

What a fitting text for All Saints. Today's text is the culmination of our faith in God's grace. When the great day of wrath has come, to the frantic question of desperate men the prophet gives a twofold answer. First, the vision of the 144,000 members of the completed people of God, numbered by God and marked as His own by His seal, gives assurance that nothing and no one can pluck God's elect from His hand—they shall be able to stand. Second, the vision of the innumerable multitude from among all nations gives assurance that the grace of God which has cleansed us by the blood of the Lamb will bring us safely out of the great tribulation, and enable us to stand before the Judge unafraid.

More than that, His grace will bring us into a new life of enraptured adoration; a life of perpetual worship before the throne in the temple of God. It is a life of consummated salvation in which the agonies of life are no more: no hunger, no thirst, no blasting heat, no tears, but fulfilled life in the shelter of God's presence, under the everlasting, kindly care of the Good Shepherd.

Collect: O Almighty God, who hast knit together Thine elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical Body of Thy Son, Christ our Lord: Grant us grace so to follow Thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys which Thou hast prepared for those who unfeignedly love 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.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



OCTOBER 6–NOVEMBER 1, 2025

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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)

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

October 5	Trinity 16	ASBH 54
October 12	Trinity 17	ASBH 55
October 17 (F)	St. Ignatius of Antioch, Bp. & Martyr	ASBH 104
October 18 (S)	St. Luke, Evangelist	ASBH 105
October 19	Trinity 18	ASBH 56
October 26	Trinity 19	ASBH 57
October 28 (T)	St. Simon & St. Jude, Apostles	ASBH 106
October 31 (F)	Festival of the Reformation	ASBH 107
November 1 (S)	Festival of All Saints	ASBH 108

St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary

Fall Quarter began September 1 and will run from until November 17. (There is a two week break from Sept. 27 to October 12.

Fall Quarter classes are: Christology (3 hrs.); Synoptic Gospels (3 hrs.); Ecumenical Councils (2 hrs.); Greek Readings (hr.); and Readings in the Church Fathers (1 hr.).

St. Ignatius currently has two students, Duncan Geldenhuis (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*.

Installation of Rev. Jacob Henson at Apologia-Deer Park

Rev. Jacob Henson, who has served since ordination as deacon of Apologia-Deer Park, has now been called as pastor of the same congregation. His installation has been scheduled for October 17 (Festival of St. Ignatius) at 5 P.M., with Bp. Heiser performing the installation. All clergy and laity of the diocese are encouraged to attend!

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31: REVELATION 14:6–7

REFORMATION

The eternal Gospel is beautifully presented in these two verses, concise and divinely wondrous. The content of this “good news” is not found in verse seven, which is a summary of the *purpose* for which the Gospel is proclaimed. The Gospel is the good news of our redemption through the blood of the Lamb. This Gospel is eternal in that it will be preached to the end of time. God still calls to men, His creatures, warning them not to repeat the sin of Adam by leaping over the boundary between creature and Creator. His calling is both the Law and the Gospel, in that it presents the gracious warnings and promises of God to His chosen elect.

As we celebrate the festival of the Reformation, we give thanks to God that He sent Luther and the other faithful teachers of the Reformation to proclaim the Word of God rightly. The Law and the Gospel both are treasures of the Church, and by our Lord’s grace they are taught clearly and properly in our midst.

Collect: Almighty God, merciful Father, who madest the light to shine out of darkness, we thank Thee that Thou hast shown mercy unto us and our fathers, and by means of Thy servant Martin Luther hast restored the pure light of Thy Gospel: keep us, we beseech Thee, in sound doctrine, that we may steadfastly believe and worthily follow Thy saving Word, and finally, by its holy comfort, depart in peace and joy; 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 Law, together with the Levitical priesthood to which it was closely linked under the Mosaic system, are only a shadow pointing to Christ. The sacrifices prescribed by the Law prefigured the Lamb of God's ultimate sacrifice. In verse four, it is made clear that an animal cannot possibly be an adequate substitute for a human being, who is made in God's image. (This reality flies in the face of today's delusions of animals being equal to man.) Thus, these sacrifices were repeated year after year, the very repetition bearing testimony that the perfect, sin-removing sacrifice had not yet been offered.

In verses five and six, the different terms used for Levitical sacrifices represent four of the five types of offerings prescribed by the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 1–7), namely, fellowship, grain, burnt, and sin. Verse nine emphasizes Christ's setting aside of the first sacrifices to establish the second. His perfect sacrifice, offered in complete submission, supersedes and therefore replaces all previous sacrifices. The Law has been fulfilled in Christ. The sanctification presented in verse ten is 'passive perfect' (completed by God). We are sanctified by God, by Christ and the Holy Spirit, through faith, by His grace.

Collect: O Almighty and most Merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldest have done; 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 Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE III.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

This article I cannot explain better than (as I have said) that it treats of Sanctification, viz. that thereby the Holy Ghost, with His office, is declared and set forth, namely, that He makes holy.

Therefore we must establish ourselves upon the word HOLY GHOST, because it is so precise and comprehensive that we cannot use another like it. For there are besides many kinds of spirits mentioned in the Holy Scriptures—the spirit of man, heavenly spirits and evil spirits. But the Spirit of God alone is called the Holy Ghost, that is, He which has sanctified and still sanctifies us. For as the Father is called Creator, the Son Redeemer, so the Holy Ghost, from His work, must be called Sanctifier, or one that makes holy. But what is the process of such sanctification? Answer: Just as the Son obtains dominion, whereby He redeems us, by His birth, death, resurrection, etc., so also the Holy Ghost effects our sanctification, as follows, namely, by the communion of saints or Christian Church, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body and eternal life; that is, He first leads us into His holy congregation, and places us in the bosom of the Church, whereby He preaches to us and brings us to Christ.

For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him and have Him for our Lord, except as it is offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Gospel. The work is finished and accomplished; for Christ, by His suffering, death, resurrection, etc., has acquired and gained the treasure for us. But if the work remained concealed, so that no one knew of it, they it were in vain and lost. That this treasure therefore might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and apply it to us. Therefore sanctification is nothing else but bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which, of ourselves, we could not attain.

Learn then to understand this article most clearly. If you are asked: What do you mean by the words: "I believe in the Holy Ghost," you can answer: I believe that the Holy Ghost makes me holy, as His name implies. But whereby does He accomplish this end? Or what are His means and method to this end? Answer: The Christian Church, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. For in the first place He has a peculiar congregation in the world, which is the mother that bears every Christian through the Word of God, which He

reveals and preaches, and through which He illumines and enkindles hearts, that they understand and accept it, cling to it and persevere in it.

For where He does not cause it to be preached and made alive in the heart, so as to be understood, it is lost, as was the case under the Papacy, where faith was entirely put under a bushel, and no one recognized Christ as his Lord or the Holy Ghost as his Sanctifier, i.e. no one believed that Christ is our Lord in the sense that He has acquired this treasure for us, and, without our works and merit, made us acceptable to the Father. And what indeed was the cause? This, verily, that the Holy Ghost was not there to reveal it, and caused it to be preached; but men evil spirits were there, who taught us to obtain grace and be saved by our works. Therefore it is no Christian Church; for where Christ is not preached there is no Holy Ghost who makes, calls and gathers the Christian Church, without which no one can come to Christ the Lord. ...

The holy Christian Church the Creed denominates a communion of saints, for both expressions are taken together as one idea. But formerly the one point was not there, as it is also unintelligible in the translation. If it is to be given very plainly, it must be expressed quite differently. For the word ecclesia is properly an assembly. But we are accustomed to the word church, which the simple do not refer to an assembled multitude, but to the consecrated house or building. Although the house ought not to be called church, except for the reason that the multitude assembles there. For we who assemble constitute and occupy a particular space, and give a name to the house according to the assembly.

Everything therefore in the Christian Church is so ordered that we shall daily obtain free and full forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs, appointed to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. Thus, although we have sin, the Holy Ghost does not allow it to injure us, because we are in the Christian Church, where there is full forgiveness of sin, both in that God forgives us, and in that we forgive, bear with and help each other.

But outside of this Christian Church, where the Gospel is not, there is no forgiveness, as also there can be no sanctification. Therefore all who do not seek sanctification through the Gospel and the forgiveness of sin, but expect to merit it by their works, have expelled and severed themselves from the Christian Church.

These articles of the Creed, therefore, separate and distinguish us Christians from all other people upon earth. For all outside of Christianity, whether heathen, Turks, Jews or false Christians and hypocrites, although they believe in and worship only one true God, yet know not what His mind toward them is, and cannot confide in His love or expect any good from Him; therefore they abide in eternal wrath and damnation. For they have not the Lord Christ, and besides are not illumined and favored by the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

—The Large Catechism, §34–45, 47–48, 56, 66

In this chapter we see the prophet directed by God to take a “wife of whoredom” to signify the adulterous nature of the Israelites. The union produces three “children of whoredom,” which are given names that reflect the sad state of the people of God who have chosen to forsake their beautiful name and prestigious title.

The prophet illustrates true repentance in the words which he places on the lips of his judged and humbled people returning to the Lord their God. Israel, the northern kingdom, is to be judged for its rebellion and idolatry. Only in Hosea is God compared to a tree in the Old Testament—and that tree will no longer bear its fruit of mercy to this people because they have chosen not to be His people. The Israelites have become fruitless due to their unbelief. They have received the fruitfulness from the Lord, but no more. They have abandoned the ways of the LORD and will now face the consequences of that tragic choice of sinful self-will.

The prophet continues his faithful message by offering each reader the alternatives of walking or stumbling—of obedience or rebellion. This text reminds us that every day of the Christian’s life involves making choices; choices which always carry the consequences of walking faithfully or unfaithfully in our sojourn through this fallen, sin-filled world.

Collect: O Almighty and most Merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldest have done; 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 text follows Jesus' beautiful figure of the vine and the branches, which emphasizes the nature of the disciples' communion with their Teacher and Lord. He initiates that communion (verse 16), they are forever dependent on Him, and they can bear fruit only by virtue of their continuing union with Him. Jesus' comment on the figure makes clear that their union with Him is not their conscious, personal choice. Jesus, who loves His own, has assured His disciples that they can continue in His love as surely as He Himself abides in the Father's love.

It is His love for them that forewarns them of the world's hatred, and forearms them against it. It is that love for you that forewarns you of the world's hatred, and forearms you against it. By faith we are identified with Christ, as He is identified with the Father. His choice of us has made us alien to the world; the world will hate us. As surely as we are servants of the Lord, so surely will we inherit the hatred of the world which persecuted Him and ignored His Word.

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 to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto 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.

The teachings of St. James reflect that which he heard from our Lord Jesus. If one truly belongs to the fellowship and brotherhood of God's people, then he knows that our Lord teaches to cling to His blessings, take up one's cross, and bear the fruit of love. This is written for those who already believe and are experiencing the trials that go with Christ's cross. Such a one is a bondservant of God because he believes that Jesus is the Lord and Master. He is a brother because by the Spirit he has been made able to pray, "Our Father..."

St. James is stirring up the faithful to stand firm in the faith which God alone has worked in them. Our Lord Jesus taught that the unfaithful world will hate the children of God because it hates God and His truth. It requires our Lord's divine help for us to both stand in the faith and to truly bear fruit in the faith. One is double-minded when he calls himself a servant of Christ and brother of the Church, but lacks the patience, love, and humility that shows he trusts in God's power.

Our Lord Jesus taught that the wealth and power of the world is empty and short-lived. The unfaithful world clings to it, but it has no patience because it knows it won't last. But in Christ we have peace, because we can humbly serve Him in the wisdom and knowledge that His Kingdom and righteousness will bless us now and forever according to His gracious promise.

Collect: Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Hebrews reminds us that “the just shall live by faith.” This is a consistent message through our Lord’s holy Word. The works of our lives do not make us just. The faith that He works in us makes us just, makes us truly alive, and makes us able to bear the fruit of patient love.

If we focus on this world, its power, its ups and downs, then we are drawn away from the promises of our Lord. He gives His Spirit so we may confidently fear, love, and trust in Him above all those things. He gives us His Gospel so we may know that He paid the price for our sins with His blood on the cross. He gives us the whole wisdom and counsel of His Word so we may be equipped to walk in His blessings. There is nothing good for us if we go back to the things of the world.

The world wants us to think that Christ’s promises are empty. Do not believe it. Our Lord has shown us in many ways that the world burns with the lies of the devil. He has also shown us that He keeps His gracious promises. He will continue to be with us and bless us in His Church, and He will make all things new in the life of the world to come!

Collect: Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

What God has done, and what the believer now should and can do by the grace of God are the central points of today’s text. Saint Paul goes into deeper detail, beyond what he has said in Romans 6, by speaking of the Christian’s resurrection as already accomplished in Christ’s resurrection. He speaks of the believer being dead; has been raised with Christ; is with Christ in heaven (“hidden with Christ”); has “taken off the old self”; and has “put on the new self.”

This is a reality because the believer has “taken off” and “put on” natures through faith. As one takes off dirty clothes and puts on clean ones, so the Christian is called upon to renounce his evil ways and live in accordance with the rules of Christ’s kingdom. He is to set his heart and mind on things above; he is to put to death practices that belong to his earthly nature; and he is to rid himself of practices that characterized his unregenerate self, and embrace the new man’s nature and practices.

Collect: O Almighty and most Merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldest have done; 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 Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity

Article IV.

Also they teach, that men cannot be Justified before God by their own strength, merits or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, hath made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4.

—Augsburg Confession

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8: JOB 2:1–10

16TH S. A. TRINITY

Job said, “Shall we not accept adversity?” Adversity does not give us the right to stop doing the righteous work that God has prepared for us. Sometimes suffering adversity is the very work that the Lord would have us do! The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job...?” The suffering and adversity that God permitted to come upon Job is one of the most well-known stories of the Scriptures. But Job's purpose was not only to suffer. He was to show what faithfulness looks like under affliction, and the Lord lifted up His servant Job so that we can ultimately see God's grace as all things are made to work together for His will.

This story also shows us that Satan is not free to do whatever he wants. Even though Satan is the murderous enemy of God and His children, the enemy still must submit to the power and will of God. Our Lord is not the author of evil. He allows things to happen because He Himself will show His power and mercy by turning it to good for His children. Even greater than the example of Job's faithfulness under adversity is the story of our Lord's suffering, death, and resurrection. God Himself allowed Satan and evil men to do all manner of temptation and violence against Him. But our Lord Jesus not only remained perfectly faithful, He also did it to pay for our sins and earn our salvation!

Collect: Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; 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 Lord uses trials to teach us patience. He uses correction to strengthen us in humility and discipline. God told His people this before. The writer to the Hebrews refers back to Proverbs 3, reminding his hearers that we should not despise correction. Proverbs 3 also says, “lean not on your own understanding,” and “do not be wise in your own eyes (vs. 5, 7). Through the wisdom of His Word He teaches us righteousness and proper vocations. It is by these that He guides us and, when necessary, chastises us. We do not have the right to despise God or the servants through whom He guides us. Our vain understanding and wisdom want to dictate what our correction should look like, but that is not our place. God is our Master, Teacher, and Savior. We are the students and disciples.

Throughout the Gospels we see the chosen twelve fail in their understanding and think they deserve greatness for their own wisdom, even though their teacher was the Son of God Himself. Our Lord Jesus often corrected them, sometimes harshly! Our Lord was fulfilling His vocation and the will of the Father as He prepared these men for their vocation to be the holy Apostles of the Church.

The Lord says in Isaiah 55:8, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways.” He calls us; we do not choose Him. We are to submit to the will of our Lord; He teaches us to pray that His will be done, not ours. And He does all of this because He loves us dearly.

Collect: Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Many seek God’s “special plan” as if it were some hidden path of prosperity or extraordinary purpose. Yet Scripture shows God’s will chiefly in the vocations He assigns. Parents, workers, rulers, and children all have God-given callings. His will is served in ordinary faithfulness.

The Proverbs remind us that wisdom is not lofty, but lived. To be generous to the poor, to labor honestly, to rule justly—these are works pleasing to God. To despise one’s neighbor is sin; to show kindness is righteousness. The will of God is found not in hidden revelations but in the daily lives of His people.

Christ frees us from sin to serve in love. Therefore, the Christian need not chase after secret knowledge or worldly success. God is glorified when His children live faithfully where He has placed them. Humble obedience, grounded in His Word, reveals His wisdom more clearly than any grand “scheme”.

The Christian life is not about seeking greatness, but serving in love, confident that Christ Himself sanctifies even the smallest task. In Him, the most ordinary work done in faith becomes a holy service to God and a blessing to our neighbor.

Collect: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee: Mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Faith is not to be hidden. It shows itself in life. James warns that envy, selfish ambition, and disorder spring from unbelief. A person who confesses Christ but lives in such sins denies the very faith he claims.

Some misuse James to contradict the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Yet James does not teach salvation by works. Instead, he insists that genuine faith cannot be barren. Just as gravity works whether one acknowledges it or not, so faith acts. If someone claims to believe in gravity, yet leaps from a building, his actions prove otherwise. Likewise, a Christian who continually embraces sin shows his confession to be false.

James' words call us to repentance, not self-justification. None of us lives perfectly. But where faith lives, there fruits appear, however weak. When we sin, we confess and return to Christ, who alone is our righteousness. Where His wisdom rules, there is peace, mercy, and good fruit.

Thus, faith and works are not opposed but united: faith justifies, and faith works. The Gospel makes us alive, and the Spirit bears fruit in our lives. To live contrary to Christ is to lie against the truth; to live in Him is to walk in His peace.

Collect: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee: Mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

If we truly confess that we are Christians, members of His one holy Apostolic Church, then we pledge to be faithful unto death. That means we strive to be faithful when things are good *and* bad, when we have peace *or* adversity, when we are well-off *or* in poverty. We do not get to call “time out” and quit doing His will just because things are difficult or unpleasant. The ultimate example of this is our Lord's own suffering and death.

Our Lord Jesus endured rejection from His people, antagonism from those who were supposed to support His ministry, betrayal from those He chose and loved, and undeserved violence from those who were supposed to uphold justice. But through it all He knew that He would rise again and enjoy a far greater joy and glory. He showed us all this in His own tribulations because He has also promised His resurrection, peace, joy, and glory to us. If we are faithful by the power of His Word and Holy Spirit, then we cling to this promise, throughout tribulations, even unto death.

Being a Christian does not mean we have it easy now. It does not mean that people will treat us with honor or respect. It does not mean we will have everything we want. God didn't promise that. He promised the opposite. We will have adversity; we will be despised; we will have what we *need* now, and our real treasures will be stored in heaven. But His promises are good, and His love and grace will see us through all things.

Collect: Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Warnings, chastisement, and discipline all go together. God warns us through His Word and through His servants. If we despise correction, or if we despise the servant who rightfully has the responsibility to correct us, then we despise God and His Word.

This passage also reminds us that we are accountable for our own sins. Even if others have failed in their responsibilities to help us, we are each responsible for our own errors. False teachers think they are being wise or loving by twisting the Law and misapplying the Gospel to help sinners not feel guilty. But they are hurting the hearer and bringing serious judgment on themselves. From the beginning we see that Adam and Eve could not get away with shifting the blame for their wickedness to others.

If our focus is on avoiding correction or shifting blame, then our hearts are already guilty of wickedness. God teaches us to seek righteousness, love, and humility. Even if we are to endure adversity doing it, we should seek to do what is right, good, and beautiful in the eyes of God, not seek our own will and wisdom. The leaven of the Pharisees was to despise the Lord for telling the truth. But true disciples hear His warnings, repent, and embrace the eternal life that our Lord's Word and Spirit give.

Collect: Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; 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 Formula of Concord teaches that believers do good works “voluntarily and freely, as if they had received no command, heard no threat, and expected no reward” (Article VI). Renewed by the Spirit, Christians serve willingly because Christ has made them new.

This is why John commends Gaius. The hospitality shown was not an attempt to earn righteousness, but evidence that faith bears fruit. Good works flow naturally from faith, even though they remain imperfect. Jesus Himself reminds His disciples that even after fulfilling their duty, they are still “unworthy servants” (Luke 17:10). Our works cannot earn us anything before God.

Yet we take comfort that God accepts and commends our efforts for Christ's sake. He causes our works and counts them as good, not because of their worth, but because of Christ's righteousness covering us. Our good works serve the neighbor, confess the Savior, and show forth the Gospel that has redeemed us. They are not our boast, but God's testimony to His grace. Thus we learn to rejoice not in ourselves, but in the Spirit's work. What God begins in us He will bring to completion in the day of Christ.

Collect: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee: Mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Moses sets before Israel a stark choice: life or death, blessing or curse. The way of sin leads only to death, for rebellion separates us from the God who is life. But in Christ, God sets before us the way of life eternal.

We remain simultaneously justified and sinful. If we follow the old Adam, indulging sin, we inherit death. But Christ has redeemed us and made us new. Through faith we walk in His way and live. This truth is not hidden—it is plainly revealed in God's Word. Sin and salvation cannot coexist.

The choice of life is not a matter of human strength but of God's mercy. By the Spirit, Christ draws us to Himself and keeps us steadfast. Daily we are called to turn from the path of death and cling to Him who died and rose for us. Moses' words urge us not to take God's grace lightly. To turn aside is to embrace destruction; to remain in Christ is to live. Therefore, we cry out to our Savior for His Spirit, that He would hold us fast in His Word, guard us from sin's deceit, and keep us in the way of His life that has no end.

Collect: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee: Mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; 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 Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

The Third Commandment.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

When, then, it is asked: "What is meant by the commandment: 'Remember the sabbath-day to sanctify it'?" Answer: To sanctify the Sabbath is the same as "to keep it holy." But what is meant by "keeping it holy"? Nothing else than to be occupied in holy words, works and life. For the day needs no sanctification for itself; for in itself it has been created holy. But God desires it to be holy to thee. Therefore it becomes holy or unholy on thy account, according as thou art occupied on the same with things that are holy or unholy.

How then does such sanctification occur? Not that we sit behind the stove and do no rough work, or deck ourselves with a garland and put on our best clothes, but (as has been said) that we occupy ourselves with God's Word, and exercise ourselves therein.

And indeed we Christians ought always to keep such a Sabbath, and to be occupied with nothing but holy things, i.e. daily to meditate upon God's Word, and carry it in our hearts and upon our lips. But because (as has been said) we do not all have leisure, we must devote several hours a week to the young, or at least a day to the mass of people, in order that we may be concerned about this alone, and especially urge the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and thus direct our whole life and being according to God's Word. The Sabbath is truly kept whenever time is devoted to earnest attention to this, and the practice of it; but that cannot be called a true Christian Sabbath where this is not done. For they who are not Christians can keep holiday and be idle just as well as the entire swarm of our ecclesiastics, who stand daily in the churches, singing, and ringing bells, but who keep no Sabbath day holy, because they neither preach nor practice God's Word, but teach and live contrary to it.

For the Word of God is the sanctuary above all sanctuaries, yea, the only one which we Christians know and have. For though we had the bones of all the saints, or all holy and consecrated garments upon a heap, they would not avail us anything; for all that is a dead thing which can sanctify nobody. But God's Word is the treasury which sanctifies everything whereby even all the saints themselves were sanctified. —The Large Catechism, §87–90

When St. Jude says, “keep yourselves in the love of God,” it sounds like we are the ones doing the “keeping”, or so many interpret it. They assume that God would never command something that is impossible, therefore it follows—so they think—that it is God who saves us, but it is up to us and our own powers to “keep ourselves” saved.

But this is a mishandling of both the divine Law and of St. Jude. For Scripture also commands, “you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48), and only the foolish believe they can do this. The Law does not change because we fail to keep it; we are still guilty. As for St. Jude, he answers his own dilemma with the message of God’s mercy, calling Him, “Him who is able to keep you,” so that we would not trust in our own power but in His.

Furthermore, the context shows that St. Jude is writing to Christians who have been renewed in Baptism. These possess from the Holy Spirit the power to cooperate with the Triune God, which consists of repentance and not resisting the work of God, so that He remains the active “worker”, rather than us sinners. This is realized in the Divine Service, where it is God and His Word which produce the Sacraments, and the Christian is merely a passive, though willing, participant.

Collect: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Moses exhorts Israel to fear the Lord, walk in His ways, and keep His commandments. God’s Law reflects His own character. He is faithful, therefore we must be faithful. He is Truth, therefore we must not bear false witness. He provides, therefore we are not to steal or covet. The commandments are not arbitrary—they show us who God is.

Beyond restraining sin’s harm, the Law also teaches us to treasure God as Redeemer. Just as He freed Israel from Egypt, He has rescued us from sin and death through Christ. To obey Him is to remember His mercy and to live as those who belong to Him.

When we walk in His commandments we confess before the world that we are not our own, but His redeemed people. The Law does not save us, but because we are saved, we keep it as a reflection of who our God is. Moses directs Israel—and us—to remember God’s faithfulness and show it forth in our daily life; not to earn His favor, but because He has already claimed us in grace.

Collect: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee: Mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; 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 calls Himself the true vine, and His disciples the branches. Apart from Him, we can do nothing, for our sinful nature produces only death and disobedience. To keep His commandments on our own is impossible, as the Pharisees learned when they trusted in their own righteousness.

But Jesus gives life to His branches. He forgives sins, grafts us into Himself, and nourishes us with His righteousness. Our obedience flows not from human strength, but from Christ's life living in us. He gives the Spirit who enables us to bear fruit—faith toward God and love toward neighbor.

Thus, the Law becomes something cherished, not burdensome, because the Gospel has freed us. In Christ we are new creations, not weighed down by condemnation but sustained by His life. We keep His commandments because His forgiveness has made us His own. To abide in the Vine is to live by His Word, delighting in His love, and showing forth that love in daily life.

Collect: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee: Mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; 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 Lord Jesus Christ, who is God and Man, united in one perfect Person, is the fulfillment of the Sabbath. It is not that the Sabbath ceased to be, for the book of Hebrews explains the Sabbath in this way: “there remains therefore a rest for the people of God,” and Christ “has entered His rest.” The Sabbath rest is a present reality in Christ. Having suffered and died for the salvation of the world, He rests from His labor, and those who have been buried with Him in Baptism (Romans 6:4) rest from the pains of sin and spiritual death.

This is why Dr. Luther, in his wisdom and—more importantly—in conformity with this Epistle, taught that to “remember the Sabbath day” was not a matter of bodily resting, but of hearing and meditating on the Word of God (Small Catechism, 3rd Commandment). Any man may rest from physical labor on Saturday, but the true Sabbath rest is “for the people of God,” because it is the peaceful rest of the conscience in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some argue that the Christian Church “moved” the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. The Church did not “move” anything. The Christ is our Sabbath rest from sin. We are to rest in Him every day of the week. But we set aside Sunday to celebrate this formally, because that is the day He rose from the dead.

Collect: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Macedonia is a region in Northern Greece, containing such cities as Philippi (Acts 16:12), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1), and Berea (Acts 17:10), where St. Paul preached. His letters to the Philippian and Thessalonian Christians are also in sacred Scripture. In today's reading from the letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul uses these Macedonian Christians as an example of generosity for the Corinthians to imitate.

This teaches an important use of the Eighth Commandment. Each of the Ten Commandments has a double application: something you must do and something you must not do. The Eighth Commandment—"you shalt not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16)—is no different. The thing you must do is "defend" and "speak well of" your neighbor; whereas you must not "tell lies about" or "defame" your neighbor (Small Catechism). In general, it is easier for us to "not do" what the Commandment forbids than to practice what it commands. It is not enough that we refrain from lying about our neighbor; we must also defend and speak well of him. Here, St. Paul is an example of keeping the Eighth Commandment when he praises the Macedonians for their faithful conduct.

This reflects the doctrine of Justification. For our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of the Law, does not merely pass over the sins of the Baptized, He also defends and praises them to the Father, calling them "blessed of My Father" (Matt. 25:34).

Collect: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

consolation, and a joyful message which does not reprove or terrify, but against the terrors of the Law consoles consciences, points alone to the merits of Christ, and again comforts them by the precious preaching of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ's merit.

7. As to the revelation of sin, because the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear the bare preaching of the Law, and nothing concerning Christ, and therefore do not learn from the Law to perceive their sins aright, but either become presumptuous hypocrites as the Pharisees, or despair as did Judas; Christ takes the Law into His hands, and explains it spiritually (Matt. 5:21 sqq.; Rom. 7:14). And thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners (Rom. 1:18), how great it is; by this means they are instructed in the Law, and then from it first learn to know aright their sins—a knowledge to which Moses never could coerce them.

Therefore, although the preaching of the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God, is an earnest and terrible proclamation and declaration of God's wrath, whereby men are for the first time led aright to the Law, after the veil of Moses has been removed from them, so that they first know aright how great things God in His Law requires of us, nothing of which we can observe, and therefore should seek all our righteousness in Christ—

8. Yet, as long as all this (namely, Christ's suffering and death) proclaims God's wrath and terrifies man, it is still not properly the preaching of the Gospel, but the preaching of Moses and the Law, and therefore a "strange work" of Christ, whereby He attains His proper office, i.e. to preach grace, console and quicken, which is properly the preaching of the Gospel.

Negative.

Contrary Doctrine which is Rejected.

Therefore we reject and regard incorrect and injurious the dogma that the Gospel is properly a preaching of repentance or reproof, and not alone a preaching of grace. For thereby the Gospel is again converted into a law, the merit of Christ and the Holy Scriptures obscured, Christians robbed of true consolation, and the door opened again to the Papacy.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

Chapter V. Of the Law and the Gospel.

Statement of the Controversy.

Whether the preaching of the Holy Gospel be properly not only a preaching of grace, which announces the forgiveness of sins, but also a preaching of repentance and censure, rebuking unbelief, which is rebuked not in the Law, but alone through the Gospel.

Affirmative.

Pure Doctrine of God's Word.

1. We believe, teach and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church as an especially brilliant light, whereby, according to the admonition of St. Paul, the Word of God may be rightly divided.

2. We believe, teach and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God, and reproves everything that is sin and contrary to God's will.

3. Therefore everything that reproves sin is and belongs to the preaching of the Law.

4. But the Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man who has not observed the Law, and therefore is condemned by it, should believe, viz. that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and, without any merit of theirs [no merit of the sinner intervening], has obtained and acquired forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life.

5. But since the term "Gospel" is not used in one and the same sense in the Holy Scriptures, on account of which this dissension originally arose, we believe, teach and confess that if by the term "Gospel" the entire doctrine of Christ be understood, which He proposed in His ministry, as also did His apostles (in which sense it is employed, Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21), it is correctly said and written that the Gospel is a preaching of repentance and of the forgiveness of sins.

6. But if the Law and the Gospel be contrasted with one another, as Moses himself is called a teacher of the Law, and Christ a preacher of the Gospel, we believe, teach and confess that the Gospel is not a preaching of repentance or reproof, but properly nothing else than a preaching of

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16: EZRA 9:6–9 17TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

The Apostles' Creed teaches "the holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints." This Christian Church is the "remnant" and "peg" which God will cause to remain till the end of the age, not because of the worthiness of the saints, but because of His great mercy.

Ezra speaks of the historical Babylonian Captivity, from which the Jews had just returned, and of certain historical sins of the Jewish people—specifically, that they married pagan women. Though historical, these things are also representative of the Christian Church, as it exists in this present world. The Church in this world exists in a state of exile, because it is separated from its true home. Like Ezra and those with him, the saints are not without sin and regularly confess their sins to God, both individually and as a community. Because of their sin, Ezra confesses that their preservation is entirely by God's grace.

Concerning marriage with pagan women, God had expressly forbidden this when the Israelites first left Egypt (Exodus 34:12–17). Such a law offends modern sensibilities, often dismissed as "outdated". But St. Paul defends its wisdom: "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14). A marriage of mixed faiths does not function well. It is a hard burden to know that the other is going to hell. Unfortunately, more often the saint's faith is damaged by an unbelieving spouse, and their children are not brought up in the fear of God.

Collect: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

St. Ignatius was bishop of Antioch and was martyred during the reign of Emperor Trajan (early second century). During his transport to Rome for execution, Ignatius wrote many letters to the churches, encouraging Christians to stand firm in the Faith. He reassured them that he was glad to die, knowing from the Scriptures that those who die for the name of Christ are blessed.

The early apologist Tertullian famously wrote about the martyrs, “The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of the Christians is seed” (Tertullian’s “Apology”, ch. 50). The Romans tried everything to destroy this “new sect” (as they saw it) called “Christianity”. But, the more they persecuted the Church, the more the Gospel spread. This demonstrates the divine nature and purpose of the Gospel; if the Gospel were from men, it would have died with men, but the weakness of men helped its proclamation to grow, fulfilling what Christ said to St. Paul: “My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

Not all Christians are called to die a martyr’s death. But all are called to serve and honor Christ so that, by comparison, they seem to hate this present life. It is better to die in Christ than to live as the unbelievers do, who are spiritually dead even while their bodies go on moving.

Collect: Almighty God, behold our weakness and the sorrows of Thy people, and as Thou didst grant the consolation of Thy Holy Spirit to St. Ignatius in his time of affliction for Thy Name’s sake, so uphold us in our generation; through our Lord, Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Mark and Luke: these two Gospel writers were not Apostles, but we must not think of them as “lesser” than Matthew and John, for they were faithful to their callings. In this text, St. Paul complains that all his companions have abandoned him, except for Luke, who is faithful. Mark he also desires to have with him, knowing that Mark is of great help to him. So, even though Mark and Luke are not Apostles, they have the endorsement of the apostle Paul for their labor and faithfulness.

Luke’s Gospel is unique because it was a collected account. Matthew and John wrote down their own eye-witness accounts. Mark’s Gospel is held to be the witness of Peter, written down by Mark. But Luke relied on those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word and, tracing the events from the first, makes “an orderly account” of them (Luke 1:1–3).

When we say that the Gospels are “inspired”, we do not mean, as some imagine, that the Holy Spirit “possessed” the hands of the writers and controlled them. God kept their free will intact and used their whole person—body, mind, will, skills, etc.—in a way that the final product was exactly what the Spirit intended, but truly written by men, who faithfully and intentionally labored in their own vocations.

Collect: O Almighty God, who hast instructed Thy holy Church with the heavenly doctrine of Thy Evangelists: Give us grace, that being not like children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, we may be established in the truth of Thy holy Gospel; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.