

Clergy of the ELDoNA, affiliated congregations and missions

Rt. Rev. James Heiser

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

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

Rev. Jerald Dulas

Sts. Peter & Paul L. C., Simpsonville, SC; All Saints Lutheran Mission, Myrtle Beach, SC; St. Michael & All Angels Lutheran Mission, Martinez, GA; St. Bartholomew Lutheran Mission, Fort Myers, FL; St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC, Ormond Beach, FL

Rev. Douglas Handrich (Emeritus)

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Benjamin Henson

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Jacob Henson

Apologia Lutheran Church, Deer Park, WI

Rev. Michael Henson

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Martin Jackson

Lamb of God Ev. Lutheran Church, Rogers, AR

Rev. Mark Mueller

Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cambridge, MN

Rev. John Rutowicz

St. Boniface Lutheran Church, Niles, MI

Rev. Josiah Scheck

Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

Rev. Eric Stefanski

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

Rev. Timothy Tolar

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

Rev. Brandon Warr

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

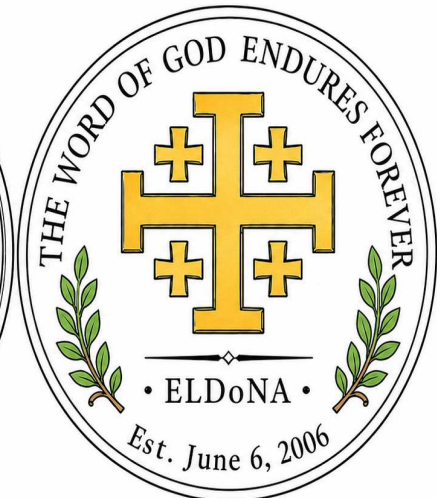
Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Dcn. Floyd Smithey

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

Rev. Daniel Mensing

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



JULY 5–AUGUST 1, 2026

A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

The Calendar

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

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

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

July 5	Trinity 5	ASBH 43
July 12	Trinity 6	ASBH 44
July 19	Trinity 7	ASBH 45
July 22 (W)	St. Mary Magdalene	ASBH 95
July 25 (S)	St. James, Apostle	ASBH 96
July 26	Trinity 8	ASBH 46
July 29 (W)	St. Olaf, King and Martyr	ASBH 97

St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary

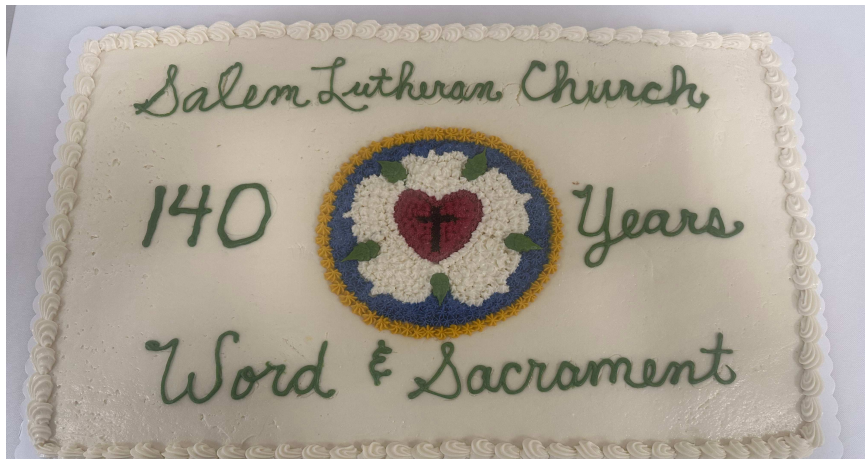
The Spring quarter concluded on May 29; Summer intensives begin June 15. (Intensives will run Monday–Friday, 2 hours per day.)

The classes offered for the Summer intensives are as follows:

Summer: (10 hours)

P003—Liturgics Practicum II (1 hr.)	June 15–19
H005—Renaissance (2 hrs.)	June 22–July 3
E007—Galatians (2 hrs.)	July 6–17
S006—Eschatology (1 hr.)	July 20–24
E009—Greek Readings 4 (1 hr.)	July 27–31
S007—Office of the Ministry & Ecclesiology (3 hrs.)	August 10–28

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



SATURDAY, AUGUST 1: MATTHEW 21:18–22 8TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

The fig tree had leaves. From a distance, it looked alive, productive, and healthy. But when Christ came near, there was no fruit. Then He cursed it. That image belongs naturally to this week’s lessons, where our Lord warns about trees and fruit. Leaves can deceive. Appearances can deceive. False teachers often look fruitful until Christ examines what is actually there.

And the warning is not only for others. It is for us, as well. The flesh loves religious leaves—titles, knowledge, reputation, outward discipline. Yet Christ is not satisfied by appearances. He seeks fruit born of faith. That fruit cannot be manufactured by our efforts. It comes from being rooted in Him. When Jesus speaks of faith and prayer, “If ye have faith, and doubt not...”, we should not assume faith here means some sort of spiritual self-confidence. Faith is clinging to Christ because you have no strength of your own. And that faith prays boldly. Not because we control outcomes; not because prayer becomes a technique; but because our Father hears those who come to Him through His Son.

Let the barren fig tree warn you. And let Christ’s promise strengthen you. Abide in Him. Hear His Word. Bear fruit in your vocation. Pray without fear. For the tree planted by living water does not wither.

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

FRIDAY, JULY 31: MATTHEW 23:23–36 8TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.”

There are moments where our Lord speaks with a severity that leaves the room silent. This is one of them. These men were outwardly disciplined. They were precise; careful in visible matters. Yet Christ exposes what lies beneath the surface. “You pay tithes... and have omitted the weightier matters.”

This fits the warning of the Eighth Sunday after Trinity. False teachers are known by their fruits. And sometimes the rotten fruit is not obvious scandal. Sometimes it is religious pride: a polished exterior and a clean cup hiding corruption. That warning lands close to home for Christians. It is possible to defend sound doctrine and still let pride poison the heart. It is possible to speak truth and forget mercy. It is possible to preserve forms while neglecting faith. That is why Christ wounds with His Law. He strips away every religious mask. And then He drives sinners to the cross.

The same Christ who condemns hypocrisy also sheds His blood for hypocrites, for Pharisees, for pastors, for churchmen, for you. So repent of public sins, private sins, and *respectable* sins. Then hear again what false religion cannot give—forgiveness in Christ.

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

2026 Diocesan Synod and Family Camp

The ELDoNA marked its twentieth anniversary this year with a well-attended synod and fruitful colloquium. Fifteen Pastors and Deacons of the diocese were in attendance (several clergy were excused on account of medical or other circumstances). The attendance puts in perspective the eight colloquium papers and eleven sermons presented and preached. Of particular significance was the coinciding celebration of the 20th anniversary of the diocese and the 140th anniversary of Salem Lutheran Church.

In addition to establishing the visitation schedule, seminary schedule, budget (including assistance to sister synods), and other necessary work of the diocese for the coming year (including release of the new *Augustana Service Book and Hymnal*), a thorough-going update to the diocesan website was discussed and budgeted. Future issues of *The Lutheran Herald* will further various aspects of the work for the coming year.

The annual Family Camp followed immediately after the conclusion of the synod and was held this year at Charity Lutheran Church in Burleson, where Pastor Heimbigner and the saints of the parish cared for the approximately 40 individuals who were able to attend this year. The daily mix of instruction (this year centering on the diocesan ceremonial for the Divine Service and Prayer Offices) and fun with various service opportunities and outings made for a truly joyful gathering. (For those who are counting, an additional five prayer offices and one divine service took place during the Family Camp.)



Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

X. Of Ordination and the Call.

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

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

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article X

THURSDAY, JULY 30: MATTHEW 12:46–50 8TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

“Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?”

Those words could sound harsh if we did not know our Lord. But Christ is not rejecting His mother. He is revealing something greater. He is showing where true kinship is found. The world builds identity through bloodlines, traditions, tribes, and earthly loyalties. Christ gathers a family through His Word. “Whosoever shall do the will of my Father...”

That does not mean salvation is by works. The Father's will is first that sinners hear His Son, believe His promise, and live by faith. Faith then bears fruit, just as our Lord teaches—good trees bear good fruit. That fruit does not create the tree. It reveals what the tree already is. So also with Christians. The baptized do not earn their place in God's household. They live from the life already given to them in Christ.

There is great comfort here for those who have lost relationships for the sake of the confession. Some are mocked by family. Some are isolated by friends. Some know the ache of division because of doctrine. Christ says you are not alone. In His Church, you have brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers; a communion built not by bloodlines, but by the blood of Christ.

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

The Church today remembers Olaf II Haraldsson, king, confessor, and martyr. His earthly crown did not spare him from suffering. His confession of Christ carried a cost, and in the end, it cost him his life. That makes our Lord's words all the more fitting: "Fear them not therefore."

Those words have carried Christians through exile, imprisonment, public shame, and martyrdom. They remind us that the enemies of Christ may wound the body, but they cannot silence the Gospel. Olaf's courage was not born from natural strength or royal authority. Kings die like every other man. His courage came from Christ. And that is what makes martyrs such a powerful witness. They do not die to earn heaven. They die because heaven has already been given to them through the blood of Jesus.

That same confession still costs something. Perhaps not on a battlefield. Perhaps not beneath a sword. But in pulpits, homes, workplaces, and public witness, confessing Christ still invites ridicule and hostility. Yet Jesus says, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father." What comfort there is in that promise. The world may forget your name. Christ will not.

Collect: O Lord, grant steadfastness in a faithful confession to those among the magistracy whom Thou hast gathered into Thy holy Church, and direct the hearts of the faithful to support them in their vocation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

"We ought to obey God rather than man."

When given the choice of obeying one person or another, people often submit to whoever holds "the bigger stick." Since the punishment of God is so much worse than any punishment man can inflict, one might think that is why the Apostles would prefer to obey God rather than the council of the Jewish leaders. But there is a greater reason for their obedience. Besides their divine call which bound them to the Word of God, the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins was at stake! Peter said in verses 31 and 32: "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things..." If the Apostles obeyed men, rather than God, sinners would not be converted! Without the faithful preaching of Law and Gospel, no one would repent of his sins and receive forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.

Christians should pray often that their pastor would be faithful in his calling. Like the Apostles, ministers today need to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit so that they do not fear to speak the truth—even if man opposes it and threatens punishment. Through the faithful ministry of these men, we receive the forgiveness of our sins. We are taught to repent through the preaching of the Law and we are comforted in faith through the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Collect: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding: Pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

From a human perspective, Moses’ objection seems legitimate. Moses had many shortcomings which might have disqualified him for the job: he was not a good public speaker (Exodus 4:10); he was despised by the people whom he was supposed to lead (Exodus 2:14); he was a convicted murderer in Egypt (Exodus 2:15).

God corrects our human thinking. It was not Moses and his rhetorical skills or social clout which would bring the work to a success. God would do it. For He said: “*I* have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up... to a land flowing with milk and honey.” Nevertheless, God would do the work *through* Moses. For He promised: “I will certainly be with you.”

Pastors are sent by God to bring people out of condemnation. While pastors have received training, and have certain talents and skill-sets, they are lacking in ways not dissimilar to Moses. Ask any faithful pastor and he will be quick to admit his shortcomings. Thanks be to God that it is not the pastor who brings success to the ministry. Spiritual deliverance is the work of God. Nevertheless, God does it through His servants. Just as He worked through Moses to bring His people to the promised land, so He works through humble pastors to bring His flock to eternal life.

Collect: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man’s understanding: Pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The people marvel at Jesus. “How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” They see the man before them, but they do not recognize the One sent by the Father.

That is the danger our Lord exposes. False judgment often looks religious. It judges by appearance. It measures truth by credentials, popularity, eloquence, or cultural approval. But Christ says, “Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” That command matters in an age drowning in religious noise. Not everyone who quotes Scripture teaches Christ faithfully. Not every teacher with influence feeds Christ’s sheep. The wolves our Lord warns about in this week’s Gospel often come polished, articulate, and sincere.

So how does the Church judge rightly? By doctrine. The question is always this: Does this teaching confess Christ according to the Scriptures? Does it preach repentance? Does it deliver the forgiveness of sins through the Means of Grace? Jesus says, “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.” That is the pattern for every faithful preacher. He is not called to innovate. He is called to deliver what has been given.

The sheep know the Shepherd’s voice. Stay close to that voice.

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

Our Lord ends the Sermon on the Mount with a warning that leaves no room for spiritual vanity. “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord...” These are not unbelievers speaking. These are religious people. They know the language. They can point to works, ministries, and outward signs of devotion. Yet Christ says the words no one should want to hear: “I never knew you.”

That is a sobering text for the week of the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, where our Lord warns us about false prophets and rotten fruit. False doctrine rarely begins with horns and open rebellion. It often comes wearing church clothes, speaking Christian vocabulary, quoting Scripture, while quietly removing Christ from the center.

So where is safety found? Christ says the wise man builds upon the rock by hearing His Word and doing it. That *doing* is not the righteousness of self-made religion. It is the obedience of faith. It is repentance. It is hearing the Gospel, receiving Christ, and clinging to His promises when the storm comes. And storms will come: illness, temptation, slander, doubt, death. A faith built on personality or emotion will crack. A faith built on Christ crucified will stand.

The Church does not live by appearances. She lives by the voice of her Shepherd. Hear Him. Believe Him. Build there.

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

In the Gospel lesson this past Sunday (Luke 5:1-11), we heard about Peter’s sinfulness and his rash confession that Jesus should “depart” from him because of his sin. Two years later, it seems that Peter has turned a corner! He makes a much better confession this time when he says: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” However, not long after this, Peter messes up again. The sinner is back when Peter tells Jesus: “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!”

Like all Christians, Peter was simultaneously a saint and a sinner. He was a child of God—forgiven of his sins and showing fruits of faith—but he had a sinful nature. His sinful nature produced evil thoughts and desires, and these frequently came out of his mouth. The way Jesus deals with Saint-and-Sinner Peter shows how God deals with all of us. The sinner is not to be tolerated: “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me.” By daily contrition and repentance, we drown our sinful desires and put on the new man who strives to live in holiness and righteousness. At the same time, the saint—whose sins are forgiven, but who daily struggles with sinful desires—should be comforted. Those who trust in the Son of the living God for salvation have the promise of eternal blessedness: “Blessed are you! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

Collect: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man’s understanding: Pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Today's lesson teaches a distinction between the right-hand kingdom (the Church) and left-hand kingdom (the State). God is indeed Lord over both kingdoms, but His called servants are not necessarily executors in both. Civil rulers and authorities are sent to administer justice in the left-hand kingdom. The Apostles (and even the Son of Man in His first coming) are sent to administer the things of the right-hand kingdom. As Jesus told Pontius Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world," (John 18:36).

The Apostles were not called to administer fire down from heaven, but they were called to preach the fiery wrath of God. They warned people, like the Samaritans, that, if they continued in their unrepentance, fire would come down on them at the Final Judgment Day. Thus, the Sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) has an edge to it. Pastors preach the Law to warn people about God's wrath and the punishments of hell. But, as Jesus said, their purpose in preaching the Law is not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. The Law is preparatory—to show men their sins. If sinners repent, pastors preach the sweet comfort of the Gospel to rescue men from God's wrath and give them eternal life.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Article XIV. Of Monastic Vows

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

Article XV. Of Human Traditions

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

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

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

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

“Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.”

How much more simply can it be said? We are to be different. In a world possessed of seeking glory and honors and the praises of men, we are to be different. The world treats pride as a virtue. “Proud to be American.” “Proud to be [insert ethnicity].” “Pride month” and “pride parades” are public celebrations of self-centeredness and rejection of God’s Word. Yet the Church for centuries has recognized “pride” as one of the seven deadly sins!

Better by far to be humble, for God says, “whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12). In and of ourselves, there is nothing in which to take pride; not before God. Rather, in humility, recognize your dire need for God’s mercies. Rejoice that you have them in and through Christ Jesus, who He is, and what He has borne in His flesh to be your Savior! Then, as one who has received mercies you did not deserve, be a servant to others in godly love and faithfulness to 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 so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto Thee; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”

The Thessalonians recognized that the preaching of Paul and his fellow servants was not the word of men, but the very Word of God. God had called and sent these men to preach on His behalf. In His stead and by His command, they proclaimed the Good News of salvation to the Thessalonians.

Today, God still calls and sends ministers in the Church to proclaim this Good News. Pastors are sent in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. When they administer Holy Absolution, it is the very forgiveness of God. When they preach faithfully from the pulpit, their word has God’s stamp of approval. And, just like in Thessolonica, their word works effectively in those who believe. Just as the Word of God spoken by Paul was effective for creating and strengthening faith in the Thessalonians, so the Word spoken by called and ordained pastors works effectively in us.

Let us, like the Thessalonians, recognize this work of God among us and welcome it—not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.

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

“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.”

With this memorable and paradoxical statement, Jesus teaches what it means to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. While non-Christians cling to the comforts and pleasures of this life, for us the things of this life are dispensable. We are willing to give up and deny ourselves these things, if that is the cross which God has laid upon us. That is what Jesus means when He says “whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.”

Note, however, we do not “desire” to lose our lives! Jesus does not say that Christians should seek out suffering in this life or invent hardship for themselves. The cross is an assignment. It is given to each Christian, according to the almighty will of God.

Through the comfort of the Scriptures, we learn not to be ashamed or offended by these crosses. Rather, we rejoice in them! Though the whole world become lost to us, we have our treasure in heaven. Through faith in Christ, we already have the victory, since Jesus won it for us by the cross which He bore.

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

“It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!”

Our Lord warns us: offenses will come; it is impossible that it would be otherwise. But woe to him through whom they do come! Now, that can be a mixed bag. Plenty of people would try to shame others into submission: “you are a pastor (or elder, or confessional Lutheran, or Christian, or whatever), and you dare to do this thing that offends me!?” Sometimes such offenses can be ignored. Other times the point is not to be overlooked. As believers, we are the face of the kingdom of God. What unbelievers know of Jesus, they know from looking at us.

Our Catechisms, explaining the petition “hallowed be Thy Name,” admonish us that “whoever teaches or lives contrary to God’s Word profanes the name of God among us.” It does not depend on us, but we do not want our weaknesses to get in the way, either. God grant us, therefore, to speak correctly His Word, and to lead godly lives in accordance with that Word, that, in all things, the saving mercies of God may be extolled.

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

“For the earth yields crops by itself.”

Luther said, “And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.” (Luther’s Works 51:71). This is important. Once someone has convinced you that somehow it depends on you, then you want to inflect your voice just right, furrow your eyebrows in exactly the correct position, speak exactly the right formula, so that the Word of God will work.

The Word of God does not need your help! Just speak it, get out of the way, and watch and see what the Word of the Lord does! The power to change the heart and mind of a man comes not from your sales pitch, but from the Word of God itself. Trust in the Word, and do not worry. As the earth yields crops by itself, so too the Word of God will yield results by itself. It does not need our help. Just speak it, get out of the way, and watch what God the Holy Spirit does with it!

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Sixth Sunday after Trinity

The Fifth Commandment Thou shalt not kill.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

These words do not just apply to Jesus in the Jordan River. These words are applied to those who are baptized. The Father’s disposition towards the Son is His disposition to all who are in the Son. Through His gift of grace, the Father sees you as His beloved. He is well pleased with you because of the alien righteousness of Christ that is in baptism. Because the Father speaks it of His Son, He speaks it of you. The Word of God attached to the water creates what it says.

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). These promises attached to baptism are the greatest comfort to the Christian. They have their power from God’s veracity and reliability. Not only may we believe these promises from God, we have no right to disbelieve them. To refuse to accept God’s proclamation is to call God a liar. “Let God be true but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4). God’s Word is reliable and unbreakable. Our standing before God does not depend on us. It is God’s gracious Word that creates faith and gives us eternal life. Cling to baptism as God’s unbreakable promise.

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

“Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?”

It is not a hard question. Give me ten dollars, and I’ll “love” you. Give me a million, and I will love you more. This is the story of St. Mary Magdalene; not the story of a super pious person who was therefore deemed worthy of ‘canonization’. No, just like all of us, she became a saint (that is, “holy one”) by grace, through faith in Christ Jesus, and that despite her many sins.

This all tells us something very important. How much do you love the Lord? If you think you are a “pretty good person,” well, you love Him *somewhat*, because you think He’s forgiven you for the rest of it. As you come to recognize not only your sins of deed, but also your sins of word, and of thought—even your “passive” sins of what you should have thought or said or done, and you did not—your debt rightly seems overwhelming. The Holy Spirit creates this repentance, and causes us to embrace the Savior who has forgiven everything, as He did with St. Mary Magdalene.

The more you recognize how much you need to be forgiven, the more you love the Savior, who forgives everything. By faith in Him, you are forgiven; all of it, on account of Christ Jesus.

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

“I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”

Our Lord speaks of joy in heaven over a sinner who repents; more so over the one, than over ninety-nine just persons who “need no repentance.” Now, in the history of the world, there have not lived ninety-nine persons who need no repentance. But those words were designed for Pharisee ears; that is, for the ears of those who imagined that they were keeping the holy Law of God sufficiently to have earned His approval! It is not possible for man to earn His approval.

Well did the Apostle write, “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” But he follows that immediately with the promise, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9). Our Lord goes further: “joy in heaven.” God does not just barely squelch His anger enough to *tolerate* a penitent one. No, God truly wants to forgive you (and everyone). That is why He sent His Son into the world to atone for the sin of the world, that “whosoever believeth” might be justified, forgiven, and have eternal life.

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

God has no *need* to save any of us. He could do just fine without us, and He could create a whole new human race to populate this earth if He wanted to. The tremendous thing about Him is that He *wants* to save us. He desires it so much that He took on human flesh and revealed Himself to us as a gracious Savior. He came to us, died for us, and made a way for us to be saved.

He also tells those of us who are His followers to go and make disciples of others who have not heard the message of the Gospel. He makes a way for us to have faith. He gives us His Word so that we can read and hear what the Gospel is. He freely pours out His grace on all through baptism. He opens the way to heaven for us through His Name; the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that we receive in baptism. And when we call on the Name that we received in baptism, God hears us and remembers us. He sees us as perfect and clean individuals because of that Name. When we have that Name upon us, we receive the perfect righteousness of the One who gave it to us, Jesus Christ.

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

These Pharisees would go through a ritual washing in order to clean themselves from the filth of sinners. Now, an interesting thing is that the Pharisees were pretty good at this. There were hundreds of laws and traditions like this, and they sought to keep up with all of them. They appeared to be ‘super saints’, so to speak, and many people looked up to them because of it.

These Pharisees were ‘fulfilling’ the law so well because it was not *God’s* law they were fulfilling, but a law of their own making. God had never set down these laws about washing when people came back from the marketplace. God had never set down the hundreds of traditions that the Pharisees kept. And secretly, they liked following their own laws better, because they could accomplish them. They could actually achieve their goal, and therefore see themselves as righteous before God. That’s the problem. Man made laws and traditions can deceive our hearts and make us think that we are better than we are.

God’s Law is absolute and condemns you. But Christ’s word of Gospel tells you that, though you are guilty, you are forgiven. Through faith in Jesus Christ, you are no longer crushed under the weight of the Law in God’s eyes. That weight has been lifted off of you, and you can live in Christ’s forgiveness.

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

“Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God.”

Our Lord warns us to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” That word ‘hypocrisy’ gets thrown in the face of Christians sometimes: “Look at him, he thinks he is a Christian, but I see his sin.” Of course they see. Try as we might, we cannot hide our sinfulness. But here is where our critics get it wrong: it is not hypocrisy for a sinner to recognize that he needs the forgiveness of sins! Quite the opposite! We go to church because we know we are sinners, and the Church is where forgiveness is distributed.

As forgiven ones, we confess Christ. We dare not simply carry on like unrepentant ones because we would rather “laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints.” We are Christ’s. We are forgiven. As forgiven ones, we are not crying. The joy of Easter—and with it forgiveness, the love of God, and the promise of eternal life—these remain with us. So when your neighbor notices a sin, do not deny it. Rather, assure him you know it, but then tell him that you know what to do about it. You know to turn to Christ. And invite your neighbor to do the same.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XXVI.

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

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

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

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

THURSDAY, JULY 16: MATTHEW 21:28–32 6TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

“The way of righteousness” is a term that means the same as “the true faith.” John came proclaiming the true way, the true path. John was righteous, that is, he was in right standing with God through faith, and he proclaimed the way of God's righteousness.

Righteousness is not just good deeds. Righteousness comes from connection to the Father through faith in the Gospel. Good deeds flow from that connection to the Father. Both our words and our deeds are to be connected in the wholeness of walking in the way of righteousness. But when our words or deeds do not match our faith, we can regret those words and deeds, repent, and turn back to the way of righteousness. It is never too late to repent of sin and return to our baptism, our righteousness in Christ. If we hear the Word of God and respond in faith, we are walking the path of righteousness.

John's preaching was God's calling out to the tax collectors and harlots. It was God's calling out to the chief priests and elders of the people. And as we hear the Gospel, John's preaching is God's calling out to us. Receive John's message and baptism, which are Jesus' message and baptism. Embrace the way of righteousness.

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

The “leaven of the Pharisees” is the doctrine and teaching of the Pharisees. What is the heart of the Pharisees teaching? It is law. It is legalism. It is dead material things. It is a dead letter of the law, not the living Word of grace. The Pharisees endeavored to provide for themselves by their own powers and efforts.

Jesus does not denounce the material world. He does not denounce bread, as such. Bread is good. The mundane physical things of this world are good gifts, but they only bring life when they are connected to the living Word of God. The Lord gives us our daily bread, and by faith we understand that He provides all that we need to live, for both body and soul. The Law of God is good, but it does not bring life. It shows our need for His help. The true teaching of Christ is spiritual, not legalistic. Righteousness through the law is nothing. It is dead. Righteousness is from Christ and His works for us.

Christ is present with us in faith, not in legalism. The law is not the way of life. The law kills. Grace and mercy bring life. Our Lord has been merciful to us. Let us also extend such mercy to our brothers.

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

Jesus tells us to do all we can to avoid sin and to reach heaven. This is what the instructions concerning hand, foot, and eye get at. Jesus is not advocating hacking off limbs in order to be perfectly sinless; He uses here an extreme statement in order to impress upon His hearers the seriousness with which they should take their salvation. Nothing is as important as reaching eternal life and being with God. Do not let anything get in the way of reaching that goal.

Jesus tells us how we are to make sure that we will reach that goal. We are to be “salted” and have “salt” within ourselves. This is the way we avoid causing others to lose their faith, and avoid having our faith choked by the pursuits of this world. What is this “salt”? It is the Word of God. It is the Spirit of life that God has given to His children. Those who stay nurtured and fed by the Spirit of God will keep themselves, and those whom they touch, from being overcome by sin. We are fed and nurtured by God through His Word. When we study and know the faith which Jesus has given to us, we are kept strong and alive in Him.

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