

We now complete our last week of the church year with a familiar text, the Gospel reading which is normally appointed for the 26th Sunday after Trinity, the account of Judgment Day. It is a curious thing that both the righteous and the unrighteous have the same reaction to our Lord, “Lord, when did we see You hungry...?” How can two profoundly different groups come up with the same reaction? The answer lies in the outset of today’s reading, in that God knows His sheep, and He also knows who are the goats. That is, He knows the ones to whom He has given faith, and He also knows the ones who have rejected Him.

Because God has given His sheep faith, the sheep hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow Him. They are led by the Good Shepherd to do good to those around them. Good works flow from faith, so much so that the sheep are sometimes unaware of the good they are doing, “Lord, when did we...?”, while the goats, asking the same question, miss the point. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, 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 LUTHERAN HERALD



NOVEMBER 3–29, 2025

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 2	Trinity 20	ASBH 58
November 9	Trinity 25	ASBH 63
November 11	St. Martin of Tours, Bp. & Confessor	ASBH 109
November 16	Trinity 26	ASBH 64
November 23	Trinity 27	ASBH 65
November 30	Advent 1/St. Andrew, Apostle	ASBH 1
Opening: 55	Hymn: ASBH 110 Communion: 311 Closing: 57	

St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary

Fall Quarter began September 1 and will run from until November 17.

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

- E009—Greek Readings 2 (1 hr.)
- E003—Psalms (2 hrs.)
- H003—Medieval Church (3 hrs.)
- H009—Readings in Medieval Theology (1 hr.)
- P002—Catechetics (3 hrs.)

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

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28: HEBREWS 12:22–29 27TH S. A. TRINITY

“See that you do not refuse Him who speaks.” Monday our Lord told us to “Watch.” We are to be observant of the events going on in this world and see to it we “do not refuse Him who speaks” to us through Holy Scripture. Wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, and so on only serve to keep us on our toes. We are called by God to look beyond this world because this world is going away, and with it all its corruption. God’s call is for His people to look to that which He has promised, “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea” (Revelation 21:1).

That which is new cannot be shaken for sin is gone, and all the heartache and sorrows that sin brings with it. The blood Jesus shed on the Cross speaks to God the Father on our behalf. It covers over our sins and hides them from the Father’s eyes for all of eternity. Having our sins forgiven for Jesus’ sake allows us to look beyond our time in this world in anticipation of an eternity with Jesus free from tears.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, 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.

“Therefore wait for Me,” says the Lord, “Until the day I rise up for plunder.” What Jesus said in yesterday’s reading was nothing new for God’s people. For the people of the Old Testament, their waiting was two-fold. They were to wait for the day of the Lord’s appearing in flesh and blood, as well as knowing He would come again in judgment on the Last Day. Both required the faith that God had given them to believe His promises.

As New Testament Christians, we know our Lord has come in the flesh. We also know of the perfect life He lived, and of His bitter sufferings and death on the Cross. We can check off that box as “Completed.” Promise made, and promise kept.

This is what the Christian faith is about. It is believing everything that God has told us in His Word, particularly during those times when life is especially difficult. That is why we need to realize that the faith we have is God’s work. Left to ourselves, our faith would crumble under that weight of our earthly trials and temptations.

*“If thou but suffer God to guide thee And hope in Him through all thy ways,
He’ll give thee strength, what’e’er betide thee, And bear thee through the evil days.*

Who trusts in God’s unchanging love Builds on the Rock that naught can move.”

(TLH #518, st. 1)

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, 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.



Installation of Rev. Jacob Henson at Apologia-Deer Park

Rev. Jacob Henson, was installed as pastor of Apologia-Deer Park on October 17, with Bp. Heiser performing the installation. Pastors Ahonen, M. Henson, and Mueller assisted with the installation service. The diocese joins the saints of Apologia in celebrating this momentous occasion in the life of this young congregation.



Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

Chapter XI.

OF GOD'S ETERNAL FOREKNOWLEDGE AND ELECTION.

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

AFFIRMATIVE

The Pure and True Doctrine concerning this Article.

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

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

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

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

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

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

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26: MATTHEW 24:1-14 27TH S. A. TRINITY

For some 2,000 years Christians have wondered, "When? When will the Lord return?" During that span of time there have been countless wars between nations, numerous famines and pestilences, and earthquake after earthquake. One might think, "Lord, isn't it about time for You to come back?" But if all those things aren't enough, Jesus seems to 'pile on', telling Christians about having to face tribulation, being hated, and enduring lawlessness. So what are we to make of all this? "See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."

Christians who have been baptized into Christ our Lord need to understand that these warnings are not given to make us upset, but rather, these warnings are for our good. Every tragic event, all the hate that Christians face in this world, serve to show us who we are: God's dear children who patiently await the return of our Lord. We are not to be troubled, for our Lord is with us every step we take in this world. Through His blessed Word and Sacraments our Lord keeps us ever prepared for His return in glory.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, 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.

As we know, our present world is a mess, brought about by one man's sin, that of Adam. No matter how hard men try to make the world better, it persists in its evil state. One need only go back through the course of history to see one war ending as another pops up. It's as though people just can't help but sin. And that's the point! Man *can't* help but sin.

That is what is meant by the doctrine of original sin. Though once perfect, man is now infected with sin. Man cannot but sin. No matter how much he may try to cure himself from sin, sin still remains, and with sin comes death. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). There is no self-help book that can help you change this. But there is one book which offers hope, the Bible.

"Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' " Our new life begins when we are washed in the waters of Holy Baptism. Once baptized into Christ Jesus, we are connected to Life itself. Yes, our sinful flesh is still with us, but God gives us His Holy Spirit to lead us to repent of our sins and to trust in Jesus for forgiveness. Because of Jesus we can look forward to the new heavens and earth.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, 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.

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

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

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

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

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

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome, §1–12

The Lord's zeal declared here is exactly that in Sunday's Gospel (St. Matthew 22:1–14). It is zeal to have mercy, and to have that mercy received, along with every blessing it conveys. He comes to those whom He had chosen as the bearers of the Seed, the Descendant promised to Eve as 'Crusher of the Serpent's Head'. The Promised One's coming was to be through the line of Jacob's son, Judah, through his descendant, King David. Yet, that line of kings most often led the people away from the promise, instead exalting the desires of the flesh.

The kingdom of Judah was to be the visible home of God's merciful reign on earth, so its being carried off into exile should have stirred the nations to ask why God had appeared to abandon His people. Instead, they contentedly went on in their sins and idolatry, while Judah suffered from growing despair, not trusting the Lord's purpose in their captivity. The Lord calls the remnant of His people not to act like their fathers, who took their status before Him for granted and left Him shamed before the nations by their evil conduct. He desires not only to bring them back to their homeland, but to His feast. There He not only invites them, but provides everything they need to attend, even replacing their ragged garments of sin with the righteousness of God the Son, so that they may fittingly eat and rejoice.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve Thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

"And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" As the church year winds down this week one word ought to resound in our ears, "Watch!" Christ's words in today's reading were spoken to some of His disciples who expressed concern about the end of time. They simply wanted a sign, a warning as it were, as to when the end would come. Implied in their request was their desire to be ready. Yet, their inquiry was left unanswered. Or was it?

"Watch!" Jesus' answer to their inquiry was "Watch!" Their preparedness, and ours, rests not on knowing the exact date and time, but rather on preparedness. And the best way to be prepared to meet the Lord on the Last Day is to meet Him now. We start our week on Sunday when we join with "angels and archangels and all the company of heaven" in the presence of our Lord. There, in the Divine Service, we are greeted by our Lord who comes to give us what we need the most: the forgiveness of our sins.

But it doesn't end there. Continue to hear the Word taught and preached. Continue to search the Scriptures and thoughtfully read devotional material such as the Lutheran Herald. See how the Lord works. See what He told you to do, what He has led you to do... "Watch!"

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, 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

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4: MATTHEW 21:28–44 20TH S. A. TRINITY

Jesus addresses the ‘lodge’ of Judaism: they think their bloodline membership and self-devised works of righteousness entitle them to inherit God’s kingdom. They claim obedience to His Law; He most desires what they *truly* need, but reject: not the Temple sacrifices themselves, but what they signify and deliver. They deliver the One who comes as the Lamb of God to carry away their sins, the “Chief Cornerstone” of God’s eternal Temple. They don’t look to the Lord’s mercy in Him, so they do not show it toward others and lead them to receive it. In this way, they do not render the promised service of sons in the vineyard, but are as the thieves who would steal the vineyard from the heir.

Jesus warns them that “the Day the Lord has made” (Psalm 118) is coming upon them, in which the righteous rejoice while those rejecting the Lord’s mercy are crushed by the very thing that would save them. In that psalm, the Messiah declares (of Himself and of all who trust in Him) that when the unbelieving surround Him, swarming like bees and flaring like a raging fire, He cuts them off “in the name of the Lord,” revealing His will. Not the usual word for ‘cut’, but the word for circumcision is used there. It is the action that rids Him of His enemies. His serpent-destroying death for sin on the cross will transform those who trust in it from enemies to friends and beloved children!

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve Thee with a quiet mind; 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 people were “like sheep having no shepherd” because those who occupied God’s offices labored not for the sheep, but for themselves. The sheep were scattered by their harassment, rebuking them with the commands of men while depriving them of the relief known only in the mercy of the Good Shepherd, who had instituted all things for their preservation from harm. Instead of feeding, grooming, and guarding such as sheep need, they were slaughtered by these wolves who could not even feed on them, other than on the self-assurance of their own superiority. Every perversion of God’s Word that would lead others to despair and damnation is as futile and ridiculous as every attack from demons against those created in God’s image.

Yet, that’s what Jesus saw in all the cities and villages: damage being done to the people by would-be shepherds who were leading the sheep into lives of fear, despair, and self-destruction. Instead of the sheep growing fat and having lush coats, the shepherds gorged themselves. We know from the example of David’s shepherding and Jesus’ self-description in St. John 10 that a true shepherd, instead, puts himself at risk by doing both for and to the sheep those things that glorify the Lord and Owner of the flock. Pray, therefore, the Lord of the Harvest provide and sustain those who will be faithful to use His means and look only to His glory!

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve Thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

It is one thing to die having never received Baptism. It is another thing to receive Baptism, to take the Lord’s Supper, and then to fall away from Christ. Those in the second group will be judged more harshly than those in the first. Those who have never been baptized are God’s enemies because of unbelief, but those who received Baptism and then fell away are traitors. Therefore, the author of Hebrews is calling Christians to remain repentant, lest they receive a harsher condemnation than the other unbelievers.

This is why the faithful Church, in accordance with Christ’s command in Matthew 28, carefully catechizes her members—that is, we teach them the doctrine of Christ before admitting them to the Lord’s Supper. In order to protect the weak and ignorant from judgment, the Church communes those who are properly trained and examined: “the sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV:1).

As our Lord desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4), His Church also desires that everyone treasure His gift of forgiveness and life, and not mock it or fall away from the knowledge of the Truth into condemnation.

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.

One word which is grossly misused by the people of the world is the word “deserve”. Someone says, “I worked for this, therefore I deserve it.” You do not necessarily deserve it, but God, out of grace, gave it to you through earthly means. Someone says, “They got what they deserved.” They actually deserved worse, and so do you.

The truth is, no one deserves any good and everyone deserves damnation. In this life God does not give us what we deserve, according to Psalm 103: “He has not dealt with us according to our sins” (v. 10). The only ones who get what they deserve are the unbelievers at the final Judgment. But, until then, even unbelievers enjoy the undeserved things of creation and God’s undeserved patience as He waits for them to repent.

God does not always reveal the specifics of why disasters happen to some and not to others. But He has revealed that what they “deserve” has nothing to do with it. The best proof of this is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He was without sin, yet He suffered the condemnation men deserved in order to give men the life He deserves. Now He labors patiently with us, preparing hearts through the Word and Holy Spirit so we may have the fullness of peace and joy through faith in Him.

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.

Jesus is not saying that a Christian never sins. He is, however, saying that a non-Christian never does what God would consider a good work; he is not a fruit-bearing tree. “Without faith, it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6), because “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). In St. Matthew 25:32–33, Jesus distinguishes between the ‘sheep’ and ‘goats’, then displays their works to show the rightness of His judgment (verses 34–46). Romans 14:23 shows that goat-works always dishonor God (even though He may turn them to the good of His Church, as in Romans 8:28).

Christians, as good trees, produce good fruit—if they’re bearing fruit at all. If not producing fruit, the Holy Spirit prunes by the Law and feeds with the Gospel so that they do. When the Law shows what fruit you are to bear and you see yourself lacking, the Gospel reminds you that your foundation isn’t of your works, but of the rock upon which you are built. Lest despair creep in to overtake you, this drives you to visit your pastor to confess your sins and receive God’s Absolution from him, so that he may also speak God’s Word to you and ready you to rejoice in being fed with the Body and Blood of Jesus. His dwelling in you will renew you to the bearing of good fruit, as St. Paul confessed (Galatians 2:20).

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve Thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Lord lays things out for Solomon very straightforwardly, just as He had done for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: ‘I’m giving you this, and if it is ever not this way, everyone must acknowledge, it is because of you and not because of Me.’

This is, of course, not simply a matter of God maintaining His reputation by assigning blame. It is the Lord establishing for those who come afterwards that He already had a plan for every possible failure of humans whom He had blessed, so that they might be restored to the state of blessedness and bounty that He had given them. It is this reality to which the unbelieving world is blind. It’s why they ask, “Why me?” It’s why they assert, “If God exists and is truly good, He wouldn’t allow these bad things to happen,” and “You must be misunderstanding the Bible, because if God makes people in His image and calls them good, and I was born with this desire, He must approve of what I want to do, not call it ‘sin’ like you do.”

God’s Word makes it clear that Adam’s sin resulted in children born in his own sinful, dying likeness (Genesis 4:1). From him we have a continuing responsibility to God for acknowledging His original design (Genesis 9:6) and His desire to restore every descendant of Adam to it through Christ’s atonement for sin (Colossians 3:10, Ephesians 4:24, Ezekiel 18:32, 1 Timothy 2:4–5).

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve Thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

St. Ignatius, on the way to his martyrdom, wrote to his fellow Christians in Rome, “Now at last I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing visible or invisible envy me, so that I may reach Jesus Christ. Fire and cross and battles with wild beasts, mutilation, mangling, wrenching of bones, the hacking of limbs, the crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil—let these come upon me, only let me reach Jesus Christ!” (Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 231). St. Ignatius knew that he was saved by grace and through faith. This faith made him reject this fallen world, and he longed to attain that perfection which was promised him in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, when he was sentenced to death for his confession, he rejoiced because he was about to receive his greatest desire: the removal of all sin.

In this life, we will never reach sinless perfection, although we will be perfect in the life to come. God gives to each of us a different level of maturity with which to resist sin and practice righteousness. Nonetheless, St. Paul bids us “be of the same mind,” that is, despise the fallen things of the world and desire the perfection of heaven where Christ sits at the right hand of the Father.

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.

“Beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit.” “The mutilation” means the Jews. He calls them “the mutilation” because they were physically circumcised, but not spiritually. They did not understand that the promise of circumcision had pointed to the Christ. Since the Jews deny the Christ, their circumcision is without meaning and nothing more than self-mutilation.

In contrast to this, St. Paul declares, “We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit.” We who are born again through Baptism and the Spirit have the circumcision of the heart—which is repentance unto life in the Lord Jesus Christ. Even in the Old Testament, circumcision helped no one if it was not accompanied by true repentance, for Moses had said, “circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer” (Deu. 10:16).

Now that the Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament, physical circumcision has no spiritual purpose. What matters is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as received through the sacrament of Baptism. It is written: “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith” (Col. 2:11–12).

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.

St. Paul speaks to those who “fear God” in Pisidian Antioch (in southwestern Turkey), both those descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the Gentiles who had come to believe that the Lord would provide forgiveness, so that He “might be feared” as a perfect Father and not as a tyrant (Psalm 130). He explains how the prophecies that might mistakenly be referred to King David by Israel’s rabbis and priests were really about David’s greater descendant, Jesus, whom he proclaimed to them as the Christ, God’s Son and Anointed One. He declares the innocence of Jesus and the injustice perpetrated by those in Jerusalem, showing Jesus’ resurrection was both proof of this and the fulfillment of God’s promises. They should allow no one to water down these promises to make them fulfillable by David or anyone else, because Jesus fulfilled even the most amazing one: though He died, His flesh saw no corruption through three days, arising perfect from the tomb.

Paul then makes sure they understand that the resurrection doesn’t change who Jesus is: He remains true Man, our Brother in whom and for whose sake God’s forgiveness is given. Yet, he quotes Psalm 2 as further identification of Him: the One of whom God the Father could say from all eternity, “You are My Son,” is the One “who was made flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth” (John 1:14) who had atoned for the sins of all!

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve Thee with a quiet mind; 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

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18: 1 PETER 4:1–7

26TH S. A. TRINITY

“For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead.” Does he mean physically dead or spiritually? Though a strange way of speaking, the rest of Scripture helps us to interpret it. Nowhere does Scripture speak of preaching the Gospel to the physically dead, that they might “live according to God.” On the contrary, Hebrews 9 says, “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (v. 27). Therefore, St. Peter cannot mean that the Gospel was preached to those already physically dead.

But Christ is Judge of “the living and the dead,” and Romans 10 explains, “Have they not heard? Yes indeed: ‘Their sound has gone out to all the earth’” (v. 18). In this sense, the physically dead heard the Gospel while living, and Christ will judge both the living and the dead according to how they received His Gospel while alive.

The Gospel is not preached to those already physically dead, but it is preached to those spiritually dead. All men are spiritually dead before hearing the Gospel: “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). In this sense, the Gospel is proclaimed to both believers and unbelievers alike, so that everyone who hears might “live according to God in the spirit.”

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.

When will the kingdom of God appear? When will Christ return for the final judgment? That is what the Jews wanted to know. But that is the wrong question. God alone knows when the final judgment will be, hence our Lord says in Matthew 24, “Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (v. 36). What we should be asking is this: “what does God want me to do while I wait for His return?” Answer: God wants me to faithfully use His gifts.

Like the nobleman in the parable, the Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted Christians with His gifts, and He wants us to use them, rather than hide them away. Those gifts are the Lord’s Supper, Baptism, and the Scriptures. He gives us the Lord’s Supper, saying, “Take, eat... This do, as often as you drink it” (1 Cor. 11:24, 25). He gives us Baptism, commanding the Church to baptize all nations (Matt. 28:19). He gives His Word—the Scriptures—saying, “If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death” (John 8:51).

The one who faithfully uses God’s gifts is the one who receives the Lord’s Supper in faith, who trusts in the promise of Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and who believes the Scriptures as the Word of God. This is the man whom Christ will honor at the final judgment. But he who has ridiculed and rejected these gifts, Christ will punish.

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.

The Pharisees and Sadducees come to our Lord seeking a sign from heaven. In the previous chapter, our Lord Jesus had fed four thousand men, plus women and children, in the wilderness with seven loaves and a few small fish. It was reminiscent of the supplying of manna and quail to the Israelites during their forty years wandering in the wilderness. But for the religious leaders this sign was not enough of a sign from heaven for them. In reality they do not want a sign. Their asking for a sign is proof of their unbelief. This is why the Lord rightly calls them hypocrites; they are not seeking the thing they are asking for.

Our Lord warns His Apostles to beware of their leaven. Their doctrine was a doctrine of works. If salvation is based even a little bit on our works, then there can be no salvation. All depends on our Savior. He is the only sign from heaven that we get as proof of our salvation. He is the sign of Jonah. He is the One who was in the belly of the earth for three days. He suffered death to atone for the sins of the whole world, so that all those who look to Him in faith as the sign from heaven, which shows that we have salvation, will be saved for all eternity.

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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

When Adam and Eve sinned by believing the devil's lies, the whole world was plunged into darkness—the darkness of sin and death. Satan ruled this world and kept it in darkness until the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, came. He was “the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:9). Through Him the darkness of sin and death is dispelled. Through Him mankind is enlightened with saving faith, which clings to the Lord Jesus and Him alone for salvation. He rules in light and truth by giving the Church as a sanctuary from this dark world.

The Church, the Bride of the Christ, continues to be a light in this world. It is a shining beacon, sitting on a hill, which illumines the surrounding area and can be seen from a far distance. For the Church proclaims the Light of the world. It preaches the pure Word of the Lord God, and administers the Sacraments that the true Light gave to her to distribute. These means enlighten men's hearts with faith in the Lord Jesus. Those enlightened by the Word, like St. Martin of Tours, turn away from the darkness of sin and death, and cling to the true Light, which is not hidden but illumines the whole house.

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, 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-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, *λατρεία*, 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

While we wait for the second coming of our Lord Jesus, we must be vigilant and watch for the thief. The thief is the devil. He uses the world and our sinful flesh to deceive us and lead us into sin and shame. We are constantly faced with temptations. The devil knows our weaknesses and preys upon us like a prowling lion, seeking who he may devour. When we succumb to temptation we must also remember that we have a gracious and loving Father who desires our salvation. Therefore, we should humbly confess our sins and amend our sinful lives, praying that our Father might send His Holy Ghost to strengthen and comfort us in all times of temptation.

We must also be on guard that we do not become like the servant in the parable our Lord tells. That evil servant, because he refused to be watchful and ever in expectation of his Master's return, thought that he could live his life satisfying every evil lust and pleasure this world, and his flesh, had to offer. Make note of the consequences of the impenitent servant: he was cast among the hypocrites where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Therefore, watch; that is, live daily in contrition and faith, looking with joyful expectation for the coming of our Lord Jesus to take us from this vale of tears to our eternal home in the life of the world to come.

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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Moses asked God that he might see Him in His full glory. The Lord responds that no one can see Him face to face and live. Therefore, the Lord put Moses in a cleft of the rock, and passed by him while covering his face with His hand. Moses could see His back, but could not see His face. This shows how far above us the righteousness of the Lord God is. Moses, who was a firm believer, and spoke to God as a man speaks to a friend, was still unworthy to see the full glory of the Lord.

How much more unworthy are we, according to our sinful flesh, to see the Lord God. Many believers in the Lord God have desired to see Him face to face, just like Moses. This is why our Lord takes upon Himself our flesh, and comes down from heaven to us. We can see God in our flesh in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus. What cannot be seen by the man of the Law now can be seen by those who have faith in the Gospel, in the redemption found in the Lord Jesus. We can now see God face to face when we hear and believe all that is spoken of Him in his holy Word and the blessed Sacraments. There we meet the Lord God, who is our Lord Jesus.

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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

This continuation of the Gospel from Sunday shows what things will be when Jesus comes again to judge both the quick and the dead. The whole world will be in turmoil, indeed, the whole universe, for “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven.” For the unbeliever, that day will be a day of dread and woe. They will realize the great mistake they have made living their lives only for the pleasures of this world. All the things they strove for in this life will be revealed for the worthlessness that they are. The unfaithful will be judged and thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Those who cling in faith to Jesus will feel no such turmoil. The darkening of the heavenly bodies holds no fear for the Christian, for we have as our light the true Light which has come into the world and enlightens those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. He will appear on the clouds of heaven. We will get to see He who talked with Moses as with a friend, and who we have longed for all our lives to see. He will take us from this world of sin and pain to our eternal home with Him. The angels will gather us from the four corners of the world, and we will be joined with all the saints to sing our Lord’s praises forever.

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.

Our Lord Jesus in the previous verses talks about the coming of the Son of Man. There is much in those verses that could cause angst and fear at the expectation of those events coming to fruition. Today, our Lord offers comfort for those who have heard His previous words. For He says of that day that no one knows the day or hour. Why is this a comfort to us? Because it shows that if He did not concern Himself with knowing the day and hour, then neither should we. In not telling us the day and hour, He has given us time to spend in contrition and faith.

We can go about our lives without fear that “this will be the day.” During Noah’s days before the flood, the people went about their lives not caring that their destruction was coming. We can go about our lives living daily in repentance: humbly confessing our sins, and trusting in the works and merits of our Lord for salvation. He has told us this day is coming; that also means we have the joy of looking forward to the day when He will come again. We have the daily comfort of knowing that this life will end, and we will be forever with Jesus, the angels, and all the saints who have gone before us.

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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.