesus in an act of hypocrisy, motivated by hopes of capturing Jesus in some statement or action they could use to somehow condemn Him. Their hypocritical behavior is further condemned in their willingness to ignore, bend, and compromise God's clear Word.

This sin of adultery was not committed alone, so the question arises as to why only one offender was brought. The woman's accusers appear to have also been especially eager to humiliate her, since they could have kept her in private custody while they sought Jesus' response. The claim that she was caught in the act further begs the question of "where is the other party?" for the law required the execution of both parties, not just the woman. Additionally, the Romans did not allow the Jews to carry out death sentences, so if Jesus had said to stone her, he could have been in conflict with the Romans.

Jesus' answer, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first," disarmed them. In concluding, Jesus did not condone what the woman had done, but neither did He condemn her in the way the hypocrites did.

Collect: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, 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 Fifth Sunday after Trinity

X. Of Ordination and the Call.

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

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

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article X