

**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

Lamb of God Ev. Lutheran Church, Rogers, AR

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



AUGUST 4–30, 2025

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

The Calendar

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

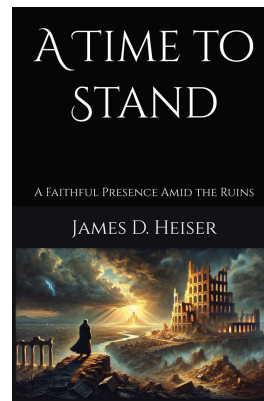
(Monday: M; Tuesday: T; Wednesday: W; Thursday: R; Friday: F; Saturday: S)

Please note that hymn numbers for Festival Days reflect the enumeration of drafts of ASBH supplied at the most recent synods.

August 3	Trinity 7	ASBH 45
August 10	Trinity 8/St. Laurence	ASBH 46/ASBH 98
August 15 (F)	St. Mary Theotokos	ASBH 99
August 17	Trinity 9	ASBH 47
August 24	Trinity 10/St. Bartholomew	ASBH 48/ASBH 100
August 29 (F)	Beheading of St. John the Baptist	ASBH 101
August 31	Trinity 11	ASBH 49

St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary

Summer Quarter is taking place. 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). The specific dates for the 2025–2026 Academic calendar will be available in the next issue of *The Lutheran Herald*.



NEW BOOK BY BISHOP HEISER

A Time to Stand is the long-awaited companion to *A Time for Every Purpose Under Heaven*, offering a profound meditation on Christian faithfulness in an age of collapse. Where the earlier volume traced the sacred architecture of time and history, this new work asks how the Church must now live—rooted, enduring, and unflinching—in a world that no longer remembers its foundations.

Drawing upon Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the witness of classical and Christian thought, Bishop James D. Heiser offers a clarion call to the Church: not to reclaim cultural dominance, but to remain faithfully present amid ruins. With chapters addressing the loss of meaning, the failure of institutions, the dangers of ideological reaction, and the hope rooted in Christ's return, *A Time to Stand* is not a manual for political renewal—it is a summons to spiritual clarity.

ISBN 979-8317229979 • 200 Pages • \$14.95

EPISCOPAL VISITATIONS

Bishop Heiser is scheduled to visit with Pr. **Heimbigner** and the saints of Charity Lutheran Church (Burleson, TX) on Sunday, **August 3**, and with Pr. **Tolar** and the saints of St. Luke parish (Kenai and Homer, AK) **August 22–24**.

Bishop Heiser had 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, and visited Pr. **Warr** and the saints of St. Patrick Lutheran Church in Chipley, Florida on Wednesday, **July 2**. He also recently had his visitations with Pr. **Mueller**, Pr. **Ahonen**, and Dcn. **Jacob Henson** (**July 23 through 25**) and with Pr. **Benjamin Henson**, Pr. Em. **Handrich**, and Pr. **Rutowicz** (**July 26 and 27**).

Today's reading looks ahead to the Epistle lesson for this upcoming Sunday (Trinity 11). Just as the Sanhedrin was faced with the undeniable fact of a miracle performed through Peter and John, so Paul presents us with the undeniable fact of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He writes: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins... was buried, and that he rose again the third day... And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once..." (1 Cor. 15:3-6). Just as the Sanhedrin could not deny the reality of the lame man's healing, so the reality of Jesus' resurrection cannot be denied either. The evidence is too great; there were hundreds of eye-witnesses.

Peter and John declared that they could not but speak the things which they had heard and seen. So also, pastors cannot but speak the doctrine which they have received in the Holy Scriptures. When it comes to preaching and teaching, pastors are a one-track record. They have no other doctrine to preach than what has been handed down in the Church through these eyewitnesses. This is why false doctrine cannot be permitted. The temple must be cleansed from all corruptions and additions, since only the truth is acceptable before God; only the truth can make us free.

Collect: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace, that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XXVI.

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

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

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

Wherefore our teachers must not be looked upon as having taken up this matter rashly, or from hatred of the bishops, as some falsely suspect. There was great need to warn the churches of these errors, which had arisen from misunderstanding the traditions. —The Augsburg Confession, §1–11, 18–19

Recently the divisions on our nation were once again made evident by a scandal over a list and who knew the contents of the list. The particular facts of that sordid episode are not our concern here, except insofar as we hear echoing once again the words of our Lord: *"For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known."* Men devote a great deal of energy to their secrets: the careful concealing of that which is not to be known (save to a trusted or initiated few) is common across human history because people are inherently deceptive—and ashamed of what they have done.

Our Lord's words turn our concern where it should be, to the precious good news which cannot and should never be concealed. *"Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God."* The Christian faith must never be concealed or muted by those who are called to believe and confess it. The world deceives and is deceived; the Church has the unchanging, saving Truth, and that Word will be confessed to the end of the world.

Collect: O God, Whose never-failing Providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth: We humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. *Amen.*

The faithfulness and zeal of John the Baptist is something to marvel at. Although he was placed before rulers and kings, he was not ashamed to speak the truth. He preached Christ boldly, even at the risk of angering powerful people. This faithfulness of John finally resulted in his imprisonment and execution.

We desire to be faithful like John. We hope that, in times of testing, we also will make a good confession before others, no matter the consequences. However, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. From safety we boldly declare, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." But when someone asks one little question about our faith, we are ready to retreat.

The Holy Spirit strengthened St. John to make his bold confession; the Spirit strengthens us as well. Paul writes in Romans 8:26 that the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. Also, in 2 Corinthians 12:9, we are comforted by the fact that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. This does not mean we are 'off the hook'. We should always be ready to give a defense of our faith to anyone who asks us (1 Peter 3:15). However, we should not worry about what we will say or how it will be received. Whoever confesses Christ before men (however weakly), him Christ will also confess before our Father who is in heaven (Matt. 10:32).

Collect: O Lord, as Thou didst grant unto Thy Forerunner and martyr to proclaim Thy Word before princes and not be ashamed, we pray that Thou wouldst grant to Thy saints a zeal for a faithful confession in all times of persecution; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

This passage presents a great difficulty for Calvinists. Calvinists believe that God created some people in order to send them to heaven and others in order to send them to hell. The reason (they say) why some are saved and others are not is that God predestined it to be so.

We see a very different sort of God in today's text. God indeed sends wrath against those who reject His Word. Those who persist in unrepentance bear the full responsibility for their sins. But God did not want to damn these people. He sent them prophets, wise men, scribes, and even His own Son. He urged them to repent and believe in the Gospel, saying, "How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

We should never accept that teaching of the devil which says that God wants some to be saved but not others. The Scriptures are clear: "[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth... [Jesus] gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:4, 6). So when you hear the Gospel preached from the pulpit, you can be sure that it is preached for *you*. When you receive Christ's Body and Blood in the Sacrament, you can be sure that it is distributed for *you*. The Words of Institution are clear: "...given and shed for you for the remission of sins."

Collect: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace, that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Pharisees murmur, grumble, backstab, and deceive; after all, such actions are the normal course of action for those who are enemies of the Truth. They use poisonous words in their attempt to keep their hearers enslaved to their false teaching, but our Lord answers with a parable which proclaims the joy which exists in heaven when a single person is brought to the faith.

Our age, weighed down by corrosive notions which would link 'truth' to 'majority opinion,' thinks that the masses are what ultimately matter. The parable in today's lesson teaches the truth that one man or woman or child being delivered out of spiritual death is a cause for rejoicing among the angels, and therefore should be celebrated among the saints, as well. Pharisees want to measure whether *they* consider a particular believer to be "worthy"; the Lord beholds the hearts of those whom He calls through the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word, and the conversion of sinners is a source of joy in heaven—and on earth, in Christ's Church.

Collect: O God, Whose never-failing Providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth: We humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. *Amen.*

Jesus proclaimed the truth and defended His disciples, and the disciples seem to try to “check” Him on His words. There can be a propensity among Christians to act as if we wish the Word said something other than what it does, but that is a very dangerous mentality. The disciples said to the Lord: “*Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?*” Of course He did! That is part of why Jesus said *what* He said *in the way* that He said it. As St. Paul wrote to St. Titus: “*For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, the Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.*” (1:10–14) It should go without saying that needless offense should be avoided; at the same time, the fact that the wicked are offended is “a feature, not a bug.”

Jesus spoke very directly with the disciples because of the danger attendant in the way they were thinking: “*Are ye also yet without understanding?*” They were, but the directness of our Lord’s instruction brought them back into the way of Truth. Sometimes, it needs to be the same way with us. But we need that. God’s Word is not bound, and the Law and Gospel are instruments where by the Holy Spirit brings us to repentance and faith.

Collect: O God, Whose never-failing Providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth: We humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. *Amen.*

In the verses leading up to our lesson, St. Paul describes the Church of God as a building. In his analogy, ministers are the builders, hearers are the building, and the foundation of the building is Jesus Christ. One last element is added in the verses appointed for today: “if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire.” This last element is about the doctrine which is taught in the Church. Some ministers build with gold, silver, and precious stones—that is, with good, faithful, solid teaching. Others build with wood, hay, and straw—that is, worthless opinions of men. On the Day of Judgment, each minister’s work will be revealed, whether he built well upon the foundation, or whether he added worthless things which will not endure.

If ministers should take heed how they build, then hearers should take heed how they are built! There is only one foundation and that is Jesus Christ. If you are built upon anything else—whether it be your own righteousness or some worthless idol—you will not endure. But those who are built on the precious merits of Jesus Christ will be saved. Thus it is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame” (1 Peter 2:6).

Collect: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace, that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. *Amen.*

People were coming to the temple to worship the Lord. Together with the priests, they offered sacrifices, burned incense, read the Torah, and called upon the Lord in prayer—just as one would have expected, based on the Law of Moses. The problem was that their hearts were wicked. They performed the rituals, but they did not repent of their sins. They pretended piety in the Lord’s house, but outside the gates they worshiped Baal and persisted obstinately in sin. Therefore, God sent Jeremiah to warn them: “Amend your ways and your doings!”—that is, repent!—“and I will cause you to dwell in this place”—God will forgive your sins and you will live with Him forever.

This lesson reminds us that God is not pleased with mere outward worship. If we show up to church and only walk through the motions, this is not true worship. God desires faith in the heart. He wants us to worship Him by confessing our sins and trusting in Jesus Christ. Jesus says in John 4:23 “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” When we approach God’s house in true faith, there is a great promise for us: God will cause us to dwell with Him forever. For the sake of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, our sins are forgiven and we receive the gift of eternal life.

Collect: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace, that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The fruitfulness of the Word is not subject to human technique; the Word of the Lord makes that very clear. “*So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.*” It does not matter how much we learn about agriculture; the point of comparison here is that the fruitfulness of the seed is not dependent on knowledge, but upon the vitality which the Lord has granted to it.

The parable sets forth the pattern: “*For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.*” When the seed has been sown, the Lord declares, then that which is according to that which the Lord has established comes to pass. The sower may be awake, or he may sleep, but that does not alter this fruitfulness.

The moment for the action of the sower comes again in the day of harvest: “*But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.*” The seed is sown, the fruit harvested. As St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3: “*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.*”

Collect: O God, Whose never-failing Providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth: We humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

This very short reading speaks with a clarity which we always need to keep in mind where the offense of sin is involved: “*Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.*” The offense of a wicked life or false teaching is such that it imperils the “little ones”—both children and those who are new to the faith. Indeed, the degree of scandal can be an offense to the faithful, irrespective of age.

St. Paul teaches the Church: “*For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.*” (1 Cor. 14) Open wickedness and false doctrine always bring confusion and threaten division from the saving truth. It is a consolation to know that God promises to punish such wickedness, for it assures the saints that, in love for His saints, the Lord will judge such wicked men. Our Lord’s words are a call for the wicked to repent, and for the saints to take consolation: The Lord will judge the world and preserve His Church, for the gates of Hades will not prevail.

Collect: O God, Whose never-failing Providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth: We humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. *Amen.*

Jesus tells a parable about children playing in the market-places. Some try to lead games for the others, but their companions are too stubborn. It does not matter what game they choose—whether a joyful dance with instruments, or a pretend funeral with mourning—the latter children refuse to play along. Similarly, Jesus rebuked the people of that generation for rejecting His Word. It did not matter whether He preached sorrowful Law to them or joyful Gospel—or whether their preacher was a rough man like John the Baptist, or one more common like Himself—the people remained stubborn and unresponsive. They closed their ears, refusing to repent and believe.

Thanks be to God that He has blessed us with ears that hear! Through His Word He has created faith in our hearts which hears the Word of God and keeps it. This is no credit to ourselves. Faith is a gift, as Jesus says in Matthew 13:11, “It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” Since God has blessed us with such a gift, we should use it! When the Law falls on our ears, we should sorrow over our sins. When we hear the Gospel proclaimed, we should believe it with joy. Finally, if we notice differences in personality and habits among God’s ministers, we should not be offended by these. So long as he calls out a faithful tune, he is God’s servant to you for good.

Collect: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace, that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. *Amen.*

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Of Chapters and Cloisters.

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

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

—Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article III

SATURDAY, AUGUST 9: LUKE II:34–36 7TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Once again, the Lord teaches His Church by an analogy with an aspect of His creation, which we do well to heed with proper understanding. Light comes to us from outside; the eye does not have its source of illumination within it (obviously—despite imagination of some thinkers in the ancient world), but must be illuminated from outside. If there is no light, we would remain in darkness.

It is the same with the Light of the divine Word: Where the Lord illuminates, there is light. But there are men who close their eyes and refuse the light. They would rather close their eyes and say, in essence, “There is nothing but darkness,” while the Lord’s saints keep saying to them, “Open your eyes.”

The eyes should be dedicated to that which is true and beautiful and brought into service of good works which benefit the neighbor. As we confess in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: “And God, at the same time, by the Word and by the rite, moves hearts to believe and conceive faith, just as Paul says, Rom. 10:17: Faith cometh by hearing. But just as the Word enters the ear in order to strike our heart, so the rite itself strikes the eye, in order to move the heart. The effect of the Word and of the rite is the same, as it has been well said by Augustine that a Sacrament is a visible word, because the rite is received by the eyes, and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore the effect of both is the same.” (Art. XIII)

Collect: O God, Whose never-failing Providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth: We humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. *Amen.*

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Article XIV. Of Monastic Vows

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

Article XV. Of Human Traditions

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

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

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

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

SATURDAY, AUGUST 23: LUKE 16:10–13 9TH S. A. TRINITY

The master in the parable of the shrewd steward seems foolish. By not taking away the stewardship immediately, he gave his servant an opportunity to waste more of his possessions. What did he expect to happen? Of course one who was unfaithful in little would continue to be more and more unfaithful.

Contrast this with the widow who gave the two mites, as we read a few days ago. What little she had! Yet, how faithful she was with it. Although at the time no one else noticed, Jesus noticed, and now she is honored by all Christians who read about her in the Gospels.

No matter how much wealth we have been given in this earthly life, we who believe have much with which to be faithful. All those who have been baptized have been given that which is another Man’s, that is, the righteousness and merits which belong to Jesus Christ, true God and true Man. We have been given His Word, His Absolution, and His true Body and Blood. If we are faithful with these tremendous, undeserved gifts, then we will find that God gives us even more at the hour of our death. Then He will give us an eternal crown and restore us to perfect righteousness and joy forever.

Collect: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; 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 accuses the Jews of not knowing what time it is. As we will hear this coming Sunday, this failure to know the time of their visitation led to their destruction (Luke 19:43-44). Being able to tell spiritual time is a very important skill.

So what time is it? It is time to settle accounts with our adversary, the holy Law of God. Moses is our accuser, as we read yesterday. And, unless we do something about it, we will be condemned to the eternal prison of hell for our sins against the Ten Commandments.

Pursuing earthly honor and wealth at a time like this would be insane. Even if we were able to obtain them, what good will they do us when our Master returns? He is coming soon and will require us to give an account of our stewardship. There is no time for chasing after worldly things.

It is time to know the things that make for peace. The only thing that will satisfy our adversary, the Law, is the righteous life and innocent death of Jesus Christ. It is time to repent and cling to Christ by faith, so that we might be saved. And it is time to make good use of His gifts. Our remaining days should be spent hearing His Word and using everything we possess in service to our neighbor.

Collect: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Countless false teachers populate the world. They invoke the name of Jesus, but only in the sense that Jesus' name functions as their own private rabbit's foot, a lucky charm of sorts. What is missing from their preaching is really quite easy to spot: It is the forgiveness of sins. The devil's never-ending ploy is to direct people away from what they really need from Jesus, His forgiveness.

So how are we supposed to "do" Jesus' sayings? Quite simply, we are to believe what He says. You are a sinner without hope. Unless you look to Jesus, who is your only hope, and trust in His forgiveness secured for you on the cross, you have no hope. Thanks be to God that He gives us faith to believe that we are forgiven for Jesus' sake. The faith that God gives rests upon the "Rock", upon Jesus. Such foundation in Christ is unshakable, for it comes from God Himself through the working of the Holy Spirit. Even when you are overwhelmed by the troubles of this world and you feel like giving up, God does not give up on you. In the midst of all your troubles He holds fast to you according to that faith in Christ.

Collect: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

At the time when Jesus walked the earth the most prominent of the laws given to the Jews by Moses should have been the Ten Commandments. While God also had given many ceremonial laws to the Jews, such as circumcision, the Ten Commandments were the basis upon which their society was to function. Yet, the Jewish leaders were upset with Jesus for following the Ten Commandments. They were more concerned about the ceremonial law concerning circumcision than their neighbor's well-being.

Such was the life of Jesus while He walked the earth. He did good to others, only to be met with lies and deceit. "Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him," (John 13:16). When it comes to our good works, we need to remember that it is Christ who is working in us and through us to do such good works. Just as He was often ridiculed for doing what is right, now that He is working through us, we can expect the same derision. While the help a Christian gives to another Christian may be met with ingratitude, we need to remember Jesus' words, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

Collect: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; 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 all have sinned and have been accused by the Law of Moses for misusing our Master's goods. As a consequence, the Law threatens to remove us from our place as servants in the house of God. What then shall we do?

The steward from Sunday's parable can represent one possible response. He did not care at all about staying in his master's service and embraced his punishment. Instead, he poured all of his efforts into gaining honor in the eyes of other men in the hope that they would provide for him. Many choose a similar strategy in response to the Law. They ignore it, completely throw themselves into the service of mammon and worldly honor, and abandon any thought of service to God.

There is, however, a better option for us, as St. John teaches in his epistle: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). God has promised that He will pardon all those who come to Him in humble repentance and faith. He will dismiss the accusations against them, honor them with the righteousness of Christ, and even restore them as His servants. We should follow this second path, seeking the honor of God by believing in the Son of God, and not be troubled about the temporary honor, wealth, and security of this world.

Collect: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; 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 says the scribes will receive greater condemnation. He indicated the reason for this in Monday's reading. "That servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes... For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required..." (Luke 12:47-48). It was God's will to give the scribes the great responsibility of teaching His Word to the people, but they had misused it to give honor to themselves and oppress the laity with traditions.

Some of us, like the scribes, have been given more. Bishops and pastors, as well as government officials, supervisors, managers, parents, and teachers have been given additional gifts, honor, authority, and responsibility by God. Others of us, like the widow in today's reading, have not been given such honor or position of authority, for example, children, the unmarried, and lowly employees.

Jesus warns that those to whom much has been given should not take their position lightly or use God's gifts to honor themselves. Nor should they think that God is somehow more pleased with them than others. On the flip side, Jesus comforts those to whom little has been given. He is delighted with their faithful good works, no matter how insignificant in the eyes of others. For the value of our work does not come from us or our earthly position, but from faith in the merits of Christ.

Collect: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Some people today find it important to give their "personal testimonies". Often the difficulty with their testimonies is that they are far more "personal" than testimonies about Jesus.

Understanding what Jesus has done for you is important. Indeed, each individual ought to always give thanks to God for Jesus' work of paying the price for our sins through His death on the cross. But we do well to remember that testifying about Christ's work is to tell what *He* has done for the whole world. *He* is the "Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world."

Our testimony to the world must be clear: "I am just like everyone else in this world, a poor, miserable sinner, and our only hope is Jesus Christ and His forgiveness." That is why the Father sent Him.

The promise made by God to Adam and Eve in the garden was fulfilled in Jesus. Though His heel was bruised, He crushed the head of the serpent, thereby defeating death itself. Our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake by what Jesus secured on the cross for the whole world. It is granted unto us by our gracious God through faith. The work of our salvation has been completed by Christ and given to us as God's free gift.

Collect: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” That is quite a statement for Jesus to make when one considers “His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him.” While it may appear that Jesus is disowning His mother and brothers, if one sets aside a quick reaction and listens to what Jesus is saying, one can begin to appreciate the comfort found in Jesus’ words.

For too many of the Jews in Jesus’ day, knowing they were of the bloodline of Abraham was all that mattered. They felt no need for repentance and no need for forgiveness. They failed to understand that even though their bloodline could be traced to Abraham, they still needed to be adopted by God to be a part of His eternal family.

Those who are to be called His “brother and sister and mother” are the ones adopted into the family of God. Such adoption takes place through Holy Baptism as God snatches us from the grasp of Satan and places us into His own loving arms. God’s family is one eternal family that He creates as His Holy Spirit continues to call people to faith in Jesus Christ.

So, did Jesus really disown His mother and brothers? “For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother...” This statement does not exclude them, for everyone who believes in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins is His “brother and sister and mother.”

Collect: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The shrewd steward from Sunday’s parable knew that people tend to love those who love them, and that they will repay favors done to them. He used this quite effectively to his own advantage, distributing his master’s wealth so that he might receive something in return. Christians, however, should be concerned about obtaining the love of God, not men. God’s love is not at all like man’s love. He does not bestow His love on those who love Him first, nor does He give so that He can get something in return.

Scripture teaches us that God showers His greatest blessings upon whoever believes in His Only-Begotten Son. We are received into His loving, eternal home through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus loved us while we were still sinners, and He died for us, freely offering salvation, without demanding any payment in return.

We are unable to repay Him for this great love. But by the power of His Holy Ghost we may give Him thanks by obeying Him, by showing love to our enemies, and by doing good without expecting anything in return. We do not need anything from our neighbor anyway. We are not looking for a secure home by the love of men. We have our place as forgiven servants in God’s household.

Collect: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; 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 yesterday's Gospel reading, Jesus encouraged us to imitate the shrewd steward who made friends for himself by means of unrighteous mammon. Today, Jesus describes what exactly is the righteous version of this. He says that the sons of light will use their wealth to give alms to the poor. He says that faithful and wise stewards do the work of the household of God. Whatever God has given us, whether money or skills or time, comes with the responsibility to use these gifts to provide for those in need.

When Jesus says that by doing so we will store up treasure in heaven, He does not mean that we will earn eternal life by our charity. He makes clear right from the start that our inheritance in the kingdom of God is purely a result of His good pleasure. For this reason He says we do not need to fear, as if our salvation depended upon our own almsgiving.

There is fear, however, for anyone who knowingly withholds God's gifts from his neighbor in need. Because we Christians have been taught what the will of our Master is, He expects even more of us than unbelievers. Let us strive then to be faithful and wise stewards, always focused on pleasing our Lord and mindful that He is coming soon.

Collect: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; 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 when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." As we heard yesterday, out of God's grace and mercy the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel to faith in Jesus when we are baptized in Christ.

The only-begotten Son of God, true God, resided in the womb of His mother, St. Mary. He whom we confess to be both true God and true Man was there in St. Mary's womb. We may find ourselves asking with St. Mary, "How can this be?" How can God Almighty, the Creator of all that exists, be found in her womb? The angel made that clear, "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

We, too, do well to listen to Scripture, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). As God chose to reside in the womb of St. Mary, so, too, He has chosen to reside in His faithful people.

Collect: Almighty God, who didst show favor to the Blessed Virgin Mary, granting unto her to be the mother of Thine only-begotten Son, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst grant humility and faithfulness unto Thy Church to glorify Thee in the fulfillment of our labors, that we, who have been saved by grace through faith in Thy Son, might remain steadfast unto the end; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” Really? *Whatever* we ask?! So many people have been led astray by preachers who have based their ministries on the “whatever” portion of Jesus’ words, while completely disregarding the word “believing”.

Jesus’ point is quite simple. The “whatever” is always contingent on “believing”. What are we as Christians supposed to believe when we pray? The answer is found in these words from the prayer Jesus taught us: “Thy will be done.” We have all had troubling times when we prayed and didn’t get the response we wanted. We may have even begun to think that God didn’t care. And yet, nothing could be farther from the truth.

“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32). When we hear these words of St. Paul we are reminded that the receiving of “all things” is God’s promise to us. While in this world we may not get everything we pray for, He has promised that when we rise from the dead on the Last Day, “all things” will be ours for Jesus’ sake.

Collect: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; 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 Ninth Sunday after Trinity

The Seventh Commandment. Thou shalt not steal.

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

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

—The Large Catechism, ¶223–225, 227