

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



FEBRUARY 2–28, 2026

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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.

February 1	Septuagesima	ASBH 16
February 2 (M)	<i>The Presentation of our Lord</i>	ASBH 78
February 8	Sexagesima	ASBH 17
February 15	Quinquagesima	ASBH 18
February 18 (W)	Ash Wednesday	ASBH 19
	<i>Martin Luther, Confessor and Doctor</i>	ASBH 80
February 22	Invocavit (Lent 1)	ASBH 20
February 24 (T)	<i>St. Matthias, Apostle</i>	ASBH 81
February 25 (W)	Ember Wednesday in Lent	
February 27 (F)	Ember Friday in Lent	
February 28 (S)	Ember Saturday in Lent	

FEBRUARY 27 IS THE LAST DAY OF WINTER QUARTER
FOR ST. IGNATIUS

St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary

Winter Quarter begins December 8; the Christmas break begins on December 20. After Christmas break, classes resume January 5 and run through February 27. The classes offered in the winter quarter are as follows:

E009—Greek Readings 2 (1 hr.)

E003—Psalms (2 hrs.)

H003—Medieval Church (3 hrs.)

H009—Readings in Medieval Theology (1 hr.)

P002—Catechetics (3 hrs.)

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Septuagesima Sunday

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

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

AFFIRMATIVE

The Pure and True Doctrine concerning this Article.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Therefore we should judge concerning this our election to eternal life

neither from reason nor from the Law of God, which would lead either into a dissipated, dissolute epicurean life, or into despair, and would excite in the heart of men pernicious thoughts (and such thoughts cannot be effectually guarded against as long as they follow their own reason), so that they think to themselves: "If God has elected me to salvation, I cannot be condemned, although I do whatever I will." And again: "If I am not elected to eternal life, it matters not what good I do; for my efforts are nevertheless all in vain."

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

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

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

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

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome, §1–13

Moses died. He was a normal man. Joshua was also a normal man. But these men served the Lord and pointed to the Servant who would die and rise again, the incarnate Word of God! Moses and Joshua were to do all things according to God's Word, but as sinful men they did not always do it perfectly. However, our Lord Jesus Christ did do all things perfectly!

The true catholic Church is the whole company of people who have been faithful to the Word of the Lord and looked to Him for forgiveness and salvation. It was never about how good Moses, or Joshua, or anyone in the Old Testament was. It was never just about bloodlines or locations. It has always been about God's Word and the promise of the true Savior who would lead the whole Church into the kingdom of heaven according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified!

Moses served his purpose. So did Joshua. So did the history and locations around Israel. But now the true people of God are those who still cling to all that the Lord has commanded and promised in Jesus Christ, who saves us from our sin, brings us into the favor of God, and will raise all His people to eternal blessedness!

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people: that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Our Lord Jesus emphasized this message from the prophet Isaiah. He used it to show that He was indeed the true Christ, the Messiah. The hypocrites hated Him and His authority. Our Lord did nothing wrong; all His works were about love, mercy, grace, and truth. But the hypocrites hated Him because they loved their power and status more than the truth, thus fulfilling the parable.

The Word of God is clear: righteousness is not all about us men and our deeds or status; it is about what the Lord teaches and promises to us! As servants in His kingdom, we are to do the work that He prepares for us according to our vocations, and the fruitful results are His, for His purpose and His glory. Any authority we may have is to be used according to His good will and order, and our glory or approval comes from His pleasure, not from our status. As God makes us His holy and faithful people by His Word and Spirit, we are to cling to Him for our strength, and to give Him thanks and praise for graciously making us His servants in Christ Jesus.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people: that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

No one can keep the statutes, commandments, and judgments of the Lord if they do not have faith in Jesus Christ. The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrates clearly that He is the fulfillment of God's promises; He is the true Christ and Messiah. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" (John 14:6). Many have tried throughout the centuries to disprove our Lord, but none have succeeded.

Our Savior did not seek vain glory or power. He acted out of love, grace, and honesty. Any person or any belief system that says they believe in God, yet reject what Jesus says in the Gospel, has not understood what God actually says in His statutes, commandments, and judgments.

If we are to know and do the will of the Lord, we understand it through Jesus Christ. We sin and fail, but that does not invalidate what our Lord has taught us. In fact, even our weakness affirms what our Lord says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). His statutes, commandments, and judgments say, "Repent of your sins, and believe in the only-begotten Son for grace, forgiveness, and fullness of life!" So His faithful people find the fulfillment of all His Words by focusing on our crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people: that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The people insisted that they wanted to serve the Lord and have Him be their God. Joshua warned them that they cannot do that if they cling to vanity and idolatry, but they still insisted. Generations later, the holy Servant of God stood before them and they rejected Him, condemning Him to death as a criminal and a blasphemer. After hypocrites called for Jesus to be crucified, Pilate said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it"; all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children." (See Matt. 27:24-25.)

God is loving, gracious, and merciful, but He is also just. If people mock and reject His gracious Words, then those people call down upon themselves the righteous wrath and judgment of the Lord. We cannot pretend to be servants while we unrepentantly reject His truth.

The Church faithfully upholds all that our Lord teaches and promises. We show forth His love and grace, but we also show proper fear and respect for His discipline and Law. False teachers talk about love while rejecting discipline. They do not serve the Lord; they serve vanity and preach licentiousness, and they deserve the consequences of their persistent error. Proper fear, love, and trust in Christ Jesus values all His Words, because they are all a holy blessing to His faithful people.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people: that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Lord said, "I will save you." And He would do this by a relatively small number of men who were chosen according to His instructions. This is a point that needs to be remembered. Throughout history man says, "I will save us by my power and wisdom," and they forget God.

The faithful people of God might only be a relatively small number, but we are His. Our salvation and our righteousness are never a matter of how many, or how few; never a matter of our strength or our shrewdness. It is always about the Word and will of the Lord! He created us and all things. He sustains all things according to His will. And He alone saves us from sin and death by Christ crucified and His Spirit at work in us.

Even the simplest earthly work that we do comes from the gifts that He provides. So, it is important that we remember this lesson from the story of Gideon. It is the same lesson that we should remember when we pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; and give us this day our daily bread..." Luther's Small Catechism reminds us that we are asking the Lord to strengthen and preserve us steadfast in His Word and faith unto our end, and that He would lead us to know that He alone provides all the good things in our life!

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people: that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Lord corrected Jeremiah, telling him, “Do not say that.” Our good and holy Creator calls us to our roles and duties. He establishes all good order, and so our callings, our vocations, which come from Him are the work that He prepares for us! As St. Paul says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:8-10).

We, like Jeremiah, may feel afraid or uncertain in our duties, but we are also to remember that the Lord promises to be with us and work through us according to His Word and Spirit. We should have confidence in that, and pray often so that we may remember it.

It seems like the world is overwhelmed by the power of sin and foolishness. But our Lord says, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). St. John also reiterates this: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” (1 John 5:3-4). We have peace because our Lord works through us!

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Sexagesima Sunday

Article VII.

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

Article VIII.

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

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

—The Augsburg Confession

XII.

Of the Church.

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

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article XII

The Book of Concord

This is the third of the four servant songs. The speaker is given the tongue of those who are taught, that He may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Awakening morning after morning throughout time to teach and lead, the Lord awakens His ear to hear as those who are taught. The speaker can only be the Servant, identified by name in 42:1; 49:6.

While rebellious Israel turned a deaf ear to God, Jesus could claim to “speak as the Father taught” Him (John 8:27–29). Therefore a word from Him sufficed to sustain him that is weary, and to give rest to “all who labor and are heavy laden.” Jesus’ determination to fulfill everything written by the prophets leads Him to offer His back to repeated blows and suffering. Charged with the sins of the world, yet vindicated and acquitted when He was raised from the dead, He is at the right hand of God, defending the imputed innocence of all who appeal to Him for justification. The Lord will find Him righteous. Because Christ was sinless, He also atones for the charges brought against any who believe in Him as their Redeemer.

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

The author gives counsel on faithful living: even though time and chance may sabotage a carefully planned project, it is foolish to refuse to engage in ventures for fear of sustaining losses. Verse one is somewhat similar to our saying, “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.” If a merchant engaged in trade upon the seas, a storm could sink his ships and his fortune. But he does not allow this possibility to prevent him from investing in a business. The truth expressed in this maxim as applied to the Church: deeds performed by believers in Christ are not a bad investment. Like ships sent out to sea, they return laden with rich dividends, though it may be after many days.

These verses also urge faithful caution in making investments. Because evil may happen on earth, it is wise not to “put all your eggs into one basket.” The outcome of man’s enterprises depends on circumstances beyond his control, such as the havoc caused by the forces of nature. Man, who does not understand how he takes shape in the womb of his mother, should not wait to completely understand the work of God, who makes and sustains everything, before he launches a project which may or may not prove outwardly profitable. We live by fear, love, and trust in the Lord.

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

The twelve enlisted as Apostles in verses two through four were sent out on a mission as our Lord's ministers to the masses. They were instructed to avoid the Gentiles, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, proclaiming as they go that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. They were to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons. They were not to charge for these services, for they received freely what they gave. They were not to provision themselves with gold, silver, or copper for their belts; no bag or clothes for their journey, for the laborer deserves his compensation.

In whatever town or village they entered, they were to find out who is faithfully worthy and stay there until it was time to depart. As they entered the house, they were to greet them in the Lord, and if the house was worthy, the peace of the Lord would come upon it. If anyone would not receive or listen to their words, they were to shake off the dust from their feet when they left that house or town. "It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment" than for that town which rejects the one sent by Christ. This all summarizes the duties and activities of the Office of the Keys.

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

Today's text gives us a kind of 'fruits of faith' cataloging. Believers of old conquered the kingdoms of the Midianites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, etc. They enforced justice, received divine promises, sealed the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, exhibited strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, and put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. The faithful displayed great endurance even through horrible torture and persecution. We are told the world was not worthy of them. They were too good for the wicked world of men, which is without God and opposed to His will, which pursued them mercilessly, falsely making them out to be evil doers and outlaws.

The truth is well attested by their faith. The concluding verse of our text declares that God has planned something better: the fulfillment for them, as for us, is in Christ, who is the resurrection and the life. Only together with us would they be made perfect. All persons of true faith who had gone before focused their faith on God and His promises, just as we do in our time. The fulfillment of God's promises to them (and us) has now come in Jesus Christ, and their redemption (and ours as well) is now complete in Him.

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

It is important to know that the verses leading up to this text present Cyrus, king of Persia. Today's reading warns that no one should presume to dictate to the Creator of the universe how He is to go about saving fallen mankind, whom He formed from the dust of the ground. Anyone guilty of such faithless insolence forfeits the promised deliverance, and also provokes God to pronounce a fearful judgment on him.

In spite of objections, the divine plan of salvation remains unchanged. The Gentile king Cyrus will carry it out, for God aroused him in righteousness to set Israel free. At the same time, Israel's liberation from physical bondage, important as it is, only sets the stage for the eventual redemption toward which God was directing the world. It was His purpose to create a spiritual Israel, a worldwide communion of saints. Nations such as those incorporated in the Persian empire (Egypt, Ethiopia, etc.) would seek citizenship in this confederation in order to share in the everlasting salvation found nowhere else.

This glorious vision of the future is not a mirage. The Creator of heaven and earth will maintain control of history in His hands, not allowing the world to sink into complete diabolical chaos. The Lord issues an invitation to all the ends of the earth to forsake their useless idols, to trust in the certain fulfillment of His promises, and to turn to Him; for only in Him can they experience triumph and glory.

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

Jeremiah was constantly devising different modes of expressing Israel's need to repent and not destroy itself. In this chapter the prophet tries to rouse his hearers from their fatal complacency by labeling their apostasy a revolt against God. This is similar to the weekly activity of pastoral preaching and teaching.

Obstinate unfaithfulness is not the sin of a weak moment, but a deliberate conspiracy to defy God's claim to their loyalty. Nor can any profess ignorance of wrongdoing. At Mount Sinai God had made a solemn pact with His people. According to the words of this covenant He would be their God and they His people if, in response to this undeserved gift of grace, they would obey His voice and keep His commandments. But in the stubbornness of evil hearts and in the face of persistent warnings, Judah repudiated the sacred pledge of obedience. Hence, the curse pronounced on disobedience in the covenant would go into effect.

Chosen to be God's beloved, the covenant nation faced imminent destruction. Jeremiah's prayer on its behalf and its hypocritical ceremonial observances in God's house cannot avert its doom. Our modern situation also reflects this pending judgment on hypocrisy and unbelief, because it is virtually impossible for anyone today to claim no access to the clear Words of God's promises and warnings recorded in the New and Old Testaments.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Quinquagesima Sunday

Chapter II, Article IV.

[B. What is Justifying Faith?]

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

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

—Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §48–52

With just under 50 days until Easter, knowing that 40 of those 50 will be of the great season of repentance, Lent, today's reading makes sure we know why. Even those who desire to be with Him in His resurrection are prone to self-exaltation and thoughts of their own abilities. When we see it in others we become angry and indignant, not realizing that such a reaction is tinged with committing the same sin as they do. While our New Man in Christ may truly be rightly offended at such pretense as seeks favors and diminishes the proclamation of His glory, our flesh is also active in bristling at the audacity of those who make such presumptuous requests and who think they excel at Christian living in comparison to us.

Jesus makes it perfectly clear, though, that where we sit in the Kingdom is by the Father's gracious choice. The best thing we can do is not to concern ourselves with such things, but only to be concerned with living as true sons of our Father in Heaven—to live as Jesus Himself lived. As “even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many,” the highest position we can have in this life is in serving all. Our greatest concern must be that we are given to such works as glorify Jesus' working to save us—and that, as with salvation, comes only through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully hear our prayers, and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Judas “gets us.” Following Jesus would be easier if everyone could see Him for who He is! Yet, seeing is not necessarily believing. Judas Thadddeus (“not Iscariot”) confesses that Jesus manifested Himself, that His works reveal Him as the Only-begotten Son of God, come as True Man to save us. Thaddeus wants all to trust in Jesus as He does. Judas Iscariot, though, having seen the very same things, betrays Jesus!

Lack of trust in Jesus’ teaching robs one of the understanding of His works, just as it robs the understanding of His parables (Matthew 13:14). Judas Thaddeus embraced Jesus’ answer that those who believed His teaching would have Him and the Father dwelling in them. Judas Iscariot would find it another reason to betray Jesus: Jesus wasn’t doing what the unbeliever wants done—making him rich, making his children behave, giving his party political sway, overthrowing Rome—He’s just making life more difficult for some intangible benefit of “having peace with God.” Judas Iscariot continued to desire what Judas Thaddeus learned is not possible, that all would live by sight, not faith. Israel’s history demonstrates that ‘sight’—seeing repeated acts of deliverance—will not save sinners, because faith isn’t just a confession of the facts. It is trust in God’s abiding favor toward us behind those facts. It is something that comes only through the Word, which promises grace will continue to us through Jesus’ perfect life and atoning death in our place.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully hear our prayers, and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; 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' words are so clear that only a misguided view of history and an annual competition in mental gymnastics has allowed the Roman practice of Ash Wednesday to re-infiltrate Lutheran churches. Where did it come from?

While adult catechumens were finishing their preparation for Baptism during Lent, those who had been removed from the fellowship of the Lord's Table would receive the 'imposition of ashes' to begin a season of making their repentance apparent. 'Imposition' wasn't just a name for the rite, then, but the reality of being required to display public penitence so that neither the Church nor the public would be scandalized by the thought of their presence at the Lord's Table.

Certainly, of ourselves we all are unworthy to receive God's gift. However, the Roman Church and modern practice of putting ashes on *all* cheapens both the meaning of the original rite and the right understanding of fellowship at the altar, and the very difference between being in and out of the faith.

Pietism didn't steal this practice from Lutherans; Lutheran orthodoxy let it die. Its very essence is pietistic: substituting feelings and man-made gimmickry for the clear and objective words of Jesus. A Lutheran Lent focuses on the realities of the Gospel: that we have been washed clean in Holy Baptism, have Holy Absolution renewing us in that cleansing, and have our fasting kept from becoming starvation through our nourishment by Christ's Body and Blood.

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The ritualistic abuse of yesterday's reading is all the more abhorrent in the light of those leading the Galatians astray. They were warping a God-ordained sacrament to proclaim their spiritual superiority! Having a bit of flesh removed when they were eight days old, they asserted, was a fulfilling of the Law that those born to Gentile parents lacked. Therefore, Gentiles couldn't be as fully members of God's Kingdom as they were—apparently even asserting that Paul would agree with their saying this. St. Paul, though, rails against it: if having their foreskins removed as infants made them superior, he “could wish” them to become really holy by emasculating themselves altogether!

He doesn't wish this, though, but that they repent. Neither circumcision nor the lack of it was something to boast about, but only that God the Holy Ghost has given you faith in the work of Jesus to save you. That boast, Paul teaches, should come through works of love toward others, not in boastful words. The glory for this faith is not yours, but His. Circumcision, the sacrament given to God's people as they were waiting for their Savior to come, wasn't designed such that one should boast in the physical reality of its having been done any more than we should boast of the bread or type of wine used in the Lord's Supper. We glorify God for the Word of promise He has attached to it and the work that He, alone, does through it.

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Yes, God used “six seven” before your kids or grandkids did. By it, He indicates that some of the things listed overlap, all spring from the same root, and all bear the same judgment: all are contrary to His natural order of things and, therefore, called “abomination.”

That’s not the demarcation of “a sin that’s worse than the other sins not being named,” but things that ultimately make as little sense as having false gods. An idol, as anyone can see, is not a viable candidate for being the true God, since it is made by human hands, doesn’t eat or drink, or move, or talk. Devising wicked plans, running to do evil, lying, making false accusations or giving false testimony, shedding blood not in self-defense or defense of others, stirring up division, or boasting on the basis of things that either are given to you or only possible because of things you can’t supply for yourself (air, health, etc.) are all utterly senseless activities that contradict how God established the world. When you are caught doing them, there is nothing that simply makes them go away. If man does not catch up with you and judge you for them, God ultimately will. It doesn’t matter how you number them; in His eyes they each deserve the fullness of His judgment, which is what ‘seven’ signifies throughout Scripture.

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

God's wisdom shows what betrays us and what serves us. Gorging, even on things of this world that are good, can nonetheless make them bad for us. How much more, then, if we embrace what is bad? Whether honey or hospitality, overindulgence brings new problems. False witness may free one from a situation temporarily, but whether you beat, run through, or shoot from afar your neighbor, you will have deprived yourself of whatever good he might otherwise have done to you. Trying to gain a group of supporters when you have a problem with someone, instead of seeking to solve the problem with that person alone, both violates Jesus' prescription in Matthew 18 and violates common sense (as Luther demonstrates in the Large Catechism, 8th Commandment). Seeking to tarnish another's reputation destroys your reputation, as well.

Instead, with patience and forbearance, seek your neighbor's good—even your enemy's good! Listen to his complaint against your cause, and seek to refresh him by confessing the truth in a way that should come across as truly helpful to him. If such things do not persuade the one you have an issue with, they will persuade others that you have done the right thing, so that your enemy is disabled from further success in attacking you.

Such wisdom works best when your adversary is also wise—when he values humility and sober thought. Thus, Solomon teaches by these principles the sort of humility that desires and finds forgiveness through Christ alone!

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Invocavit Sunday

Article XXI.

Of the Worship of Saints, they teach, that the memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works, according to our calling, as the Emperor may follow the example of David in making war to drive away the Turk from his country. For both are kings. But the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints, or to ask help of saints, since it sets before us Christ, as the only Mediator, Propitiation, High-Priest and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to, and hath promised that He will hear our prayer; and this worship He approves above all, to wit, that in all afflictions He be called upon [1 John 2:1]: "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father," etc.

—the Augsburg Confession

The devil uses different means to ensnare us in sinfulness. His temptations vary according to the situation and the man. Our Lord silenced the devil when He was tempted. He used the Word of God to defeat the devil. The Apostles, on the night of our Lord's Last Supper, were entrapped by the devil's temptation. They argued among themselves over who was the greatest. In such a case, those who were of a lesser degree most likely did not want to give way to those of a higher degree, and those of a higher degree did not want to relinquish that place of honor. The Apostles were still thinking our Lord would be establishing an earthly kingdom, and they tussled over who would be in what position.

Our Lord Jesus, like with the devil, rebukes the Apostles. He uses the promises that are proclaimed in the holy Scriptures. They will be bestowed with a kingdom. This will not be an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly and eternal kingdom. This should be the prize for which they fight and strive. This kingdom is ruled by the Lord Jesus, given to Him by His Father. In this kingdom He invites all those who cling to Him in faith to sit down and eat with Him. They have a place at the table. Therefore, the temptation that the devil uses to lead the Apostles into sin is rendered invalid, for there is promised something greater than earthly positions of authority. There is promised an eternal kingdom with our Lord.

Collect: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy Majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Judas Iscariot betrayed the Lord Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, and realizing his error, went and hung himself. St. Peter stands before the whole congregation of 120 souls and declares that someone must take the place of the betrayer, the one foretold in the imprecatory psalms of the Psalter (Pss. 69, 109). The determining factor for his replacement was that one had been with them from the beginning, from the baptism of St. John the Baptist unto the ascension of the Lord Jesus. Two men were found to fit the requirements: Joseph called Barsabas, surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

That is all we are told about St. Matthias in holy Scripture. He is chosen by the Apostles and the rest of the congregation, but a few chapters later the Lord Jesus chooses St. Paul to be His voice to the Gentiles. This would be later confirmed by the Apostles when they sent St. Paul to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. But St. Matthias, who Eusebius writes was among the seventy sent out by the Lord, was an eyewitness to the life of the Savior. He would bring that eyewitness account to the people of Judea and Ethiopia according to Church tradition. Therefore, he is numbered among the Twelve, and honored by us on this day.

Collect: O Almighty God, who by Thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to Thy holy Apostles many excellent gifts, and commandest them earnestly to feed Thy flock: Make, we beseech Thee, all Pastors diligently to preach Thy holy Word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Ninevites heard the preaching of Jonah and repented in sackcloth. He performed no signs, he did no wonders. He preached the destruction of Ninevah. “Forty days and Ninevah shall be destroyed.” That was it; just a simple sermon, and the people of Ninevah, from the greatest to the least, repented, turned away from their rebellion, and believed the Lord God.

This is not so with the scribes and Pharisees. Our Lord Jesus not only preached, but also did signs and wonders. He had just cast out a demon who made a man blind and mute. They did not repent at this, but accused Him of being in league with Satan. Having just seen a sign, they had the gall to ask Him for a different sign! In truth, they did not want any sign, for they did not believe on the Lord Jesus. This is the point our Lord makes: the Ninevites repented after the preaching of Jonah, but not the Jews, who have not just a type of the Christ, but the actual Christ before them!

Jonah preached destruction; our Lord came to the Israelites with the promise of the remission of sins. And where there is the remission of sins there is also life and salvation. Jonah came preaching death, the Lord, life. The Ninevites repented, the scribes and Pharisees hardened their hearts. Blessed are all those who trust in the sign that points to our redemption: the sign of Jonah, the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

Collect: Mercifully hear our prayers, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy Majesty against all our enemies; 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 text from the book of Daniel is not outlining a new diet which one should follow. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego did not have better features and appear fatter in flesh just because they only ate vegetables and drank only water. They were gifted with this on account of God's work through them in their faithfulness to the Law of Moses.

Like the Lord Jesus, from this past Sunday's Gospel when He withstood the devil's temptations, Daniel and the three young men also resisted the temptation of eating the royal delicacies. This would have been a great temptation, too. They were offered the best of foods, and the best of wine. But since they refused them, we assume that these things were not permitted by the dietary regulations that Moses had proclaimed. They resisted the temptation of breaking the Law by eating the royal delicacies, and instead chose to eat only vegetables and drink water; things that were permitted according to the Law.

This provides us with an excellent example. When we are tempted by the things of this world, which would drive us away from the Law of God, we can look to the example of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who refused the royal dainties, and chose faithfulness over pleasure. They looked past the instant pleasure those things would bring, to the eternal pleasure that is bestowed upon all those who in faith cling to the Word of God and His promises.

Collect: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy Majesty to defend us from them that rise up against 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 Prophet Ezekiel proves that works do not save. It is only faith in the works of the Lord Jesus that bestows salvation. He writes about wickedness and righteousness. These are to be understood as unbelief and belief, for faith and unbelief are what truly make a person righteous or wicked. He drives this point home when he proclaims that when a person turns from righteousness to wickedness all the righteousness that he did is forgotten. If salvation was dependent upon our works, then righteous acts we did would not necessarily be blotted out by our wicked acts. We could still have a ledger of good deeds from which to draw.

That these go away when we lose our faith is proof that we should place no trust in our works. A person cannot rely on his good deeds to save himself. This is why we teach, as the holy Scriptures teach, that salvation comes through faith in the Lord Jesus alone. It is His works and merits to which we cling in faith. His works are perfect. His works are accepted by the heavenly Father. Therefore, we cling to Him and His works, and He bestows them upon us through faith. This faith is gifted to us through the preaching of the Gospel and the blessed Sacraments. Therefore, if we desire to be righteous, we will be where those means are given to us, so that by the working of the Holy Ghost we may be granted saving faith.

Collect: O Lord, be gracious to Thy people, and as Thou makest them devoted to Thee, in Thy mercy comfort them with Thy kind assistance; through our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

A broken and contrite heart God does not despise. The Lord loves the penitent. What makes a person truly penitent is not just confessing one's sins. This is only one part of repentance. True penitence is in choosing the Lord as one's God. As we say in our Catechism, repentance embraces two parts: one, that we confess our sins, and two, that we cling in faith to God. Contrition—sorrow over our sins—and faith equals repentance. Therefore, a broken and contrite heart is not despised by God, for this is a heart that trusts in Him by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Those who choose God as their Lord also obey His commandments. Out of love for their Lord they are careful to observe His Law with all their heart and with all their soul. One cannot claim to love Him and ignore or reject His Law. One cannot claim to have chosen Him as their God if they hate what He has commanded them to do. Therefore, we who cling to Him in faith are careful to do all that He commands us to do.

When we fail in keeping His commandments, then we humbly confess our sins and look to Him who has redeemed us from sin and death by His perfect obedience to the Law. We look to Him who paid the penalty of our transgressions by hanging upon the cursed tree of the cross. We cling in faith to the Lord Jesus, for in Him is redemption.

Collect: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength: Keep us both outwardly and inwardly, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

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