

**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. Michael Henson

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Martin Jackson

Lamb of God Ev. Lutheran Church, Rogers, AR

Rev. Daniel Mensing

Faith Lutheran Church, Tualatin, OR

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

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Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Jacob Henson

St. Henry Lutheran Mission (WI and MI), especially Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI

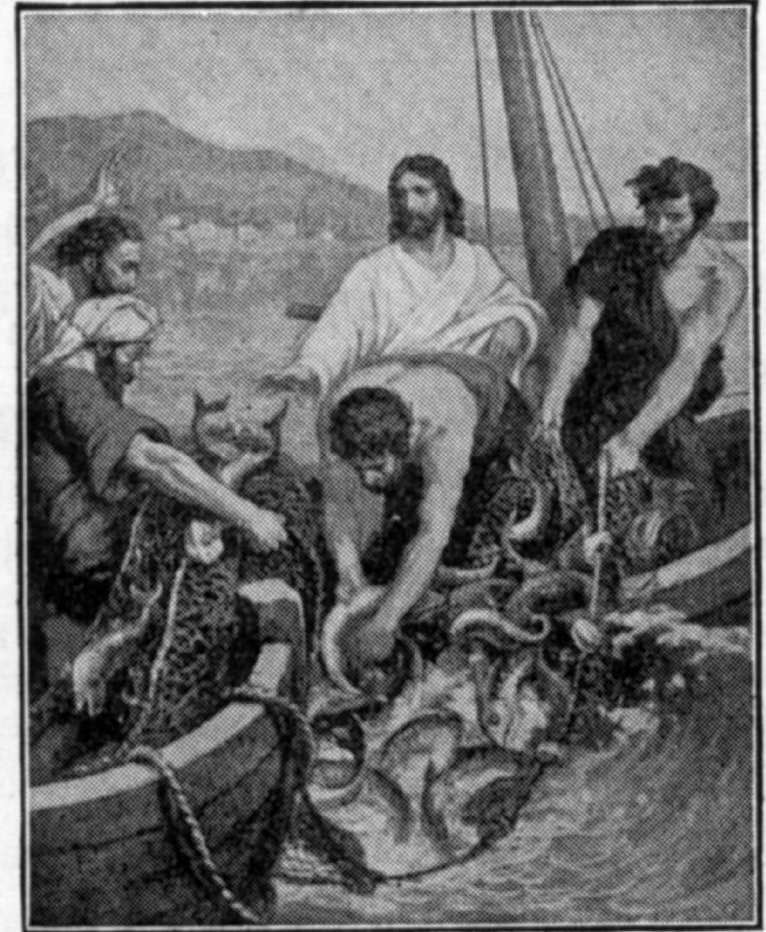
Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Dcn. Floyd Smitley

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

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



The miraculous catch of fish (Gospel for Trinity 5)

JULY 1-27, 2024

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The Calendar

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

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

July 2 (T)	<i>Festival of the Visitation</i>	ASBH 94 (this issue)
July 7	Trinity 6	ASBH 44
July 14	Trinity 7	ASBH 45
July 21	Trinity 8	ASBH 46
July 22 (M)	<i>Festival of St. Mary, Magdalene</i>	ASBH 95 (this issue)
July 25 (R)	<i>St. James the Elder, Apostle</i>	
July 28	Trinity 9	ASBH 47

Note regarding hymn numbers: The number for some hymns will change as we prepare for the move from the Supplement to the finished Hymnal. The selection of Office Hymns is now complete as of this year's synod.

Scheduled Episcopal Visitations

Pr. Dulas, Dcn. Smithey and Sts. Peter & Paul ELC (S. C.) July 27–8

Recent Support for the Work of the Diocese

Charity Ev. Lutheran Church (Burluson, Texas) generously contributed \$1,605 to the work of St. Ignatius Ev. Lutheran Seminary. **Lamb of God Lutheran Church** (Rogers, Arkansas) generously contributed \$600 for internet connectivity for Salem Lutheran Church and St. Ignatius Ev. Lutheran Seminary and \$1,400 for the needs of the diocese and seminary.

The work of the diocese and seminary is supported by gifts from many individuals and congregations. We are grateful for all of the gifts, regular and occasional, large or small, which facilitate the ongoing work. Thank you!

ASBH Hymns Added Since Last Issue of the *Lutheran Herald*

"Awhile in Spirit, Lord to Thee"	CSB (1917) #79
"Forsake Us Not, O Lord Be Near"	Ohio #181
"In Vain Would Boasting Reason Find"	Church Book (1893) #97
"Lord Jesus Christ, To Us Attend"	ELHB #1
"Spread, O Spread, Thou Mighty Word"	ELH #119
"When My Last Hour is Close at Hand"	ELHB #528
"While Yet the Morn is Breaking"	ELHB #21
"Who Knows How Near My End May Be"	ELHB #544

SATURDAY, JULY 27, 2024 MAT. 21:18–22 8TH S. A. TRINITY

"And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

Now here is a verse that false prophets have abused to create no small amount of mischief! They say, "Name it and claim it! Ask God for whatever you want, and God will give it to you if you are believing 'hard' enough." It's obviously wrong, and the error lies in the misunderstanding of "believing." There are some things we do not ask for if we are asking while "believing," i.e., asking faithfully. We gladly pray, "Thy will be done," concerning uncertain matters, for ultimately God's will is what the "believing" one really wants.

But having said that, there is the opposite danger that we would dismiss our Lord's promise entirely! Do not do that. Our Lord has made us a great promise. He has entrusted us with praying. And He has further promised that, when we pray faithful prayers, we are heard by God the Father. The Maker of heaven and earth actually listens to us! Therefore, let us boldly approach the throne of grace, laying our petitions before God and trusting Him to answer us wisely, graciously, and lovingly, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

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.

“You are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.”

There is a danger that ever lurks for the faithful preacher: Pastors always want to see their people grow in the faith. It becomes a temptation to go looking for measurable results, to focus on “changed lives.” The ends do not justify the means! If it is preached that one must tithe, or quit whatever bad habit, or manifest the presence of the Holy Spirit in some visible way, the end result may well be what Jesus says of the Pharisees: polished on the outside, but unchanged and awful on the inside.

The Law shows us our guilt. The Gospel shows us God’s grace in Christ. The result is gratitude. Where the gratitude is not apparent, the solution is not to demand the ponying up of more gratitude. The solution is to go back to Law and Gospel, to fill in whatever is missing. Then, genuinely repentant and trusting in Christ, we may be cleansed inwardly as well as outwardly. The good works which follow are then an expression both of what Christ expects of us, and of gratitude for what Christ has done for us.

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.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus!

Recently, Deacon Oncken and I had the opportunity to attend a conference of the Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations (ACELC). The ACELC was organized in 2011 by Missouri Synod pastors and congregations to attempt to address the false doctrine and wicked practices being tolerated and promoted in the LC—MS using a series of theses to call the synod to repentance. Approximately two dozen churches are formally part of the organization, though an additional group of pastors and some laymen have had a long-standing informal affiliation with the ACELC. Approximately 90 souls were in attendance at this year’s conference in Kansas City.

I attended several ACELC conferences over the years, but this was my first opportunity to do so since the Covid pandemic. What we saw at the conference in Kansas City did not surprise me, but it did sadden me. The general tenor of the presentations by the two district presidents who spoke to the conference was, in essence: “Yeah, things are bad in the synod, but it’s getting better—honest!” When some attendees had the temerity to observe that such an assertion was not intellectually or factually honest, they were essentially ignored. Their theme was, in essence: “Be faithful to your calling by tolerating such unfaithfulness, because someday error will be overthrown if we don’t separate from false teachers.”

Not all those in attendance were in agreement with such ongoing capitulation to false doctrine and false teachers. However, what was clear was that the organization was as unwilling as ever to take any formal step to address the unfaithfulness of the LC—MS.

The Lord asks in Amos 3: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” Individual pastors and laymen will continue to be confronted by the need to offer a faithful confession of the hope which is ours in Christ Jesus. The Church is never blessed when her teachers are unfaithful. Of course, deacon and I were there to observe—not *solicit* anyone to join the diocese. Taking a faithful stand is not easy; it always involves sacrifice. Certainly, it was clear that there were pastors who were assessing that cost. It is always our prayer that the Lord would preserve His remnant, and grant boldness to His servants to manifest a faithful confession in faithful practice, when brethren must “mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them,” (Rom. 16:17) for “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” (1 Cor. 4:2)

Yours in Christ, Bishop Heiser

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 25, 2024 MATTHEW 12:46–50

ST. JAMES

“Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.”

In Mark 10, we read about James and John asking Jesus if they could sit, one on His right hand and the other on His left, in glory (v. 37). It's almost as though they never even heard what He said about His impending crucifixion (v. 33-34). Jesus asks them if they can drink the cup that He will drink. They say they can; and Jesus says they will, but it is not for Him to grant their request.

They wanted to be great in the kingdom, and, indeed, as they fulfilled their calling and sealed it with their martyrdom, none would claim that they are not somewhat “great.” But this comes by way of bearing their crosses in this world, as it does for us. Jesus tells us that whoever does the will of His Father in heaven is “great,” and they are His brother and sister and mother. What is His Father's will? “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:29). God work in us such a faith that dismisses bargaining and simply trusts Christ.

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.

“Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved.”

Elections are coming upon us, and many things inevitably happen. One is that people with radically different political views will point to Jesus and say, “See? Jesus said these things! Therefore you should vote our way.” But election year politics are matters of this world. Jesus did not come to straighten out the political affairs of men. He is very clear: “I say these things that you may be saved.” He came to straighten out our eternity!

As people in our country fall away from the Faith, more and more they transform politics into their substitute religion. Be not like unto them. Jesus is not our political mascot, He is our Savior. God grant us therefore to hear what He says. And hearing, God grant us to repent of our sins, trust in His holy life, His atoning death, and His glorious resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins, “that you may be saved.”

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 Apostles were placed in a difficult situation. The council which was censuring them was chaired by religious and political authorities, including Pharisees, Sadducees, and the high priest. The authorities were appointed by God and thus were owed honor and obedience. Jesus declared on one occasion: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat” (Matt. 23:2). Also, St. Paul writes: “whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God” (Rom. 13:2). When the council commanded the Apostles to cease teaching the name of Jesus, they were causing the Apostles to make a choice between two ordinances of God. The Apostles were not disturbed by this conflict. They knew that when the decrees of men contradict the decrees of God, “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

If our political authorities make laws contrary to God’s Word, we can be assured that these laws are invalid. When we disobey them we are not “resisting the ordinance of God,” since such laws were not made according to God’s authority. God has given the government authority to punish evil and minister to us for good. He has not given them authority to annul His Word or persecute Christians.

If we are ever placed into a difficult situation like the one the Apostles faced, may God give us strength to obey Him rather than men. “Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word” (Acts 4:29).

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.

Festival of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

94. My Soul, O God, Magnifies Thee

Mein' Seel', o Gott! muß loben dich
Bartholomäus Gesius, † 1613
Tr., composite

Wo Gott zum Haus
"Geistliches Lieder"
Wittenburg, 1535

1. My soul, O God, mag - ni - fies Thee,
2. Since Thou be - held my low - li - ness,
3. Might - y Thou art, dear Lord, in deed,
4. Thou mer - ci - ful art e'er to he

My Sav - ior who doth come to me:
Hence - forth will all men call me blest;
Thy pow'r di - vine doth ne'er re - cede;
Whose heart a - lone now fear - eth Thee;

Thou bring'st me joy and glo - ry great,
From far and wide I'll laud - ed be,
A - bove all else is Thy Name's worth,
The poor Thou wilt for - e'er give aid,

TUESDAY, JULY 23, 2024 JOHN 7:14-24 8TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

“Jesus answered them and said, ‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.’”

Jesus is concerned about doctrine! You would never know it from listening to some people. The message you get is something like, “it does not matter what you believe; it only matters that you are a ‘good person’ like Jesus.” Those who say such things fail to recognize that they, too, have just made a doctrinal statement; and it is wrong.

There is no difference in Jesus’ doctrine and that of the Father, of course, since they are one God. But being perfect man, Jesus presents His doctrine not as His, but as coming from God the Father. What stands between Him and His hearers is that they cling more tightly to their preconceived notions than they do to God and to His Word.

Be not like unto them! Recognize that Scripture has the authority to correct you; allow God’s Word to do that very thing. Thus shall we continually be made wise unto salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

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.

MONDAY, JULY 22, 2024 MAT. 7:22-27 ST. MARY MAGDALENE

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

Our Lord had cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene. However, Jesus says that there would be those who had cast out demons in His name and prophesied in His name whom He would nevertheless disown. “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”

Impressive as casting out a demon would be, it is not ultimately what matters. What ultimately matters is hearing and doing what Jesus says. Mary Magdalene was saved, not just because Jesus cast out her demons, but because she was given faith to believe His words. When He speaks words of Law, we dare not practice lawlessness! Yet, looking into the Law we see how great our guilt is. Thanks be to God that Jesus also speaks words of Gospel: through faith in Him by the power of His Spirit, we repent and are forgiven. Thus was Mary Magdalene. Thus may we all be.

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.

De - spis - ing not my low es - tate.
For Thou hast done great things to me.
Yet poor - ly praised art Thou on earth.
When grief and pain on him are laid. A - men.

5. Let pride of man us never charm,
For naught withstandeth Thy strong arm:
Who in his own strength would depend,
Of such Thou soon dost make an end.

6. Thou shalt rest all counsels of man,
To work, O Lord, Thy wondrous plan,
For what work 'gainst Thee they would lay
Doth them undoubtedly betray.

7. Yet, to the lowly and despised
Thy grace, by might, sheds its disguise:
With princes given equal name,
The poor made rich while rich are shamed.

8. Thou, Lord, today hast worked Thine art
And mindful of Thy tender heart,
Thine Israel dost Thou succor give,
That Thine elect may ever live.

9. Such mercy we have not deserved
Yet, Thou hast made all things to serve
The Word which to our fathers gave
That God Incarnate man might save.

10. Yea, to that dear man Abraham,
Thou didst reveal Thy holy plan,
For Heav'n to him was pledged by Thee,
And to his Seed eternally.

Δ11. Glory now and forever be
To the Most Holy Trinity:
God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—
In Thy rich grace we daily boast.

12. Who longest sinners to show grace,
To save from Hell our fallen race,
And when this fleeting life shall cease,
Bestow on us eternal peace.

The Scriptures use the words ‘hate’ and ‘love’ to indicate preferential treatment. For example, Genesis 29:30-31 (KJV) says that Rachel was loved by her husband and Leah was hated. Jacob did not hate Leah in the way we usually understand ‘hate.’ He loved both of his wives. Leah was “hated” in comparison to her sister, since Jacob loved Rachel more than her.

In the same way, when Jesus teaches that we should “hate” our family, He is not saying that we should hate them in an absolute sense. Rather, He wants us to love Him more. If our kin should ever lead us astray from the faith, we should prefer to live at enmity with them rather than forsake being Jesus’ disciples.

As Christians, we have a new family. Our family is our brothers and sisters in Christ. If our natural kin hates us, we should be comforted by the fact that we are part of the community of saints. The Church holds many different blood lines, but we all share in the blood of Jesus which covers our sins.

This sort of community is beautifully displayed in the Virgin Mary’s visitation to Elizabeth’s house. While Mary and Elizabeth were actual blood-relatives, they especially rejoiced in their common faith in the Christ. “But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:43).

Collect: Almighty God, who hast dealt wonderfully with Thy handmaiden, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and hast chosen her to be the mother of Thy Son, and hast graciously made known that Thou regardest the poor and the lowly and the despised: Grant us grace in all humility and meekness to receive Thy Word with hearty faith, and so to be made one with Thy dear Son. Amen.

No man hath pow'r to aid me.
 And peace still be de - nied me.
 Thy Son hath suf - fered for me.
 On earth I glad - ly suf - fer. A - men.

5. But curb my heart, forgive my guilt,
 Make Thou my patience firmer;
 For they must miss the good Thou wilt
 Who at Thy chastenings murmur.

6. Then deal with me as seems Thee best,—
 Thy grace will help me bear it,
 If but at last I see Thy rest
 And with my Savior share it.

Festival of St. Mary Magdalene

95. Alas, My God, My Sins Are Great

Ach Gott und Herr, wie gross und schwer
Johann Major, 1613
Tr., Catherine Winkworth, 1863, alt.

Ach Gott und Herr
"Andachts-Zymbeln"
Freyburg, 1655

1. A - las, my God, my sins are great,
2. And fled I hence in my de - spair
3. Lord, Thee I seek. I mer - it naught;
4. If pain and woe must fol - low sin,

My con - science doth up - braid me;
In some lone spot to hide me,
Yet pit - y and re - store me.
Then be my path still rough - er.

And now I find that in my strait
My griefs would still be with me there
Just God, be not Thy wrath my lot;
Here spare me not; if heav'n I win,

WEDNESDAY, JULY 3: MATTHEW 16:13-26 5TH S. A. TRINITY

Roman Catholics think that this passage establishes their doctrine of the Papacy. According to them, the first pope, Peter, is the “rock” upon which Christ’s Church is built. As that rock, he and all his successors have authority to introduce new laws and customs for securing the forgiveness of sins.

However, the Scriptures teach that the Church is not built upon any one man. It is established in the right confession about Jesus Christ. The Church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). Thus, in our reading today, Jesus does not say that the Church is built upon Peter. Rather it is built upon Peter’s confession of faith: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

While this passage does not give Peter authority to add new laws for securing righteousness, it does give him authority to bind and loose sins. All those placed into the Office of the Ministry are authorized to forgive sins, according to Jesus’ words, “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Thus we can be confident that when our pastor forgives our sins, he is doing it by God’s authority. God has authorized him to forgive sins. Therefore, when our sins are loosed by him on earth, they are also loosed by God 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.

The time had come for Jesus to die for the sins of the world, and so He was journeying to Jerusalem for the Passover. As He passed by the region of Samaria, He hoped to preach to some of the Samaritans, but they did not receive Him. When they heard that Jesus was going to Jerusalem, they resented Him, since the Samaritans worshiped on Mount Gerizim instead of at Jerusalem (John 4:20).

Their rejection of the Messiah was indeed serious. Unless these Samaritans came to acknowledge the true God and believe in His Son, they would finally perish in hellfire. But the time for that destruction was not yet. God was still working to save these Samaritans. In fact, Jesus' face was set toward Jerusalem for that very purpose. He was going to die for them and take away their sins. Years later, the Apostles would come back and preach this forgiveness to them. Then they would believe, be baptized, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14ff).

This is a comfort for us. As Jesus patiently worked repentance and faith in the stubborn Samaritans, He patiently works repentance and faith in us. Jesus is not desirous that any of us should be destroyed. He has come to save our lives from sin.

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

What our eyes behold fills the rest of us. In other words, what we look at and focus on will affect our life. In Colossians 3:2, St. Paul encourages us, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." We are to fix our eyes on Christ's love and perfection. His Word and His Spirit are the oil and flame that light the lamp of our eyes.

Christians should especially keep these verses in front of us at all times. We are constantly surrounded by temptations to focus on poisonous dark things of the world, which encourage us to be prideful, rebellious, perverted, and lazy. We treat our Christian life as a part-time endeavor that only concerns us 'as needed', while we think that our worldly work and leisure are the more important, full-time concerns. Every hour of every day should be shaped by the light of our life in Christ Jesus. That does not mean that we *only* sit around reading the Bible, praying, and thinking about how we need to be perfect. It means that every task and vocation we have ought to be done with the Lord's commandments in mind.

Our Lord warns us against sin and hypocrisy because that is the darkness that turns our eyes in on ourselves, and the darkness that proceeds from our own hearts is truly dangerous. Our regular jobs and our recreational times should be carried out with thanks to God and love for others, all according to His good will!

Collect: O God, Whose never-failing Providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth: We humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Three men in our reading desired to follow Jesus. Jesus forbade none of them, but He did instruct them about what sort of faith was required. The first man was very enthusiastic about following Jesus, but his faith evidently lacked root. He was like the seed which fell on rocky ground in the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:13). Jesus prepared the man's weak faith for a life under the cross when He said, "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." By contrast, the second and third men were sluggish in their faith. Each of them looked back on their attachments to the world. They were in danger of becoming like Lot's wife, who turned into a pillar of salt when she looked back toward Sodom as it was perishing.

The circumstances and temptations for each of these men was unique, but the general admonition from the Lord applies to us: "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." In order to follow Christ, we must be willing to forsake all that would hinder our faith. "Farewell I gladly bid thee, False, evil world, farewell" (TLH 407). None of us can produce this faith in ourselves. It must be given to us by God. The Collect printed below is an excellent prayer for such faith.

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.

There are two things that make up the Christian experience: faith and life. First, there is faith concerning who Christ is. Second, there is a life of following after Christ. This pattern is seen in our reading today. Peter confesses in faith that Jesus is “the Christ of God,” and then he is instructed in the life which accompanies this faith: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

Our lives following Christ are not glamorous. Often they are accompanied by persecution. Just as the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus and persecuted Him, so we can expect leaders in this world to reject and persecute us. But the Christian life is also not one of doom and gloom. We have the hope of eternal life! While in this world we suffer for confessing Christ, in the world to come we will be exalted for having confessed Him. “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven,” (Matt. 10:32). When the Son of Man comes in His glory, we will be glorified with Him—not on account of anything we have done, but because of Christ and what He has done for us. All who are baptized into this faith will receive eternal life with Christ 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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Offenses will come and sin will cause problems. It will continue to happen until our Lord Jesus returns in glory to judge the living and the dead. However, as St. Paul says in Romans 6:1-2: “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!” Sin and pride always have bad consequences, so we should always strive to avoid sin. Knowing that Christ forgives our sins does not justify our laziness, carelessness, or any other type of negligence toward God’s commandments.

Through faith we know that God forgives our sins when we repent of them. But even after we have been absolved, the sin can leave damage. We should avoid causing that damage whenever we can. Our in-born sinfulness will always fight against us until the Resurrection, so we can never live perfectly, but our Lord still calls us to strive to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48).

Those who cause offense with no concern for faithfulness and repentance will also be an on-going problem in this life. The damaging unrighteousness that they spread heaps woe upon woe as they corrupt others. Even our loving God says it would be better for them if they were removed and punished than for them to harm themselves and others. But God allows Satan and evil men to bring offenses because His holy, perfect will uses such things to bring about the greater good. We may not always understand, but we do have His gracious, enduring promises.

Collect: O God, Whose never-failing Providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth: We humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Our Lord makes us part of His kingdom through faith, by the power of His Spirit. As He does so, He uses us to confess His Word and do the righteous works that He prepares for us. By such things He spreads the seeds of His Gospel, so that sinners may hear and understand, grow up in true faith, and be gathered with all His people. The cycles of nature and farming show us a wonderful example of the greater spiritual truth of this cyclical work of His holy kingdom.

Our Savior also makes the point in this parable that the man who works to spread the seed does not necessarily know how the seed will sprout and grow. As workers and servants in Christ's kingdom, it is not our place to know or judge all things. It is our place to observe His commands, do the work, and trust that He is the one who has all power and knowledge. There is comfort for the faithful in this! If things seem to go well, we thank God that He has brought the increase and that our sins have not messed things up! If things seem to go badly, then we pray that He make all things work together for good according to His will and that He forgive us for our sins that might have messed things up! This is why He teaches us to pray, "*Thine* is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever." Amen!

Collect: O God, Whose never-failing Providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth: We humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. 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

If you were baptized as an infant and grew up regularly hearing the Bible stories, you might not catch the unusualness of this event and its corresponding importance. Dr. Luther says in the Large Catechism, “In the same manner, and even much more, you should honor and exalt Baptism on account of the Word, since God himself has honored it by words and deeds and has confirmed it by wonders from heaven. Do you think it was a jest that the heavens opened when Christ allowed himself to be baptized, that the Holy Spirit descended visibly, and that the divine glory and majesty were manifested everywhere?” (IV. 21)

Are the miracles a jest or triviality? No. First, God’s Word declares to us that Baptism is worthy of trust as a life-giving water which “does now save us” (1 Peter 3:21). Second, by means of the opened heaven, the descending Spirit, and the Father’s voice, the Triune God is drawing extraordinary attention to Holy Baptism. Third, there is only one baptism (Eph. 4:5), and we “were baptized into Christ” (Rom. 6:3, Gal. 3:27). Though we don’t see these wonders at every Christian’s baptism, great things are occurring. The water and the Word do forgive sins, rescue from death and the devil, and give eternal salvation to all who believe these words.

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.

Our Lord’s disciples were concerned that the Pharisees were offended by His teaching. But He commanded the disciples: “Let them alone.” In a sense, our Lord is saying, “Let them be offended.” It is good if God’s Word offends the hearts of prideful sinners. It is better for them to be stirred up so that they might be brought to repentance!

We should not try to be offensive and rude, but if God’s truth and works offend sinners, so be it. It is disturbing that so many people in our time are so ignorant and desensitized to God’s Word that they are not even offended by it. They are offended by being told that they are wrong, or offended by being told to stop their destructive behavior. But the spiritual implications of Christ’s saying, “what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man,” just seems to bounce off their chests.

Our gracious Lord Jesus continues to teach and bless us through His Church, calling the multitudes to “hear and understand.” Our lives as Christians should reflect the spiritual truth of our God’s love and wisdom. We should confess Jesus Christ’s atonement and His commands in all that we do and say, according to our proper vocations. And our hope should always be that those who are lost might hear, understand, repent, and be saved by this power and grace of God!

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

In their self-justifying hypocrisy, the Pharisees and scribes fail to see the dangerous irony in their resentment that “this Man receives sinners and eats with them.” Truth and humility from God’s Holy Spirit would show them that *they* are sinners who need Jesus to come and be with them, to bless them and help them. But they wanted Him to do it on their terms; they wanted Him to affirm their own prideful expectations.

Our gracious Lord rejoices in sinners who faithfully see that they are indeed sinners, who repent, and who fear, love, and trust in Him above all things. Unrepentant sinners trust in themselves and deny that they are lost and sick. He is the one who comes to seek and save, by the Son who became flesh and blood as true man, and by His Spirit who enlightens us in true faith. He is the one who does all the work, and He is the one who teaches us His terms for good order and righteousness. If He did not receive sinners and abide with us, we would all be lost in condemnation. Thanks be to God that He does come to us on His terms, according to His will. May His good and gracious will truly be done on earth as it is in heaven, and may we serve according to it so that others may be found and saved by our Lord Jesus Christ!

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

Rebuke is a strong word, occurring seven times in St. Mark’s Gospel. Jesus rebuked demons (1:25, 9:25) and the wind (4:39). He was greatly displeased when the disciples rebuked those bringing little children to Him (10:13-14). When Peter rebuked Jesus for saying that He would suffer, die, and rise again, Jesus turned around and rebuked Peter (8:32-33). The content of the Gospel message is definitely of such great importance that there needed to be a scolding. The redemptive work of Jesus Christ cannot be denied without a loss of salvation.

In St. Mark’s post-resurrection account, Jesus rebukes the apostles. This time it was not a denial of the content of the Gospel, but for their initial unbelief when their fellow believers bore witness to Christ’s resurrection. In other words, God’s appointed means had been denied. The women at the tomb (16:1-8), Mary Magdalene (16:9-11), and the Emmaus disciples (16:12-13) had all told them. It’s one thing not to have expected the resurrection, but it’s quite another to refuse to believe your fellow Christians because of stiffness of heart.

Similarly, it is inevitable that we will discover times that we have sinned. However, do not be hardhearted and refuse to repent of your sins when the Law reveals it. Instead, repent and believe in the apostolic message of 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.

Two things are contrasted: the tradition of the elders and the commands of God. Each has its rightful place. Lutherans are not anti-tradition. Augsburg Confession, article XV, says, “With regard to church usages that have been established by men, it is taught among us that those usages are to be observed which may be observed without sin and which contribute to peace and good order in the church.” However, if human traditions transgress the Word of God, then those traditions must not be observed.

The prophet Isaiah’s rebuke fits the actions of the scribes and Pharisees. They are observing the outward trappings of hand-washing, which certainly could teach about ceremonial cleanness. Though they acted as if they cared about ceremonial cleanness, they rejected the true washing away of sins brought by Jesus’ forgiveness. These teachers also contradicted the Fourth Commandment by their rules regarding church gift-giving (korban). A hypocrite may observe externals, but it is a mere pretense, in order to cover up an unbelieving heart. After repeated denials, a hypocrite may actually think he is pleasing God when he is only observing man’s rules.

The true worship of God is determined by God, not man. God desires that we, who have come to learn of our sins through the Law, would seek the forgiveness of sins, which we have come to learn through the Gospel of God.

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.

We do not get away with anything. Our sinful hearts and minds tell us that our sin won’t be known. We think it’s OK to do a little bit of wickedness and excuse ourselves. A hypocrite is not just someone who fails to do what he believes or ‘preaches’; a hypocrite is one who *justifies* himself in such double-mindedness. All of us fail to fear, love, and trust our Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We fail to “practice what we preach” as Christians. But that does not make us like the Pharisees. The hypocrisy of the sons of Satan is ignoring God’s truth and justifying our departure from that truth.

To know that the Lord has complete power and knowledge over all things should be comforting, but it also should be terrifying! If we love God’s truth, then we can rest in the fact that He will love and protect us for Christ’s sake, no matter what happens to our bodies. He will save us and forgive us because His Spirit makes us faithful in our Savior’s atonement on the cross. But if we try to justify ourselves, we resist and mock the Holy Spirit and say in our hearts that God does not see our sin, or that He won’t punish our unrepentance. We should be very afraid of such hypocritical dishonesty, because that is the pride and obstinacy that leads to hell.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The 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 11: MATTHEW 21:28–32 6TH S. A. TRINITY

Psalm 14:3 tells us that “They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.” If that is true, then St. John the Baptist's message concerning the way of righteousness—a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Luke 3:3)—was required not for some, but for all people. In the story of the two sons, both are disobedient and require repentance. However, only one of the sons by his repentance does the will of the father.

Jesus told this parable to the Jewish leaders of which St. Luke (7:29-30) says, “And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.” These leaders refused to repent or to receive a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. They rejected the proclamation of salvation by repentance and faith in Jesus. But more than that, when they saw that message work repentance in great sinners, they still did not repent. And thus they remained outside the way of righteousness.

Let us repent of our sins and trust in the only Son, who not only said He would do the will of His heavenly Father, but in every way accomplished it. Through repentance and faith we come into 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. Amen.

These obstinate Jewish leaders have been disputing with Jesus, who was exposing their false teachings (8:11). The Pharisees have chosen the commandments of God in order to try and make themselves holy. They trust in their own false and imperfect holiness. The ruling Sadducees (aligned with Herod) deny even basic Biblical truths (the resurrection, angels, etc.). They keep the external trappings of religion, but are only concerned with power, prestige, and money. Similarly, St. Paul says of them, "...traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (2 Timothy 3:4-5).

Though Jesus patiently tried to enlighten them, these leaders do not wish to learn from Him. They don't ask for a "sign from heaven" in order to come to faith in the Christ. They are only testing Him. Jesus warns His disciples of their leaven/false teaching because it is time to "reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition" (Titus 3:10).

Recalling the two dinner-providing miracles, Jesus reminds the disciples why they should believe and trust in His Messiahship. He provided for them natural bread, so they need not worry about forgetting to bring bread to the isolated eastern side of the lake. Rather than worry about bread, we ought to concern ourselves with holding to the true teaching of salvation by grace through faith in 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. Amen.

The Christian is saved *for* eternal life with the Triune God, and *from* the suffering of eternal death. Jesus warns against the wages of sin when He quotes Isaiah 66:24 three times. Knowing that those who refuse to believe in Jesus will go to this very real place, we ought to do everything we can to avoid it. The examples Jesus gives show us the serious course we ought to pursue and the complete devotion which we ought to have toward Him.

No, Jesus is not literally saying that we ought to start chopping off body parts and gouging out eyes. Make note that in each example Jesus chooses one of a pair—hands, feet, and eyes. If our sin resided in only one hand, then we should certainly remove it. But it doesn't. We know that it is our sinful nature which leads us into temptation and sin. Nothing would prevent our Old Adam from using the remaining hand, foot, or eye to cause us to sin.

The Word of God is likened to the effect of salt upon meat. Salt seasons or cures the meat. First, it purifies or burns up the impurities as it dries up the meat, and second, it preserves the meat. God's Law exposes our sinful nature (original sin) and the actual sin which proceeds from it. God's Gospel creates faith in Christ and thus preserves us unto eternal life.

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. Amen.