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; 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 (Emeritus)
St. Luke Lutheran Church, Kenai, AK
Homer Lutheran Mission, Homer, AK

Rev. Brandon Warr
St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

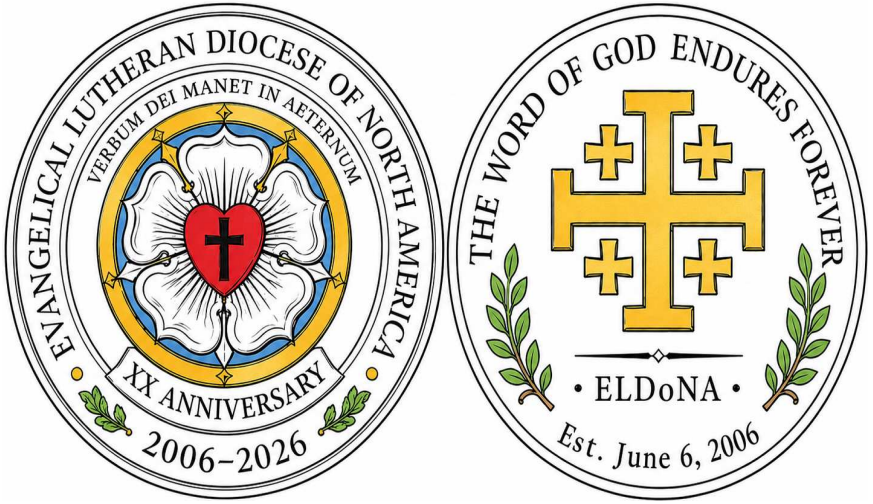
Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun
Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

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



November 2–28, 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.

November 1	Trinity 22/All Saints	ASBH 60/ ASBH 108
November 8	Trinity 25	ASBH 63
November 11 (W)	*St. Martin of Tours, Bp. & Confessor*	*ASBH 109*
November 15	Trinity 26	ASBH 64
November 22	Trinity 27	ASBH 65
November 29	Advent 1	ASBH 1
December 6	Advent 2/St. Nicholas	ASBH 2/ASBH 66

St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary

The Fall Quarter of Year Three of the St. Ignatius calendar began on Monday, September 7; the Fall Quarter concludes on November 13. The Fall Quarter is as follows:

P004—Homiletics 1 (3 hrs.)	Mon.-Wed.-Fri.
S008—Sacramental Theology (3 hrs.)	Mon.-Wed.-Fri
H005—Post Reformation (3 hrs.)	Tuesday-Thursday
P007—Confession and Absolution (1 hr.)	Thursday

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

Visitation Schedule

Bishop Heiser's scheduled November visitation include Pr. Dulas on November 6, and Pr. Warr and the saints of St. Patrick Lutheran Church on November 8. Visitation of Pr. Martin Jackson and Pr. Eric Stefanski and the congregations they serve will occur over the November 21–22 weekend.

AUGUSTANA500 WEBSITE NOW LIVE—The diocese is beginning preparations for the 500th anniversary of Presentation of the Augsburg Confession in 2030. The **augustana500.info** website is our main online resource; 1580 *Book of Concord* text of the Augsburg Confession and the 1854 Henkel translation are available. New book resources are being linked on the site at they become available. A variety of "swag" items are available, as well.

NEW RESOURCES FROM REPRISTINATION PRESS:

A Brief and Useful Booklet on the Lord's Supper (1572), by Nicolaus Selnecker. ISBN 979-8953656016. 56 pages. $9.99

Originally printed at Strasbourg in 1572, *A Brief and Useful Booklet on the Lord's Supper* is organized in three divisions. The first defends the proper sense of Christ's words of institution against transubstantiation and interpretations that reduce the Sacrament to a sign of an absent reality. The second treats Christ's true presence, the power of His institution, and the relation of Eucharistic doctrine to the personal union and communication of properties. The third distinguishes natural, sacramental, and spiritual manducation, explaining both the oral reception of Christ's body and blood by worthy and unworthy communicants and the saving reception of Christ by faith.

On the Inseparable Union of Christ's Two Natures: Against Andreas Osiander (1552), by Andreas Musculus. ISBN 979-8161995662. 56 pages. $9.99.

How does the union of Christ's divine and human natures bear upon the sinner's justification? Writing against Andreas Osiander in 1552, Andreas Musculus (one of the six authors of the Formula of Concord) places the Person of the Redeemer at the center of this urgent Reformation controversy.

In ninety-three propositions, Musculus draws upon Scripture and the witness of the Church's teachers to confess the inseparable union of Christ's two natures in one Person. His argument moves from the incarnation and the communication of attributes to Christ's mediation, redemption, and the free imputation of righteousness through faith. Repentance and new obedience follow from the saving work of the one Lord who is both God and man.

Saturday, November 28: Mat. 25:31–46 27th S. a. Trinity

In presenting the judgment, our Lord describes the distinction between the believing and unbelieving in terms of their works. Neither group was aware of works (or lack thereof) as indicative of what they had done for the Lord: they beheld their neighbor and either cared for him in his need, or neglected and despised him. And, importantly, the distinction is not between "clean" and "unclean"—the shepherd divides the sheep from the goats, not the sheep from the swine. Thus, the image is not the division between those who are ritually pure or impure, but between those who have the fruit of faith manifest in their earthly walk, and those who do not.

With the strong emphasis in Scripture on salvation by grace through faith, it can be a bit unsettling to see the way in which works are mentioned in our Lord's presentation of the Judgment. But the way we should receive this is according to the understanding that what has been hidden will be revealed: while it is often hard for us to fully understand the way in which our faith has been manifested in our lives in the midst of this valley of sorrows, the Lord knows the hearts of all, and the fruit of the faith which the Holy Spirit sustained in us will be praised by the Lord on that Day.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offences, that from the bonds of our sins which, by reason of our frailty, we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; 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 Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity

The Fifth Petition.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

This point now pertains to our poor miserable life, which, although we have and believe the Word of God, and do and suffer His will, and are supported by His gifts and blessings, is nevertheless not without sin. For we stumble daily and transgress because we live in the world, among men who do us great wrong and give cause for impatience, anger, revenge, etc. And besides we have Satan at our back, who attacks us on every side, and fights (as we have heard) against all the foregoing petitions, so that it is not possible to stand always firm in such a persistent conflict.

Therefore, there is here again great need to call upon God and to pray: "Dear Father, forgive us our trespasses." Not as though He did not without, and even before, our prayer forgive sin (for He has given us the Gospel, in which is pure forgiveness) before we prayed or even thought about it. But this is to the intent that we may recognize and accept such forgiveness. For since the flesh in which we daily live is of such a nature that it neither believes nor trusts God, and is ever active in evil lusts and devices, that we sin daily in word and deed, in sins of omission and commission, by which peace of conscience is destroyed, so that it is afraid of the wrath and displeasure of God, and thus loses the comfort and consolation of the Gospel, it is an unceasing necessity that we have recourse to this petition, and obtain therein consolation wherewith to again comfort the conscience.

But this should serve to break our pride and keep us humble. For He has reserves this prerogative to Himself, that if anyone boasts of his godliness and despises others, he may regard himself in the light of this prayer, and thus he will find that he is no better than others, and that in the presence of God all must lower their plumes, and be glad merely that they can attain forgiveness. And let no one think that as long as we live here he can reach such position that he will not need such forgiveness. In short, if God does not forgive without intermission, we are lost.

—The Large Catechism, §85-91

Monday, November 2: Mark 4:21–25 22nd Sunday a. Trinity

Our Lord Jesus speaks to us concerning the hearing of His Word in our text for today. His words are different from ours. Our words have power only to name what is. Jesus' words have power to create what they name. So, when our Lord calls people to faith or to "come follow me," the believing and the following happen!

The Word of the Lord does not, however, work coercively. It can be resisted. Whoever receives the Word of the Lord in faith, that person also receives all that the Word promises: forgiveness of sins, life, salvation, the approbation and love of God, and the eternal glories of heaven. This is why Jesus lived a perfectly holy, sinless life. This is also why Jesus allowed Himself to be sacrificed on the cross. He purchased all these things for us, and gives these things to those who have faith in Him. The words of Christ which we hear have the power to create the faith that receives all those gifts.

And yet, whoever "does not have," i.e., does not have faith, such a one ends up leaving behind both Christ and His Word, and ends up with nothing. May God grant us therefore to hear Christ's words, to believe them, and so to receive all of the treasures that come with them.

Collect: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness: Be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; 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, November 27: Hebrews 12:22–29 27th S. a. Trinity

That which stands out most prominently in the lesson for today is the distinction between what can (and therefore will) be shaken, and what cannot be shaken. The voice of the Lord shook the earth, and will do so once more, He promises. And even the heavens will be shaken. This is why there will be a new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. And we are not left in doubt as to what the shaking *means*: "…Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain." It's not a disturbance: it's demolition.

That which can be shaken, will be shaken, and that which will be shaken will not remain. And, again, we are not left in doubt as to what shall remain: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God *is* a consuming fire." The kingdom of God, which often seems to weak in the strange measurements of this world, is the one thing that actually endures, because it has the promise of God. As in the days of Noah when the ark was not spared on account of the strength of the wood but of the promises of God, so it will be for the kingdom of God: the refashioning of all things will not endanger or displace it: rather, all things will be made ready for the kingdom of God, which endures forever.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offences, that from the bonds of our sins which, by reason of our frailty, we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; 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 reading for today joins together both the judgment of the nations, and the calling of God's people from the midst of the nations. When we read in God's word: "My determination *is* to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger;," perhaps it would be easy to anticipate simply a declaration of the judgment of the heathen over against the salvation of Israel.

But the Lord does not say what we might anticipate, but instead that which is true: "For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, That they all may call on the name of the Lord, To serve Him with one accord." Unity of speech—commonality of confession—is at the heart of the unity of the children of God, drawn from every nation, tribe, and tongue of men. This passage in Zephaniah is one of many in the Old Testament affirming that not all the children of Abraham are born from the physical descent from Abraham. The peoples are called to the unity of pure language and to service of the holy Trinity with one accord (or "one consent," in the language of the KJV). A common confession joins the Lord's people though all generations, for they confess the same Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offences, that from the bonds of our sins which, by reason of our frailty, we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

David's son Solomon built the temple to house the Ark of the Covenant. So we come to the words that Solomon prayed as the temple is dedicated.

Solomon knew the temple could not "contain" God. Consider v. 27: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!" But this omnipresent God promised that His Name would dwell there (v. 29), and God cannot evacuate His own Name. Where God locates His Name that is where the forgiveness of sins happens. (Think about Holy Baptism!)

So, when we "know and feel in our hearts" the need for forgiveness of specific sins, or even simply recognize our continuous need for such, we turn to the means by which God promises to give us that forgiveness. Yesterday, we heard that God does this by way of His Word. For Israel of old, they received circumcision, partook of the Passover, and turned to the temple where God had located His Name and His real presence (the Ark of the Covenant). We turn to our Baptism (the New Testament answer to circumcision) wherein God makes us His temple and locates His Name on us. And we turn to the Lord's Supper (the New Testament answer to the Passover), where our Lord locates Himself in His Body and Blood, and blesses us to receive His real presence for the forgiveness of sins.

Collect: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness: Be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; 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 is the living God who never changes. What He promised then stands forever. He promises to "keep covenant and mercy for a thousand generations." We need to be careful not to misunderstand this. One could easily read this to mean, "you earn God's love by obeying the commandments." That would be a mistake.

Focus on that "mercy". If you kept all God's commandments, if you never sinned, why would you need mercy? Of course a Christian tries to live a life pleasing to God. If His commandments tell me not to do something, and I do not do that thing, then clearly that is an act of obedience to God. But if I have done something He commanded me not to do, and I repent and seek His mercies, then I have effectively said, "Your commandment, O God, was right, and I was wrong." This too is a form of keeping the commandment (though, not disobeying in the first place is certainly preferable!) So we try to obey, we repent when we fail, and we lean on God's promise of mercy. As we do, we have a promise not only for ourselves, but also for those who come after us.

We know we have that mercy because Jesus died on the cross for the sin of the world. The people of the Old Testament looked forward to the coming Savior. We rejoice that He has come. May God keep our hearts and minds repentant, trusting in Christ, and inclined to confess Him with obedience, from now until our life's end.

Collect: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness: Be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Reading the lesson, it seems fair to surmise that the disciples received both less and more than they expected. They received *less*, in that they were clearly wanting a timeline—a number of years, a series of generations, perhaps the identification of a secular ruler. They received more, in that the Lord presents them with the outline of the entire New Testament era: wars, rumors of wars, plagues, persecutions, the hatred of the nations, the apostasy of many within the visible Church. All of these things have come to pass, and continue to come to pass, with each generation as such are counted by the world.

Let's think for a moment on the last verse: "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." It is easy in our time to take note of the way in which the love of many grows cold—but even that is not entirely a new phenomenon. What matters to us as Christians is the assurance that we do not abide in the faith in vain: "But he who endures to the end shall be saved." From the day of Pentecost, the Gospel has been proclaimed to all nations. And in our time, the word continues to go forth. Stand steadfast in your hope in the Lord.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offences, that from the bonds of our sins which, by reason of our frailty, we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Tuesday, November 24: Revelation 21:1–7 27th S. a. Trinity

The promise of the New Jerusalem is that it is a place where the Lord forever resides with His people, and the consolation of that unending presence is expressed in terms of the negatives of this life which will be removed: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Our life and joy in the Lord is known, in part, in the elimination of those things of this life in the vale of tears which were the fruit of sin.

The promise of the New Jerusalem is also an assurance of the new earth. Our everlasting home is not heaven: it is the New Jerusalem which is found standing upon the new earth. The city of God will stand upon what the Lord fashions in place of what "had passed away."

We know that this is so, for the Lord has told it to us in His Word, and it is through His Word that all things were called into existence in the first place, and thus sustained to this day. He has given His Word, and so this will come to pass, and the doubts and fears with which the saints of the Lord struggled in this life as they tried to understand all of this will have come to an end.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offences, that from the bonds of our sins which, by reason of our frailty, we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Thursday, November 5: Luke 21:5–9 22nd Sunday a. Trinity

The United States was long ago described as "the land of sects." By now, many of those "sects" have spread all over the world. They err in many ways, from trusting the word of a mortal man as though he alone represented God, to trusting in one's own reason, or relying on what seems right only in terms of one's own experience. But one way or another, these false teachings diminish the Word of God by teaching people to trust more in something else. This we dare not do. The Word of God must have the authority to correct the other things, rather than imagining that these other things can correct the Word of God!

Our Lord warns us, "do not be deceived." The Catechism too warns us against "false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice." False belief is the first thing listed! Why? Because if we appeal to the wrong god, if we cling to a false christ, we have nothing.

Forsake falsehood. The Gospel is this: that God became Man in the Person of Jesus Christ; that He lived a holy, perfect, sinless life for us; that He offered Himself up on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins; and that He rose again on the third day, victorious over sin, death, and the devil. To this Christ only do we cling for the hope of eternal life.

Collect: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness: Be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; 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, November 6: Luke 8:27–39 22nd Sunday a. Trinity

Our Lord had cast a legion of demons out of a man, restored his sanity. In short, He gave him his life back. He had sent the demons into pigs, unclean animals, which subsequently drowned. And the people's reaction? They asked the Lord to leave the region! It seems like a man's life mattered less to them than a herd of pigs.

The man is grateful, and wants to follow Jesus. But Jesus says no, and tells him to go home! We too, as believers, have been delivered from the power of the devil by Jesus; we too have grateful hearts. But not all believers become pastors or missionaries. For many, like this man, our Lord gives them the vocation of going home and confessing their Lord, their faith, their deliverance from the devil, with the actions and conversations of their daily lives.

For the rest of his life this man would be a silent accusation and continuous call to his village to repent. "Remember me? I'm the guy you valued less than a herd of pigs. Remember Jesus? You turned Him away because of those same pigs." Perhaps, in time, some did see the error of their ways, repent, and come to faith in Christ. A Christian life of faith is lived out right where we are. Act as a Christian, speak as a Christian, just exist as a Christian; and so confess the salvation God has given you by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ your Savior.

Collect: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness: Be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Monday, November 23: Mark 13:32–37 27th S. a. Trinity

For the consolation of His Church, our Lord assures us that not only is the year of His return ultimately unknowable by human computation—but even the very time of day. Christians are inclined to swing between two extremes when considering the Lord's return: either they panic that His coming is imminent, or they imagine that repentance can be put off until tomorrow.

Consistently, our Lord tells us: "Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is." We do not know the time, therefore we are always to be ready. Readiness, therefore, is measured in a walk of repentance, and the good works that are the fruit of faith. Our Lord is simply teaching His Church to live as Christians. There is not some sort of special 'end of days protocol' that needs to be enacted; rather, we are to repent, be absolved, partake of the Lord's gifts in Word and Sacrament, love the brethren, serve the neighbor, and either (a) die in the faith, (b) or be ready for the Lord's return—and the choice between those final two options is according to the timing of the Lord. The end of the year of the Church is not a time for doom and gloom or a misplaced triumphalism. A Christian death is the comforting end of a Christian life, because both took place in the promise of Baptism, and therefore the blessed hope of the resurrection when our Lord returns.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offences, that from the bonds of our sins which, by reason of our frailty, we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; 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 Last Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XVII.

Also they teach, that, at the Consummation of the World, Christ shall appear for judgment, and shall raise up all the dead; He shall give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils He shall condemn to be tormented without end.

They condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils. They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed (exterminated).

—The Augsburg Confession

Saturday, November 7: Genesis 50:15–23 22nd S. a. Trinity

Joseph had been sold into slavery in Egypt by his own brothers. His brothers! Who does that? What an evil thing to do! And then, in slavery, Joseph was falsely accused and spent years in prison. By the grace of God he was delivered, rose to prominence in Egypt, and developed a plan for surviving a famine that God had shown him (through Pharaoh's dreams) was about to happen.

The famine did happen. Joseph's brothers came to Egypt in search of food. Eventually, he invited the whole family to come live in Egypt. But when their father (Jacob/Israel) died, Joseph's brothers feared that he would repay them evil for what they had done. And Joseph, matured by all those years and the working of God in His life, responded with these words: "You meant evil… God meant it for good."

What a profound insight! God can take man's evil and use it for good! Nowhere do we see this more clearly than in the evil of wicked men crucifying the Son of God. By means of that evil, the sin of the world was atoned for, and the way of everlasting life was opened to all believers.

As we live out our lives, evil will from time to time be done to us. And we sin and make mistakes ourselves. Take heart. The Lord can and will have His use, even of these things, to bring about His good and gracious will.

Collect: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness: Be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; 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
Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity

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 [i.e., Thomas Aquinas, of the 13th century] that a monastic vow is on an equality with baptism. This is blasphemy against God.

—Smalcald Articles, Part III

Sin and wicked iniquity are real. They are a transgression of the revealed will of God. The punishment which is due for the wages of sin includes temporal death and eternal damnation. The gracious heavenly Father has provided a sacrifice for sins through the incarnation of His beloved Son. The perfectly obedient Jesus Christ laid down his life as a substitutionary sacrifice in our place. Jesus offers to us His blood of the covenant to wash away sins and the punishment we deserved. The Holy Spirit desires to create faith through the Gospel promise of forgiveness. There is only one God-approved sacrifice for sin and that is Christ's suffering and death. Those who reject God's Son and disavow the truth of God's Word will find no other way to avoid the fearful expectation of judgment.

We know of those who come into the Church of God and have been taught the knowledge of the truth. Some of them were ignorant of Christianity until they were catechized. Others had been bought up in falsehood, only to have their eyes opened by faithful and sound words. They confessed the truth. And then, for some reason, some willfully apostatized. They abandoned what they previously believed and confessed before men. The author of Hebrews warns against those who would think lightly of a defection from the truth of the Christian faith. Without Christ there is nothing left but fear.

Collect: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here, and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; 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, November 20: Luke 13:1–9 26th Sunday a. Trinity

Jesus is told about the shocking, murderous crime committed by Pilate upon Galileans. Jesus Himself brings up a building catastrophe in Siloam. Some had thought that these two events were proof that the deceased were egregiously guilty of some secret or not-so-secret sin for which God was using these extraordinary events to bring divine punishment upon them. However, Jesus denies that the deceased were worse sinners than others: "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Modern minds might dismiss the "random" events as mere unfortunate events. However, Jesus neither dismisses the possibility, nor does He accept the connection between this calamity and their supposed punishment. Instead, Jesus raises the point that there is always a danger for all sinners of perishing without repentance. At the point of death, the window of God's grace open to repentance is closed. Let this be a warning to all.

The following parable of the fig tree in the vineyard illustrates God's clemency in delaying judgment in the hope that His offered way of repentance and faith might avert the judgment. Christ's mediation, coupled with repeated efforts to bring forth the fruits of repentance, is indicative of God's graciousness. Nevertheless, man's persistent refusal to be saved by faith in Christ will ultimately result in eternal damnation. Do not delay; now is the day to repent and believe in Christ.

Collect: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here, and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Monday, November 9: Matthew 16:1–12 25th S. a. Trinity

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus looking like honest inquirers. They asked Him for a sign from heaven. Evidence was never what they lacked. They had seen His miracles and heard His preaching, and their hearts stayed hard against Him all the same. More signs will not cure unbelief. The Holy Spirit overcomes it as He works through the Word of Christ.

Jesus then warned His disciples to beware of "the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." They supposed He meant bread. Our Lord had something far worse in view than hunger. False doctrine starts quietly, as leaven does once it is hidden in dough. It hardly ever arrives as open revolt. It slips in by little compromises, misplaced trust, and teaching that moves confidence off Christ and His promises.

That warning still needs to be heard. Every age has its own leaven. Some look for salvation in moral improvement. Others rest their hope in religious feeling, political causes, or the wisdom of men. Even Christians are pulled toward their own understanding instead of the clear Word of God. The devil is pleased with any doctrine that hides Christ, whether it seems decent or wild.

The Church does not drive out false teaching by inventing a new message. She stands fast as she hears her Good Shepherd in the Holy Scriptures and confesses that same faith without changing it. Christ still feeds His people, not with speculation or signs on demand, but with His Gospel and His Sacraments. There He gives sinners what they need: forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Collect: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday, November 10: 2 Peter 3:3–15 25th S. a. Trinity

St. Peter tells us that scoffers will come in the last days, walking after their own sinful desires. They mock the promise of Christ's return because the world looks to them as if it has always gone on the same. God's patience they take for indifference. Since judgment has not arrived, they conclude that it never will.

Peter answers that history itself puts that notion to shame. The same God who created the world by His Word also judged it by the flood in Noah's day. His promises do not fail, whether He has spoken mercy or judgment. The Lord is not slow, and He has not forgotten. Rather, "The Lord is ... longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

That patience is good news for sinners. Each new morning testifies that Christ still means to gather His people through the preaching of the Gospel. The time before His return is no vacant postponement. It is the season given to the Church for proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sins in His Name.

Still, Peter will not leave us comfortable in this present age. The Day of the Lord will come unexpectedly. Christians are not called to speculate about dates or signs beyond what Scripture reveals. We live in faith toward God and love toward our neighbor, eagerly awaiting the appearing of our Savior. Our confidence does not rest in our readiness, but in Christ's finished work. He who first came in humility to bear our sin will come again in glory to raise the dead and make all things new.

Collect: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Thursday, November 19: Philippians 3:12–16 26th S. a. Trinity

In yesterday's reading St. Paul declared that He has confidence for salvation in righteousness through faith in Christ Jesus, so as "to attain" a resurrection from the dead. Today, he makes it clear that he has not yet "attained it"—that is, the resurrection or perfection.

Theologians often explain this as "both now, and not yet." *Now*, we possess eternal life by faith, but eternal life is *not yet* ours by sight, until we die. Jesus Christ has laid "hold of me" through the Word of God when He created faith in my heart and saved me. However, "I press on, that I may lay hold" of Jesus and His salvation in my daily Christian walk. A Christians is considered a saint, who is perfectly sinless (declared righteous through faith). However, until a Christian reaches that resurrection, he continues to fight against his sinful nature and strives for perfection and for holiness of living. At no point short of death can you say that you have "attained, or am already perfected."

St. Paul's "upward call of God in Christ Jesus" is simply Luther's "the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel." We say, "I am confident through faith that the prize of eternal life is waiting for me. Therefore, I press toward the goal, following the third use of the Law (God's rule)."

Collect: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here, and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration, IV, 37–38) responds to the false claim that "good works are supposed to be detrimental to salvation" by saying, "The fault, however, lies not with the good works themselves, but with the false confidence which, contrary to the express Word of God, is being placed upon good works." In today's reading, St. Paul is not criticizing the good works of believers. He is upset with those false teachers who teach men to "have confidence in the flesh." These evil workers are teaching a false confidence in salvation through "having my own righteousness," which is in the Law.

Before his conversion, St. Paul had followed that works-righteous playbook; but no longer. Paul's trust for salvation is not in those things, but in Christ! St. Paul describes believers as those "who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Our confidence is in Jesus Christ and the righteousness which is from God by faith.

Of course, believers pray that God would rule and govern our heart and mind, and stir us up to holiness of living here. Nevertheless, we don't place our confidence in our works or holy living. Through faith in Christ, we will receive a resurrection from the dead.

Collect: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here, and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; 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 says that no one lights a lamp and then hides it. A lamp belongs where its light can be seen. So the Gospel is not meant to be tucked away or watered down for the world's approval. Christ sends His Church to speak His saving truth in the open, that those walking in darkness may be brought into His marvelous light.

The Church remembers St. Martin of Tours because he lived that way. People still recall his charity. Martin knew a man's deepest want was not a warmer cloak or a fuller plate. The greatest gift he could give was the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As bishop he preached repentance, forgiveness, and salvation through Christ alone. The compassion seen in him came from the faith he confessed, not the other way around.

The old temptation is still with us, to pull Christian love apart from Christian truth. Christ does not split the gifts. The Lord who forgives sinners also sends forgiven sinners to serve their neighbors. Good works neither earn God's favor nor take the place of His Word. They bear witness to the faith the Holy Spirit creates through the Gospel.

Our Lord also warns that the eye must stay sound, or darkness will fill the whole body. The Christian keeps his eyes on Christ, the Light of the world. While His Word dwells richly among us, we are not left to grope through the dark of this age. We receive His light. That light shows itself in humble service, in a steady confession, and in a hope that rests on His mercy alone.

Collect: O God, who didst call Martin to preach the Gospel, grant to Thy servants steadfastness in the confession of the true faith that they would preach that unchanging Gospel in the midst of the darkness of this age; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Thursday, November 12: Mat. 24:29–35 25th S. a. Trinity

When our Lord speaks of the end of the age, He is not feeding curiosity. He speaks so that His disciples will hold fast when the world looks as if it is going to pieces. Wars, persecution, upheaval, and the shaking of creation do not mean Christ has left His Church. They tell us that this present world is passing away and that our redemption is drawing near.

Jesus declares that "heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." Everything else has a short life. Nations rise and they fall. Kingdoms bloom and they wither. The strongest works of men crack in time. The Word of Christ lasts because it rests on His own faithfulness. What He has promised, He will do.

Christians living through unsettled days need that Word. If we measure God's care by the headlines, or by whatever is happening to us, we start to ask whether the Church will last another generation, or whether the truth itself is fading. Christ answers those fears with His own promise. His Word cannot fail. His Church cannot fail either, for she is built upon Him.

Such confidence is no excuse for sitting still. It presses us to hold the Scriptures more tightly, to receive Christ's gifts as they are given, and to strengthen one another while we wait for Him to appear. We cannot say what tomorrow holds. We know the One who holds tomorrow. The same Lord who came in humility to bear our sins will come again in glory and gather His people into the everlasting kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Collect: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday, November 17: 1 Peter 4:1–7 26th Sunday a. Trinity

The presence of suffering in this world is a nagging problem for unbelievers as they seek to reconcile how it fits into their worldview. For them, suffering is only evil and without any benefit. However, for the Christian, the Scriptures present a different picture.

First of all, Christians acknowledge that this world is not perfect. Groaning under sin, this world includes suffering. Life requires "the sweat of the brow" in the midst of "thorns and thistles" (Genesis 3:18–19). In addition, believers will also suffer "for righteousness' sake" (1 Peter 3:13–17).

Second, Christians are called to be "serious and watchful" in our prayers. We no longer follow our sinful lusts, but seek to do the will of God. We are directed to remain faithful even while being persecuted.

Third, Christians know that there will be an "end of all things." Our sinless Jesus Christ suffered in order to provide for us salvation through faith. That blessed end, which comes after death, will bring perfect bliss and peace. The suffering of this world is not senseless. God has transformed suffering and is using it for our benefit, as well as for others. We bear up under suffering because we know that when God judges "the living and the dead" He will give eternal salvation to those who believe in the preached Gospel of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Through suffering we will receive the goal of having "ceased from sin."

Collect: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here, and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Monday, November 16: Luke 19:11–27 26th S. a. Trinity

Our Lord does not tell His Church exactly when the end of the world will come in order that we would welcome His return at any time. When we "believe His holy Word and lead a godly life," we are living in expectation of Christ's return. Until His return, we should faithfully use our gifts to extend His kingdom.

In today's text, the hearers misunderstood and thought that God's kingdom was going to be an earthly kingdom. They thought Jesus would physically reign from Jerusalem. And some apostles requested, "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory" (Mark 10:37). This idea persisted even after the resurrection, when the disciples asked, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Jesus' kingdom is a faith-based kingdom and not of this world. Jesus was already in the process of restoring His kingdom through His work of atonement. God's kingdom comes when we hallow His name. The outcome of our efforts will vary, just as the return on each one's mina varied. We leave the results to God as we remain faithful in our stewardship of the Word. The Lord is pleased with our faithfulness to His Word.

Those who hinder God's true kingdom lyingly claim that they fear the reign of an austere Jesus. Their own words become their austere condemnation, while our Jesus remains gracious and loving.

Collect: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here, and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Friday, November 13: Matthew 24:36–42 25th S. a. Trinity

Our Lord shuts the door on guessing the day of His return. "But of that day and hour no one knows." Men have tried, age after age, to calculate what Christ left hidden. Those attempts always finish in the same place. They pull disciples away from the one thing Jesus told them to do: watch.

Watchfulness among Christians means staying at the work given us, not nervously predicting dates. Jesus points back to the days of Noah. People ate, drank, married, and went about ordinary life until the flood arrived. The trouble was not that they enjoyed God's gifts. They lived as if His Word counted for nothing. Noah preached for years and built the ark, yet most ignored both the preacher and the sermon.

Work, recreation, goods, and the day's duties swallow our attention easily. None of those things is evil in itself. When they crowd out hearing God's Word, receiving His Sacraments, and living in repentance, they put us to sleep with a peace that is not real. The worst danger is not that Christ will come too soon, but that we start living as if He never will.

So the command to "watch" is an invitation to stay where He has promised to be found. He keeps us awake by the preaching of the Gospel, by Holy Baptism that still speaks God's promise, and by the Holy Supper in which He strengthens faith with His own Body and Blood. The future we wait for is not a blank. We wait for the Savior who has already redeemed us. We watch, then, without terror, and with a glad hope.

Collect: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Saturday, November 14: Mat. 24:43–51 25th S. a. Trinity

Our Lord closes the discourse by turning from the certainty of His return to the calling of those who wait for Him. The faithful servant is not the one who guesses when the master will arrive. He is the one found doing the work put into his hands. Faithfulness is counted by steadfastness, not speculation.

The lesson reaches every Christian vocation. The husband loves his wife. The wife serves her family. Parents bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. Workers labor honestly. Pastors preach Christ crucified and administer His Sacraments as they have been given to do. None of these callings shrinks because Christ is coming again. His return puts a lasting weight on ordinary faithfulness.

Jesus also warns against the servant who starts to say, "My master is delaying his coming." Once that thought takes hold, everything shifts. He stops serving his master and serves himself. He mistreats others, sure that no accounting will come. Sin grows where the fear of God is put aside.

The Christian life does not run on that assumption. We know that Christ will return, even though the hour is hidden from us. We know as well that the Judge who is coming is the One who gave Himself into death for our salvation. His return warns us, and it also comforts us. We belong to Him. Our sins have been forgiven through His blood. He keeps us by His Means of Grace until the day we see Him face to face. Until that day we stay at the work He has assigned, glad that our labor in the Lord is never in vain.

Collect: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord
The Twenty-sixth Sunday after Trinity

CHAPTER III, ARTICLE VI.

But they [Romanists] object, that love is preferred to faith and hope. For Paul says (1 Cor. 13:13): "The greatest of these is charity." Now, it is in accordance with this, that to justify is the greatest and chief virtue. Although Paul, in this passage, properly speaks of love toward one's neighbor, and indicates that love is the greatest, because it has most fruits. Faith and hope have to do only with God; but love has infinite offices externally towards men. Nevertheless we grant to the adversaries that love towards God and our neighbor is the greatest virtue, because the chief commandment is this: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" (Matt. 22:37). But how will they infer thence that love justifies? The greatest virtue, they say, justifies. By no means. For just as even the greatest or first Law does not justify, so also the greatest virtue of the Law does not justify. But that virtue justifies which apprehends Christ, which communicates to us Christ's merits, by which we receive grace and peace from God. But this virtue is faith. For as it has been often said, faith is not only knowledge, but much rather to wish to receive or apprehend those things, which are offered in the promise concerning Christ. Moreover this obedience towards God, viz. to wish to receive the offered promise, is no less a divine service, λατρεια, than is love. God wishes us to believe Him, and to receive from Him blessings, and this He declares to be true divine service.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, ¶104–107