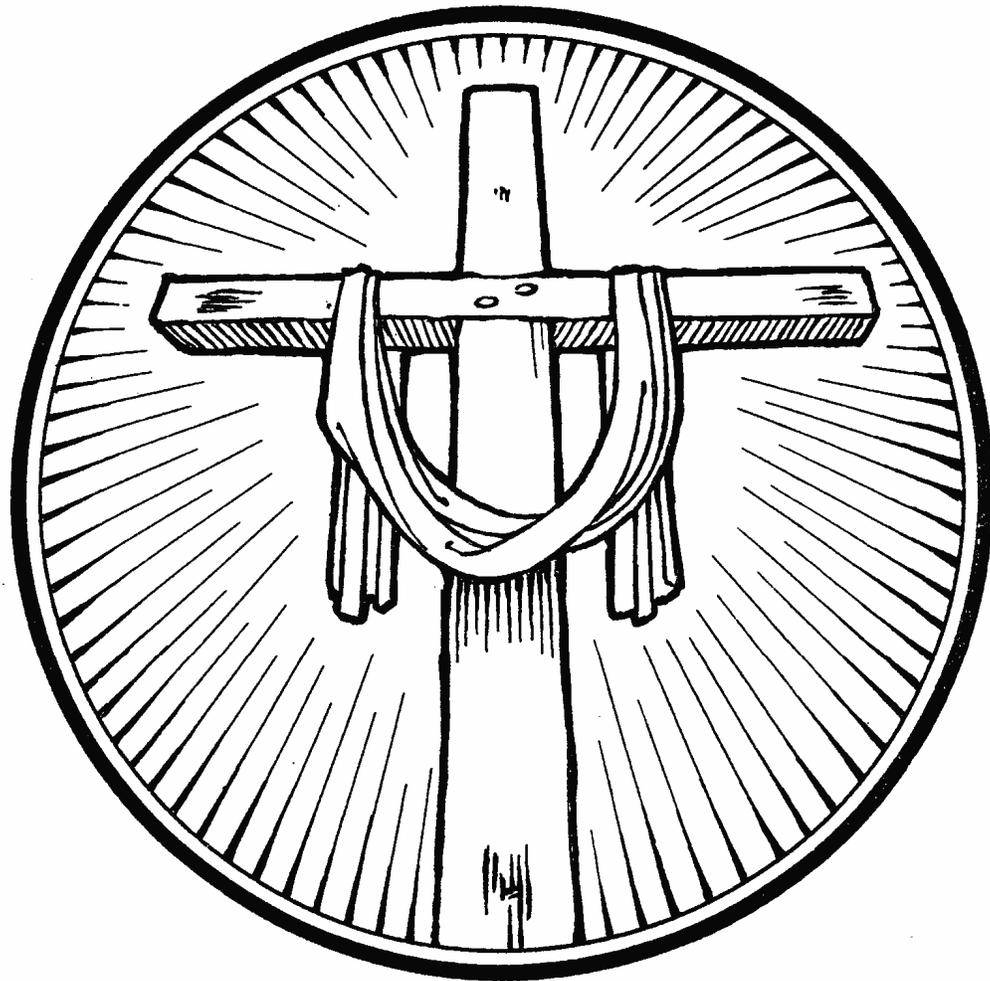


HIGHER THINGS REFLECTIONS



EASTER

APRIL 21-JUNE 8, 2019

2019 Reflections

Easter

The Easter Sunrise Reflection was written by Rev. George F. Borghardt, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Bossier City, Louisiana. He is also the president of Higher Things.

Remaining Easter Week Reflections were written by Rev. Mark Buetow, pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in McHenry, Illinois.

Easter 2-3 was written by Rev. Jacob Ehrhard, pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church and School in Chicago, Illinois.

Easter 4-7 was written by Rev. Alexander Lange, pastor of Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church in Albany, Oregon.

2019 Reflections Editorial Staff:

Rev. Aaron T. Fenker (Media Executive)

Mrs. Katie Hill (Executive Editor)

Mrs. Kay Maiwald (Junior Editor)

Rev. René Castellero (Audio Editor)

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A Short Form for Daily Reflection

Adapted from Luther's Small Catechism

Make the sign of the holy cross and say

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Read the Psalm for the Day (A table of daily psalms can be found in Lutheran Service Book, page 304).

Read "Today's Reading" if there is one listed.

Read the Daily Lectionary selections.

Read the Reflection for the Day.

Say the Apostles' Creed.

Pray the Lord's Prayer.

Pray one of these little prayers:

In the Morning:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee to keep me this day also from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

In the Evening:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day, and I pray Thee to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

In the morning go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest. If it is evening then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

Easter Sunrise

April 21, 2019

Today's Reading: John 20:1-18

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 14:10-31; Hebrews 7:23-8:13

Jesus said, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.'" (John 20:17)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is alive! He has risen from the dead! He has appeared to Mary Magdalene. The rules of the universe have changed! Before Jesus, things that died stayed dead. That can't be true anymore! Death must no longer be the end. It can't be! Jesus was dead. Now, He lives! Death is not even final! It has no sting! Death's sting stung Jesus and death was done in by the sting!

God is not mad at us anymore! He is not going to condemn us! We won't see hell in Christ. God is our God now! God is our Father today! We are children of God because Jesus died and rose again!

I am going to live forever. You are going to live forever, because the One who died on Good Friday for our sins has been raised from the dead. He lives! We are going to live in Him. We live now in Him.

Yes, the universe still is affected by sin. Stars collide. Comets hit planets. People hurt one another. We fail. We fall. We hurt ourselves. We even get sick.

But die? Not anymore. The most I will do is sleep. For I was buried with Him by Baptism. He lives now. I live, too! You do, too!

Of course, if you want to live in death, Jesus won't stop you. You can act like He isn't alive and continue tussling with the universe. You can stay grumpy with those around you. Misery loves company! You can take what isn't yours and covet what will never be given to you. But all of that ends in the loneliness of death and the suffering of eternal hell.

Your life doesn't have to be like that! You aren't alone. Jesus went through the abandonment of hell and the loneliness of death. He lives now. All who believe in Him, who live from Him, will never, ever die.

Jesus went through Lent and Good Friday for you. He was buried. He lives today. You, I, and all who believe in Him live today in Him. We live today. We live forever. For Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"Almighty God, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, You overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. We humbly pray that we may live before You in righteousness and purity forever; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever." (Collect for Easter Sunrise)

Easter Monday

April 22, 2019

Today's Reading: Luke 24:13-35

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 15:1-18; Hebrews 9:1-28

He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:46–47)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! The Lord appoints His men. They are His and no one else's. They are appointed to do what He wants. They are appointed to say what He wants to be said. They speak nothing else other than what they are given to speak by their Lord who has called and ordained them. Their message is not their own, but it's His who suffered and rose from the dead on the Third Day.

It must be this way, for the Lord's Gospel must be proclaimed, given out, poured out generously over all nations. It began in Jerusalem, but it has come to you, too. Why? Why must it be this way? Why has the Lord ordained such things and such men? You know why. You know what you've done. That deep, dark secret. That memory you can't shake. That one skeleton in the closet that no one can know about.

Repent. The Lord came, died, and rose again. It had to be that way. He must ransom you, redeem you, shed His blood for you. He must. He can't help it. Not because of you, but because of Him and His loving you in spite of you. So He must do that. He must also send you His man to give you His death and resurrection. Your pastor isn't his own man and doesn't have his own message. He's ordained and sent to proclaim such a Jesus who must die for you. He pours out the Lord's forgiveness generously upon your forehead. As a called and ordained servant of the Word, He announces God's grace unto you. He absolves your sins. He gives you the Lord's Body and Blood.

It had to be this way. It's the Lord's way. Jesus does it this way so that you always believe and know that Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, who in the Paschal Feast bestowed restoration upon the world, continue to Your people Your heavenly gift that they may both walk in perfect freedom and receive eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Easter Monday)

Easter Tuesday

April 23, 2019

Today's Reading: Acts 13:26-33

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 15:19-16:12; Hebrews 10:1-18

Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. (Acts 13:29-31)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! They crucified Jesus. They laid Him in a tomb. But He was raised from the dead. And He was seen alive by eyewitnesses! This is the remarkable fact at the center of the Christian faith: We believe that Jesus is alive even though He was dead. We believe first of all because the Holy Spirit, through the Word, has given us faith which trusts that this story is true. But we also know it is true because there were eyewitnesses.

Think about it. Jerusalem is the one place you probably could NOT get away with pretending that Jesus rose from the dead. There were the tomb, the guards, the enemies of Jesus. The resurrection of Christ from the dead and the empty tomb He left behind were verifiable. If it weren't true, it could easily have been disproven. But it happened. It's real. Jesus rose from the dead and He is alive forevermore.

This is a promise for you, too. Because you have not seen anyone laid to rest in a grave and come back; because you doubt that you will rise from the dead. Who can believe such a thing? Remember, with God, every word is possible. The Word He speaks that He will raise you from the dead is a true Word. Your resurrection from the dead is just as much a fact as Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The only difference is that your resurrection hasn't happened yet. So that you will know it will, Jesus promises that in your Baptism, His death and resurrection have become yours. He promises that when you eat and drink His flesh and blood, He will raise you up on the Last Day. Just as He is risen from the dead, so you will be raised, because Easter is about the defeat of death. It's all about new life. Life from death. The life that Jesus gives. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

If Christ still lay within the tomb Then death would be the end, And we should face our final doom With neither guide nor friend. But now the Savior is raised up, So when a Christian dies We mourn, yet look to God in hope—In Christ the saints arise! (If Christ Had Not Been Raised from Death, LSB 486:2)

Easter Wednesday

April 24, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 16:13-35; Hebrews 10:19-39

You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things. (The Small Catechism: First Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 teaches us that God is God and we are His creatures. He is God. We are not. In his Large Catechism, Luther says, “A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress” (Luther’s Large Catechism).

Before the fall into sin, that’s exactly how Adam and Eve knew God. They knew Him to be a giver of all good things. After the Fall, they ran and hid from Him. His very presence terrified them. Now their fallen perception of God was that of a vengeful judge. He’s gonna get us!

What about you? Your Old Adam, your sinful nature, sees God in the same way. Bildad, Job’s “friend,” gives Job the same picture in Job 8. God saves the pure and upright. According to Bildad, the reason Job’s children died is that they must have sinned. Sinful man’s “idea” of God is a God who pays us back for our wrongs. Okay, maybe that’s a God we can certainly fear (in a dreadful sense!), but love and trust above all things?

No! Remember the voice from the cloud: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Remember Jesus’ words to His disciples: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). Jesus is satisfied by doing God’s work, by going to the cross to save you from your sins, to rescue you from your own cleverly-devised myths about who God is.

The Holy Spirit will open your eyes to who God truly is for you. Having been made new in Christ, buried and raised with Him in your Baptism, united with the One who pleased God in your place, the One who feared, loved and trusted God above all things, you can see God for who He really is. His delight is to save you in Christ, His beloved Son. Sorry, Bildad! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

This is God’s beloved Son! Law and prophets sing before Him, First and Last and only One. All creation shall adore Him! Alleluia! (Jesus on the Mountain Peak, LSB 415:4)

St. Mark, Evangelist

April 25, 2019

Today's Reading: Mark 16:14-20

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 17:1-16; Hebrews 11:1-29

And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. (Mark 16:20)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Christ is risen! But if the apostles didn't preach it, no one would know. If the Gospel writers hadn't written down what Jesus said and did, how would anyone know? Mark (possibly the young man at whose house Jesus celebrated the Lord's Supper and who ran away naked from the Garden of Gethsemane, Mark 14:52) later traveled with the apostle Peter. It was likely from Peter that Mark heard most of what he wrote about Jesus.

In this way we have the double certainty of the eyewitness testimony and preaching. Peter preached what he heard and saw. Mark wrote it down. The Scriptures give us a "hard copy" with which to compare our pastor's preaching. Our pastor's preaching delivers what the Scriptures do: repentance and faith in Jesus as our Savior.

Above all the books of the Bible, the most important are surely the four Gospels which record for us the main events in the life of the Son of God on earth. The Spirit inspired Mark as one of those four to deliver to us the faithful account of our Lord's Words and life, and chiefly, His suffering, death and resurrection. Mark's account teaches us that Jesus is truly the Son of God who has come to save us from our sins by His death on the cross. Mark, no doubt talking to Peter and others, is a secondary witness of the resurrected Jesus, and perhaps even saw Him himself!

The Gospels and the rest of the Scriptures, along with Baptism and the preaching recorded by Mark, have in every age been the Spirit's work to bring sinners into the kingdom of God. The Gospel according to Mark is a faithful record of our Lord's teaching and accomplishing our salvation. It is by that Word of the Gospel that we cry with the Roman centurion, "Truly this man is the Son of God." And so we give thanks for Mark and the book of Good News that he wrote. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

For Mark, O Lord, we praise You, The weak by grace made strong, Whose labors and whose Gospel Enrich our triumph song. May we, in all our weakness, Reflect Your servant life And follow in Your footsteps, Enduring cross and strife. (By All Your Saints in Warfare, LSB 518:15)

Friday of the Week of Easter

April 26, 2019

Today's Reading: Job 19:23-37

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 18:5-27; Hebrews 12:1-24

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God.” (Job 19:25-26)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Christ is risen! One of the things those who don't believe in the Bible like to say is that the idea of rising from the dead, the resurrection of the body, is something that only came about with the story of Jesus' resurrection. Yet Job, in one of the oldest Old Testament books to be written, clearly confesses that He will see His Lord in the flesh, both the Lord's and his own!

It shouldn't surprise us that the entire Scriptures point to the promise of the resurrection. Our future as God's people isn't some floaty and flighty existence as disembodied spirits on clouds strumming harps. Such pictures and caricatures of heaven are really ridiculous in this respect and don't teach us the Word of God at all.

No, we believe what we say in the Creed: “The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” We believe this because this is how it goes with Jesus. The Son of God took on human nature for Himself and was born of the Virgin Mary, with a body, as we have. He then suffered and died for our sins and rose from the dead. By wiping out our sins and rising again, Jesus has destroyed the curse of death.

Death has been with us since the fall into sin. Nevertheless, it has always been overcome by God's Word and Promise. Jesus accomplished the saving work of rescuing us from death. Through Baptism and Jesus' promise to raise up all who eat His Body and drink His Blood, we can say with Martin Luther: “We Christians, who have been redeemed from all this by the dear blood of the Son of God, should by faith train and accustom ourselves to despise death and to regard it as a deep, strong, and sweet sleep, to regard the coffin as nothing but paradise and the bosom of our Lord Christ, and the grave as nothing but a soft couch or sofa, which it really is in the sight of God.” Take that, death! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

He lives, all glory to His name! He lives, my Jesus, still the same; Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives: I know that my Redeemer lives! (I Know That My Redeemer Lives, LSB 461:8)

Saturday of the Week of Easter

April 27, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 19:1-25; Hebrews 13:1-21

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, (1 Peter 2:2, from the Introit for Easter 2)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Christ is risen! Tomorrow is Quasimodogeniti. Say what? The Sundays in the Easter season are named for the Latin words of the Introits. “Quasimodogeniti” means “like newborn babies.” (And yes, the Hunchback of Notre Dame was born that day so that's where he gets his name).

The Easter season's repeated celebration of Christ's resurrection is always tied to Holy Baptism, by which St. Paul says that we have died and risen with Christ (Romans 6:4). In Baptism, we are born again, or born from above by water and the Spirit. In Baptism we have “become like children” that we may enter the kingdom of God.

Newborn babies pretty much just eat when they're not sleeping. So as newborn children in Christ, we are to desire the pure milk of the Word. After all, it's what nourishes us and gives us life. The Word is what makes us grow and get stronger. The Word is what we need to live.

Tomorrow we go to have that desire satisfied. What's that? You don't really desire the milk of the Word? You'd rather fill your mind and heart with the junk food of whatever the world thinks is so great and interesting? That's why we have parents. And pastors. And baptismal sponsors. And others who help us get to church and raise us in the faith so that we might have the pure milk of God's Word. Just as a faithful mother would give her child milk, so our faithful Mother, the Church, gives us the milk of the Word.

That pure milk, by delivering Jesus to us, gives us the “antibodies” we need against sin, death, devil, hell, the world, and our own sinful natures. By the milk of the Word, we are strengthened in our faith and trust in Christ to cling to Him as our only Savior and Lord.

And just as a child can only gain nourishment from a mother who is alive, so the Church lives because her Lord lives. Jesus' victory over death on Easter is given out to us and bestowed upon us by His Word and Sacraments in His Church. Because His Word defeats even death, it is the pure tonic and elixir and potion and medicine for us to give us everlasting life. Got milk? Got the Word? It's all there for you in the Divine Service tomorrow! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Stay with us, Lord, and keep us true; Preserve our faith our whole life through—Your Word alone our heart's defense, The Church's glorious confidence. (Lord Jesus Christ, With Us Abide, LSB 585:6)

The Second Sunday of Easter

April 28, 2019

Today's Reading: John 20:19-31

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 20:1-24; Luke 4:1-15

"Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. (John 20:19b-20)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. On the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus promised peace to His disciples. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you," says Jesus (John 14:27). But what happened just hours after Jesus uttered this promise was far from peace. It was violence. Betrayal. Arrest. Trial. Torture. Crucifixion. Tomb.

The world pursues peace by violence. It's the only way the world knows. Once Jesus breathed His last breath, the crowds quieted down, and the rulers felt secure once again. That Holy Saturday in Jerusalem was much more peaceful than the Good Friday that preceded it. Jesus was dead.

Then on Easter Sunday, Jesus appears to His disciples, and the very first words out of His mouth fulfill the promise He had made just three evenings earlier: "Peace be with you." Not the world's peace. "When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side." This peace is a peace that surpasses all understanding, a peace that comes from the holy wounds of Jesus.

The world thought it had achieved peace when Jesus breathed His last. But He had more breaths to take—and to give. "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld'" (John 20:21-23).

This peace, which the world does not give, which surpasses all understanding, is achieved by the death of Jesus and given with His gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the peace of sins forgiven.

This is the peace that your pastor delivers with every Absolution. In the stead and by the command of Jesus, he breathes those words of forgiveness, which show you once again the hands and side of Jesus. Peace be with you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and merciful God, as You have brought us to celebrate the festival of the Lord's resurrection, cause us by Your grace to bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conduct; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for the Second Sunday of Easter)

Monday of the Second Week of Easter

April 29, 2019

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 22:20-23:13; Luke 4:16-30

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. (Ezekiel 37:10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. To prophesy is to preach. The prophet Ezekiel was called by God to speak God's Word—and to speak it with authority. It wasn't Ezekiel's own word, but God's Word, given to him by the hand of the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord (Ezekiel 37:1).

God's Word is effective. It performs the very thing it says. Even dry bones cannot help but obey. In this vision, the dry bones come back together, are covered with sinews and flesh and skin. But they are not yet alive.

It's not until Ezekiel prophesies to the breath. In the Hebrew language, the word for breath (*ruach*) is the same as the word for Spirit. So it's not only that these breathless bones begin to breathe again; the prophecy, that is, the preaching of Ezekiel, gives them God's Spirit. It's not just that they live; they are *brought* to life.

But this is just a vision that Ezekiel receives. It's a sign of something that's to come. Yesterday Jesus appeared to His disciples and breathed on them and gave them the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the new Ezekiel, who gives the Spirit with His Absolution.

So when you hear these words: "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit," they aren't empty, dry words. They are living words that give life. They are words of resurrection.

"Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord" (Ezekiel 37:12-14). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O Spirit, who didst once restore Thy Church that it might be again The bringer of good news to men, Breathe on Thy cloven Church once more, That in these gray and latter days There may be those whose life is praise, Each life a high doxology To Father, Son, and unto Thee. (O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth, LSB 834:4)

Tuesday of the Second Week of Easter

April 30, 2019

Today's Reading: 1 John 5:4-10

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 23:14-33; Luke 4:31-44

For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. (1 John 5:7-8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When the soldiers were not sure that Jesus was dead, they decided to make sure by running a spear through His heart. "And at once there came out blood and water" (John 19:34b). This was a testimony that Jesus was indeed dead.

The water and the blood bear witness, but there are three that testify—John also includes the Spirit in his list of witnesses. The Spirit originates from the same source as the blood and the water. "When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (John 19:30). The Spirit and the water and the blood all agree that Jesus is the crucified One.

"He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe" (John 19:35). These witnesses would be no good if they remained buried in history. John has borne these witnesses to you, so that you may believe.

Spirit. Water. Blood. These bear witness to a crucified Jesus, but they do not bear witness to a dead Jesus. Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! The Spirit is not only a Good Friday gift, but also an Easter Sunday gift. He breathes on His disciples and gives them the office of forgiveness. The water and the blood don't just pour out of Jesus' side; they pour out of the font and chalice. The body of Jesus isn't hanging on a cross or buried in a tomb; it's given for you from the altar to make you a part of it.

Spirit. Water. Blood. Preaching. Baptism. Supper. The ministry of the Church. Three that bear witness so that you also may believe.

"Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:5, 4). In the Name of + Jesus. Amen.

Water, blood, and Spirit crying, By their witness testifying To the One whose death-defying Life has come, with life for all. (Water, Blood, and Spirit Crying LSB 597:1)

St. Philip and St. James, Apostles

May 1, 2019

Today's Reading: John 14:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 24:1-18; Luke 5:1-16

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Wow! Faith in Jesus will cause you to do not only the works that Jesus did, but also greater things? That's a pretty impressive promise. Jesus did some marvelous things in His ministry on earth. He turned water into wine, healed the sick, raised the dead, walked on water, and multiplied bread to feed thousands. Imagine what those greater things are!

Except there are not a lot of Christians going around doing more impressive miracles than Jesus. What does Jesus mean when He says, “Greater works than these he will do”?

The reason why the believer will do greater works, Jesus says, is because He is going to the Father. This is the phrase He uses to refer to His ascension (see also John 14:28, 16:27). Jesus ascended so He could be with His disciples in a supernatural way, present in His preached Word, in Holy Baptism, and bodily present in the Supper.

These are the greater things, which believers will do. Outwardly, they are not nearly as impressive as turning water into wine, healing the sick, raising the dead, walking on water, or feeding thousands. But that's why these greater things require faith. Without faith, preaching looks like just another lecture. Holy Baptism looks like plain washing, and the Supper looks like a meal that couldn't even begin to satisfy the smallest hunger. But these are the greater things that the disciples do, and the greater things that the believer participates in.

Philip wanted to see the Father. His desire is fulfilled in the ministry of the Church. In the Word and Sacraments we encounter Jesus, and through the Son we see the Father. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life,” says Jesus. “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, Your Son revealed Himself to Philip and James and gave them the knowledge of everlasting life. Grant us perfectly to know Your Son, Jesus Christ, to be the way, the truth, and the life, and steadfastly to walk in the way that leads to eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for the Festival of Philip and James).

Thursday of the Second Week of Easter

May 2, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 25:1-22; Luke 5:17-39

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord, your God. (Small Catechism: Second Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When Moses asked for God's name, he got a peculiar response. "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: "I AM has sent me to you"' (Exodus 3:14). "I AM" is, technically speaking, a complete sentence with a subject and a predicate, but it doesn't really say a lot. I am...what?

But then again, it says everything about who God is. He is the One who is, the One who exists. Everything that is, exists because God is. All being is finally in the One whose name is a form of the verb "to be." If it exists, it's because it comes from the One who exists.

That still doesn't tell us much about God *in relation to us*. But then something happens in John's Gospel. Jesus starts to fill in the gaps. "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). "I am the one who bears witness about myself" (John 8:18). "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:7). "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11). "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). "I am the vine" (John 15:5). Jesus is the One who completes the name of God. He is the One who shows you who God is *for you*.

The Name of God was given to Jesus, and He gives His Name to you. You were baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You wear it on your forehead and on your heart to mark you as His own.

And so you have His Name, not to curse, swear, lie, use satanic arts, or deceive others with, but to call upon in every trouble, to pray, praise, and give thanks. A prayer in Jesus' Name is a prayer of Jesus Himself. The Father will certainly listen to His own Son, and He will listen to all who bear the Name of the Son. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus, You have given us Your holy and precious name in the waters of Holy Baptism. Thank You for calling us Your own, and for revealing Your Father to us, and calling us children of God. We confess that we do not use Your name as we ought; we curse, swear, and lie, even as we neglect to pray, praise, and give You thanks. Forgive us and do not deny our prayer because of our sins. Return us once again to our Baptism, to die to our sins, to rise to new life, and to call upon Your holy name, the name in which we pray. Amen.

Friday of the Second Week of Easter

May 3, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 31:1-18; Luke 6:1-19

And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. (Exodus 31:18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There are many more than Ten Commandments. After those initial words, God has instructions and ordinances for nearly every aspect of Israelite social and liturgical life. And the consequences for breaking these laws are often severe. “Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death” (Exodus 31:15b).

The phrase “the finger of God,” is another way of saying, “the Spirit of God,” in the Bible (compare Luke 11:20 and Matthew 12:28). So the Law was written by the Spirit of God in letters on the tablets of stone. And death is the consequence for breaking any of them.

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “[We are] ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory” (2 Corinthians 3:6b-9).

The Spirit of God is a two-edged sword. His Law, written on tablets of stone, has an exceeding glory—far above any other ministry on earth. But its glory doesn't come from telling you how you should live; it tells you that you must die. This is a glorious thing, because it prepares you for the even greater glory of an even greater ministry—the ministry of righteousness.

This ministry of righteousness brings the ministry of death to an end. The Law is no longer written on tablets of stone: Its glory has faded. A more brilliant glory has come, which is the Spirit's life-giving forgiveness of sins. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Law is good; but since the fall its holiness condemns us all; It dooms us for our sin to die And has no pow'r to justify. To Jesus we for refuge flee, Who from the curse has set us free, And humbly worship at His throne, Saved by His grace through faith alone. (The Law of God Is Good and Wise, LSB 579:5-6)

Saturday of the Second Week of Easter

May 4, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 32:1-14; Luke 6:20-38

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. Alleluia. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made. Alleluia! (Psalm 33:5–6, from the Introit for Easter 3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. In the beginning God spoke, and in His speaking, He created the heavens and the earth. “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). What God makes is good because He calls it good.

But it did not remain good. There was a certain tree, which God said would give the knowledge of good and evil. Had Adam obeyed God’s Word and done what was good, he would have known only good. The earth was full of the goodness of the Lord. But it would not last.

Adam and his wife introduced evil into God’s good creation by doubting God’s Word, the Word that made the heavens and the earth. They listened to another word, a word that cannot create anything but disorder and disaster.

So God sent His Word into the flesh. He dwelt among us. We beheld His glory, glory as of the one and only of the Father. This Word, who was the author of everything good in the beginning, allowed Himself to be crucified by sinful men.

But out of this greatest evil the Word of God authored the world’s greatest good. By His death He destroyed the power of death, and by His resurrection He brought life and immortality to light. At the preaching of the cross and empty grave, the earth is again full of the goodness of the Lord, as He makes all things new. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

*Christ, the song of Love incarnate, Touching earth with heaven’s grace,
For Your living, suff’ring, dying, For Your rising, hear our praise!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ, Redeemer, Lord of life! (Voices Raised to You We Offer, LSB
795:3)*

The Third Sunday of Easter

May 5, 2019

Today's Reading: John 10:11-16

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 32:15-35; Luke 6:39-49

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10:11)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What makes a shepherd a good shepherd? He must know a little something about sheep. He must be dedicated to his flock. He must be brave and strong. He must love his sheep.

Jesus is all these things, but they are not what make Him the Good Shepherd. He is the Good Shepherd because He lays down His life for the sheep.

In contrast is the hired hand. He sees the wolf coming and flees. He leaves the sheep to certain death. He cares nothing for the sheep other than the paycheck they provide. And there are other paychecks out there.

The Good Shepherd cares for His sheep and would rather die in their place. Jesus' love is such that He's willing to give up everything He has to save His beloved. He lays down His own life so that we might live.

There is another peculiarity of good shepherds: The sheep know his voice. So Jesus says, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16).

Jesus leads us with His voice. He gathers His flock with His Word. In the Smalcald Articles Martin Luther writes, "Thank God, today even a seven-year-old child knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd." Wherever Christ's Word is proclaimed and heard, there His sheep find their Shepherd. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The King of love my shepherd is, Whose goodness faileth never; nothing lack if I am His And He is mine forever. (The King of Love My Shepherd Is, LSB 709:1)

Merciful Father, who by the humiliation of Your Son raised up the fallen world, grant to Your faithful people perpetual gladness, and make those whom You have delivered from the danger of everlasting death to be partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Third Sunday of Easter)

Monday of the Third Week of Easter

May 6, 2019

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-16

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 33:1-23; Luke 7:1-17

“As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.” (Ezekiel 34:12)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour” (Matthew 27:45). As the Light of the World hung on the cross dying, darkness descended over the place named after a skull. All His disciples had been scattered, as if a wolf had snuck in and sent the sheep in every direction.

On the cross, the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep, but with a dead shepherd, how are the sheep to survive? They will be scattered and picked off one by one.

But even though that hill was named for a skull, even though it was the place of death, the tree that was planted there, which bore the weight of the Good Shepherd, has now become the greenest of pastures.

“I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God” (Ezekiel 34-14-15).

On Mount Calvary is the rich pasture for the sheep of the Good Shepherd. From the cross He feeds His sheep with His own Body and Blood. He makes them lie down by the still waters of the baptismal font. He restores souls.

“I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice” (Ezekiel 34:16). This Shepherd is not for the strong, the well-to-do, the healthy. He comes for the runts of the litter. He comes for the last, the least, and the lost. But His justice makes the weak strong, the injured whole, and the lost found. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want; He makes me down to lie. In pastures green; He leadeth me The quiet waters by. My soul He doth restore again And me to walk doth make Within the paths of righteousness, E'en for His own name's sake. (The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want, LSB 710:1-2)

Tuesday of the Third Week of Easter

May 7, 2019

Today's Reading: 1 Peter 2:21-25

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 34:1-28; Luke 7:18-35

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The life and death of Jesus offer an impossible example to follow. How could we ever hope to follow in His steps? He committed no sin. We can't take a step without sinning.

And the world hated Him for it. So did the religious leaders. They conspired together to have Jesus put to death. And how did He respond? "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23).

This is an example of where we fail miserably. The first thing we want to do when people speak evil of us is to shoot an insult right back at them. When we feel like we're under attack, we go into fight or flight mode. Jesus suffered silently and willingly. He did not fight the injustice that was done to Him. Rather, He looked to the One who judges justly—His Father in heaven.

We could certainly learn from this example, especially in a world that is not friendly to our faith. From the stories that occupy the mass media to our own social circles, hardly a day goes by without some insult to our faith. To suffer patiently is a virtue (Romans 12:12). Rather than focus on the injustice of the world, look to the Father, whose justice swallows up all injustice.

But when we fail in following this example—as with every one of our failures—we know that Jesus' patient endurance, His suffering, and His sinless life were all for us. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24).

"By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25-26). What a beautiful turn of events! The Son's silent suffering is for our healing; His sinless life and truthful speech shepherd us and look over our souls. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

*In suff'ring be Thy love my peace, In weakness be Thy love my pow'r;
And when the storms of life shall cease, O Jesus, in that final hour,
Be Thou my rod and staff and guide, And draw me safely to Thy side!
(Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me, LSB 683:4)*

Wednesday of the Third Week of Easter

May 8, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 34:29-35:21; Luke 7:36-50

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. (Small Catechism: Third Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It's a curious thing that while the explanation of the Commandment is concerned with the Sabbath day, it never mentions a day. The Old Testament injunction for the Sabbath day goes all the way back to creation. "So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation" (Genesis 2:3). As justification for the Third Commandment, God Himself gives this commentary: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Exodus 20:11).

The Sabbath day was written into nature, yet the Small Catechism doesn't seem concerned at all about resting on the seventh day of the week! What's changed?

It's not that the Law has gone away. The principle of rest still remains—if you work and work and work, you'll work yourself into an early grave. It's necessary to rest. But the basis of rest isn't just to take a breather in order to get back to work again. The basis for Sabbath rest is divine worship.

The Sabbath is a day for us to rest and for God to work. In the Old Testament, that day was the seventh day, or Saturday. But Christ fulfilled every Sabbath since the beginning of time with His rest in the tomb on the seventh day of Holy Week. And by His resurrection on the first day (eighth day) of the week, He brought God's Sabbath rest to every day of the week.

Now, the holy day is every day that is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:5). God's Word excludes all our work, and bids us rest in the work of Christ. And so we hold God's Word as sacred and gladly hear and learn it. That is the true Sabbath rest. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"You shall observe the worship day That peace may fill your home, and pray, And put aside the work you do, So that God may work in you."

Have mercy, Lord! (These Are the Holy Ten Commands, LSB 581:4).

Thursday of the Third Week of Easter

May 9, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 38:21-39:8; Luke 8:1-21

And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means (Luke 8:2-3)

In the Name + of Jesus. It isn't often that women get the spotlight in the Bible. But where the men often bumble along, fail to get what Jesus is saying, and suffer from a case of foot-in-mouth disease (we're looking at you, Peter!), the women are depicted as steadfast, faithful, caring, and nurturing of Jesus and His mission.

Now this doesn't mean that the women were perfect. Remember that Martha was corrected for working when she should have been listening like her sister. Yet Martha is also the one who confessed the resurrection when her brother Lazarus died. And just before this chapter of Luke (in yesterday's daily lectionary) there is a certain "woman of the city, who was a sinner," who loved much because she had been forgiven much.

This is simply to say that the women who followed Jesus were real flesh-and-blood humans like the men who followed Him. They were chosen not because they had some worth or nobility about them, but purely by grace.

In addition to supporting Jesus and the rest of the disciples out of their means, some of these women also played an important role in the Christian faith. They were the first witnesses of the resurrection. This is an important and often overlooked detail. If the followers of Jesus wanted to invent a story of His resurrection, they would not have chosen women to be the first witnesses. Their story would have had no credibility, because the testimony of women was not considered as reliable as that of men at that time,

More important than the women being real flesh-and-blood human beings, their role in the story is to show us that they and we worship a real flesh-and-blood, risen Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God for the service of faithful women! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

*That Easter morn, at break of day, The faithful women went their way
To seek the tomb where Jesus lay. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! An angel clad in white
they see, Who sits and speaks unto the three, "Your Lord will go to Galilee." Alleluia,
alleluia, alleluia! (O Sons and Daughters of the King, LSB 470:2-3)*

Friday of the Third Week of Easter

May 10, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 39:32-40:16; Luke 8:22-39

The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. (Luke 8:38-39)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When Jesus encountered the rich young man, who inquired what he had to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus responded that he should sell all he has and follow Him (Luke 18:22). But it's not always necessary to leave everything and start an entirely new way of life to be a follower of Jesus,

When this particular man, from whom the legion of demons had been expelled, asked to go along with Jesus, our Lord denied him his request. "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." Here Jesus teaches that it is not necessary enter into a special vocation to be His follower and it is not necessary to be called as a pastor to proclaim the good news.

Every Christian, by virtue of being delivered from sin, death, and the devil, has the call to proclaim the Gospel in his or her circle of influence. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light," writes St. Peter (1 Peter 2:8-9). In fact, the most effective place for Christians to spread the good news of Jesus is in their own homes.

One final observation about the content of this man's proclamation: Jesus instructs him to "declare how much God has done for you." But this man takes a little liberty with the message. He proclaimed throughout the whole city "how much *Jesus* had done for him." The story of the legion of demons fleeing to a herd of pigs was certainly impressive, but the basis of this good news is that Jesus is truly God.

This is also your story to tell. Jesus is God, and He has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

If you cannot speak like angels, If you cannot preach like Paul, You can tell the love of Jesus, You can say He died for all. If you cannot rouse the wicked With the judgment's dread alarms, You can lead the little children To the Savior's waiting arms. (Hark the Voice of Jesus Calling, LSB 826:2)

Saturday of the Third Week of Easter

May 11, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 40:17-38; Luke 8:40-56

He keeps our soul among the living, and does not allow our feet to be moved. (Psalm 66:9, from the Introit for Easter 4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. In verses 6-7 of Psalm 66, the psalmist remembers God's deliverance of His people at the Red Sea and the Jordan River: "He turned the sea into dry land; they passed by through the river on foot" (Psalm 66:6). These two events are foundational for Israel as a people, and centuries later they still remembered them in song.

The pattern of God's work for and among His people in the Old Testament is a pattern of deliverance. Again and again, as Israel becomes enmeshed with the false gods and idols of the nations, God sends a deliverer, who returns them to His Word.

This is what it means that "He keeps our soul among the living." All other gods finally lead to death. To be among the living is to be among the things of God.

Israel's time of wandering and their anticipation of a land of their own to live in was bracketed by water. The Red Sea was their path out of Egypt and the Jordan River was their door to the land God promised to them. God's great act of deliverance in the Old Testament was through water.

And so He keeps *our* souls among the living by His deliverance through water. Holy Baptism is the path out of slavery and death, and the door to eternal life. God's greater act of deliverance in the New Testament is, like in the Old Testament, bracketed with water.

"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Water joins us to Christ's cross, and our old way of life is put to death. Water likewise joins us to Christ's empty tomb, and our death is turned to life. So rejoice! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

With high delight Let us unite In songs of great jubilation. Ye pure in heart, All bear your part, Sing Jesus Christ, our salvation. To set us free Forever, He Is ris'n and sends To all earth's ends Good news to save ev'ry nation. (With High Delight Let Us Unite, LSB 483:1)

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 12, 2019

Today's Reading: John 16:16-22

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 8:1-13, 30-36; Luke 9:1-17

"No one will take your joy from you." (John 16:22)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. No one will take my joy from me? What do you mean, Jesus? It's pretty easy to take away my happiness. It doesn't take much to spoil my morning. I oversleep, spill my coffee, trip over something and nearly break my neck, and before you can say a four-letter word, I'm grumpy.

Christian "joy" is not simply an attitude created by happy circumstances, but it is an attitude created by remembrance of God's deeds in the past, faith in His never-changing love, and hope for salvation in the future. Thus, Paul talks about joy "in the faith" (Philippians 1:25) and joy "in the Lord" (Philippians 3:1).

Christians rejoice or celebrate because our Lord Jesus paid for our sins, rescued us from God's coming judgment, stripped the devil and the world of their power, and even conquered death itself. Joy is the response of faith when it hears the Gospel. And since the Gospel is certain and eternal, our joy never ends!

This doesn't mean we suppress our sorrow and grief—even Jesus, who had perfect faith, felt fear and grief (consider Him in the Garden of Gethsemane or weeping because Lazarus died). Like St. Paul, we are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing (2 Corinthians 6:10). Even when we feel terrible, even when we are scared, depressed, or grieved, we know that Jesus gave Himself for us and that He was raised from the dead. Thus, we have every reason to celebrate!

Every Sunday we gather with our fellow Christians to celebrate Easter with them. We even share a meal together, talking about how Jesus has saved us, while eating His very Body and drinking His very Blood. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, the heavenly Father who shows the light of the truth to those who are in error, so that they may return into the way of righteousness, cause all who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Church to avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and to follow all such things that are agreeable hereto; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Easter)

Monday of the Fourth Week of Easter

May 13, 2019

Today's Reading: Isaiah 40:25-31

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 9:1-24; Luke 9:18-36

"They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength."(Isaiah 40:31)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. My church is full of children between the ages of 2 and 8. You can see and hear them squirming throughout the Divine Service. As soon as the organist begins to play the postlude, the children burst out of their pews. For the next hour they will run, jump, and shout. Often the elderly say that they miss having that kind of energy.

"Even youths shall faint and be weary," (Isaiah 40:30 ESV). Yes, even the energy of children has a limit. For example, my three-year-old daughter is full of energy, but lays limp and silent on the couch whenever she gets sick. The fever saps her of her strength and she becomes faint.

Isaiah says that God is not like human beings. He never grows faint, never grows tired, and never becomes weak. The nation of Judah was stripped of her power by Babylon, and the Israelites felt weary and burdened while laboring in Babylon. They were helpless, but thankfully Yahweh is their Helper. He has unlimited power and strength, which He will use to strengthen and empower His people (Isaiah 40:28-29).

Of course, this will happen in God's own time. The Israelites must wait, but Isaiah promises that those who wait on the Lord will be renewed!

We are like the Israelites. We live in Babylon (i.e. the world). The temptations, the persecution, the diseases, and death make us weary and faint. We know that Jesus will rescue us. He laid down His life for us, after all. He won't abandon us. We know that He will return...eventually. Still, it is hard to wait, isn't it?

The Word, the Sacrament, the prayers and presence of fellow believers, and the liturgy help us to wait. They are given to encourage us with the Lord's promises. We are reminded to wait for the Lord, for He will come back and fill us with His own strength. He will make our bodies immortal and our hearts immovable. Sin and death will never make us weary or faint again! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, by the patient endurance of Your only-begotten Son You beat down the pride of the old enemy. Help us to treasure rightly in our hearts what our Lord has born for our sakes that, after His example, we may bear with patience those things that are adverse to us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Prayer for Patience, LSB p. 312)

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Easter

May 14, 2019

Today's Reading: 1 Peter 2:11-20

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 10:1-20; Luke 9:37-60

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. (1 Peter 2:11)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Often I am asked, "How are we to regard the state of Israel and the Jewish people?" Many American Christians believe that there are two covenants that coexist: one for the Gentiles and another for Jews. They believe that many Old Testament promises have not been fulfilled yet, and thus, God has given the Jewish people their land and He will rebuild a physical temple there.

1 Peter exposes how misguided such notions are. Notice what Peter calls these Christians: "sojourners and exiles." Those are labels traditionally given to Jews living outside the Promised Land. He also calls the Church a "holy nation" and a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). These are the titles Yahweh gave to Israel at Mt. Sinai.

The true Israel is the people of God. Jesus is the offspring of Abraham (Galatians 3:16), and all who share Abraham's faith are his offspring (Romans 4). Therefore, the Christian Church is Israel and all of God's promises are applied to us!

God's promises are not only applied to us, they are ratcheted up. For example, the Temple of Solomon has been replaced with the assembly of believers. The Lord doesn't dwell in a building, but He dwells within every congregation and within every believer. There are no more physical barriers between us and God!

Likewise, the Lord gave Israel an abundant land. This land foreshadowed a greater inheritance. You see, our Lord experienced the full weight of sin, death, and evil on the cross, in order to reverse it. Jesus is risen! Someday He will return to reclaim what is His: you and this creation. You will be raised from the dead and made immortal. This creation will be resurrected, too. It will be liberated from decay and renewed (Romans 8:18-23).

So don't become too obsessed with the modern state of Israel. *You* are God's holy people and *you* are the heirs of His promises. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Guide me, O Thou great Redeemer, Pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but Thou art mighty; Hold me with Thy pow'ful hand. Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, Feed me till I want no more; Feed me till I want no more. (Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer, LSB 918:1)

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Easter

May 15, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 16:1-24; Luke 10:1-22

Honor your father and mother. What does this mean? You should fear and love God, so that you do not anger or despise your parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. (Small Catechism: Fourth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You have a Father in heaven. He loves you. He provides for you and He protects you. He teaches and guides you. He disciplines you. He sees your good works done in Christ and He gives you gifts freely, out of love.

Your heavenly Father works through means. He deputizes your fellow humans, giving them a calling, with responsibilities and authority. God gives you little “F” fathers.

He gives you a biological father or an adoptive father to provide for you and protect you in your home. He gives you a spiritual father—a pastor—to guide you with His Word and to give you the forgiveness of sins. He gives you civil fathers—presidents, governors, and judges—to protect you from criminals and to order society for your benefit.

Every earthly father is a mask of God, an instrument of your heavenly Father. God blesses you on account of Christ, who was crucified for your sins and raised for your salvation. How do these blessings get to you? God blesses you through these authority figures. Yes, even God’s spiritual and eternal blessings come through fathers, although you probably call them “pastors” rather than “fathers”.

So, honor your fathers. Serve them and obey them, not begrudgingly, but gladly. Know that when you honor and serve an earthly father, you are honoring and serving your heavenly Father. Love and cherish your parents and other authorities, for they are God’s gifts to you.

And don’t forget to enjoy your daily bread, your safety, and all of the other benefits of having fathers, including the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Give thanks to your heavenly Father, who has ordered such things for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

“You are to honor and obey Your father, mother ev’ry day, Serve them each way that comes to hand; You’ll then live long in the land.” Have mercy, Lord! (These Are the Holy Ten Commands, LSB 581:5)

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Easter

May 16, 2019

Today's Reading: Lamentations 3:22-33

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 17:1-16; Luke 10:23-42

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." (Lamentations 3:22-24)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Lamentations is not fun to read. It is a lament. The author is grieving the destruction of Jerusalem and the suffering of God's people. God's people sinned, and thus, God condemned them and sent Babylon to punish them.

Our text for today is the only bright point in the whole book. It sits right in the middle of Lamentations, indicating that it is the most important part of the book and the key to grieving faithfully.

Tragedy happens. Sometimes it is a result of our stupid, sinful choices. Other times tragedies seem random and unfair. Regardless, God's people often suffer trauma. And it is okay to grieve and lament whenever something bad happens!

That being said, St. Paul reminds us that we grieve, but not without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We know that the worst tragedy in world history was the crucifixion of Jesus. We also know that God reversed this tragedy: Jesus was raised from the dead. God also used this tragedy to accomplish the greatest good: the salvation of mankind!

Because of Jesus, we know that God is loyal and full of a never-ending love. His faithfulness is so great that we can depend on our Lord and wait for Him with confidence. The exiles hoped that the Lord would resurrect the nation of Israel, bring the exiles back to their land, rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, and send the Messiah. We hope that our Lord Jesus Christ will return to raise us from the dead, grant us access to the new creation, and dwell with us forever.

Yes, we grieve, because tragedies happen. However, that's not the end of the story. The story ends with Jesus coming and bringing an end to evil once and for all! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and most merciful God, in this earthly life we endure sufferings and death before we enter eternal glory. Grant us grace at all times to subject ourselves to Your holy will and to continue steadfast in the true faith to the end of our lives, that we may know the peace and joy of the blessed hope of the resurrection of the dead and the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Prayer in Times of Affliction and Distress, LSB p. 317)

Friday of the Fourth Week of Easter

May 17, 2019

Today's Reading: 1 John 3:1-3

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 18:1-7, 20-19:8; Luke 11:1-13

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. (1 John 3:1)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The god of many world religions seemingly might have something in common with the God of the universe: usually such a deity is viewed as lord and king over all things.

Christianity is unique in many ways, not the least of which is that we Christians insist that God is not only our King, He is also our Father! God has adopted us. He invites us to call Him "Father" and to ask Him for anything. God seats us at His own table. God promises to give us an inheritance.

This is huge! God shows us special favor. He values us and loves us in a way that an earthly king cannot value or love his subjects. Thus, we can approach God with confidence, even when we have sinned. We can be certain that God will forgive us. We are His kids, after all!

Why do we think that God considers us His children? Jesus, the Son of God, told His followers that God is His Father...and that He is our Father. Jesus gave His life as a ransom payment in exchange for our lives (Mark 10:45). By suffering the penalty for our sins, Jesus made it possible for our God to not merely pardon us, but to adopt us.

This is why we remember our Baptism. At the font God forgave your sins for the sake of Christ and He adopted you into His family. Every time you remember your Baptism, you remember who you are, namely, a child of God. If you are His child, then you are forgiven and loved by Him. If you are His child, then you will live with your Father forever, receive an imperishable inheritance, and rule alongside your elder brother, Jesus.

So make the sign of the cross, receive Absolution from your pastor, remember your Baptism. Rejoice, for God loves you as His own child! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Once in the blest baptismal waters I put on Christ and made Him mine; Now numbered with God's sons and daughters, I share His peace and love divine. O God, for Jesus' sake I pray Your peace may bless my dying day. (Once in the Blest Baptismal Waters, LSB 598:1)

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Easter

May 18, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 9:9-18, 26-37; Luke 11:14-36

Sing to the Lord a new song, Alleluia, for he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. Alleluia. (Psalm 98:1, from the Introit for Easter 5)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Sing to the Lord, because He has revealed His righteousness. What is the Lord's righteousness?

Righteousness is conformity to a standard. A person is considered righteous, or "in the right," by his neighbor when he meets that person's expectations or fulfills his obligations. Marriage, for example, is governed by certain obligations and standards. When I meet my wife's expectations and conform to those standards, I am righteous in her eyes. When I don't, I am an unrighteous husband, and she rightly condemns me.

God is righteous. He conforms to a standard. What standard? The standard set by the Lord Himself. Nobody can require God to conform to man-made standards. God is sovereign and ruled by none. Still, He is free to make promises and oaths to us. He is free to commit Himself.

For example, the Lord revealed that He is just and that He will punish the wicked. Thus, sometimes when the Bible talks about God's righteousness, it speaks of how He hates sin and judges the wicked. I think that's what we normally think about whenever we consider the righteousness of God.

The Lord revealed that He is merciful and faithful, too. He made promises to His people: He will send a human being to defeat the serpent (Genesis 3:15); He will not destroy His creation again by a flood (Genesis 8:21); He will bless the nations through Abraham's offspring (Genesis 22:18); a descendant of David will rule forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Since the Lord is righteous, He will conform Himself to these promises! Thus, the prophets and the psalter often associate God's righteousness with God's faithfulness, God's mercy, and God's salvation!

So rejoice! Your God is righteous! That means He will be merciful and faithful! That means He will save you through Jesus! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Praise Him, for His grace and favor To His people in distress; Praise Him still the same as ever, Slow to chide and swift to bless: Alleluia, alleluia! Glorious in His faithfulness. (Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven, LSB 793:2)

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 19, 2019

Today's Reading: John 16:5-15

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 20:1-16, 22-27; Luke 11:37-54

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth," (John 16:13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Why do we believe the Bible? We believe the Bible because we believe in Jesus.

If you believe in Jesus, you will believe His Word. Jesus promised His apostles on many occasions that He would give them the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit would give to them the truth, and that the Spirit would speak through them. Jesus promised that the word of His apostles would be His words.

Likewise, Jesus affirmed the authority of the Old Testament. For example, in Mark 12 Jesus quoted Psalm 110, and He introduced this quotation by saying, "David himself, *in the Holy Spirit*, declared..." (Mark 12:36).

If you believe Jesus, then you believe what He said about the prophets and the apostles. Our view of the Bible is deeply rooted in our Christology—our theology about Christ.

But why do we believe in Jesus? We believe in Jesus because God raised Him from the dead.

Remember, Jesus wasn't some ordinary rabbi. He made radical claims about Himself that scandalized the Jewish leaders. The Sanhedrin accused Jesus of blasphemy. They thought He was either lying or demon-possessed. Having condemned Jesus, they crucified Him.

There is a Judge greater than the Jewish Sanhedrin or Pilate: God. God raised Jesus from the dead because Jesus was righteous. By raising Jesus, the Father vindicated His radical claims. If Easter isn't true, Jesus is a liar or a lunatic. If Easter is true, then Jesus is Lord.

I encourage you to research the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Be prepared to give an answer to those who ask about your hope. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Our merciful Father, the God who alone make minds of the faithful to be of one will, cause Your people to love what You command and to desire what You promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reign with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

Monday of the Fifth Week of Easter

May 20, 2019

Today's Reading: Isaiah 12:1-6

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 21:1-24; Luke 12:1-12

“Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted.” (Isaiah 12:4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Isaiah 12 offers us an excellent opportunity to reflect on the Name of the Lord. Our God gives us His Name. That’s an incredible gift!

Whenever you introduce yourself to someone, you give them your name. This is how we initiate relationships. Likewise, God initiated a relationship with you by giving you His Name. His Name was placed upon you when you were baptized.

Then, throughout your life, you learn more and more about this God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through the Scriptures and the preaching of the Word, you learn that the Father created you and takes care of you. You learn that the Son laid down His life for you and forgives your sins. You learn that the Spirit sustains your faith and that He will raise you from the dead on the Last Day. You begin to associate God’s Name with His attributes, character, and works.

God has given you His Name so that you can use it! You need something? Ask God for it through prayer! Has God given a gift to you? Thank the Lord! Are you in danger? Cry out to the Lord, for He desires to save you! Do you love the Lord? Praise Him by telling others about who He is and what He has done!

How we use God’s Name reflects our relationship with Him. For example, when we use God’s Name flippantly or to lie, what does that say about our view of God? On the other hand, if we never cry out to God for help, or ask Him for things, or thank Him, then doesn’t that suggest that we don’t depend on God or that we are ungrateful? We sin by abusing His Name and by failing to use it.

As sinners we misuse God’s Name. As forgiven sinners we are invited to use it regardless. As Christians we honor God’s Name through prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus! Name of wondrous love, Name all other names above, Unto which must ev’ry knee Bow in deep humility. Amen. (Jesus! Name of Wondrous Love, LSB 900:1)

Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Easter

May 21, 2019

Today's Reading: James 1:16-21

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 23:1-22; Luke 12:13-34

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (James 1:17-18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God created the sun, the moon, and the stars. He created the sun to rise and set, the moon to wax and wane, and the stars to move across the heavens.

How different is the Creator of these lights! His grace doesn't rise only to set a little later. His faithfulness doesn't wax and wane. His love isn't always moving, always changing, here today and gone tomorrow. Our Lord is not fickle. His love is eternal and He never breaks a commitment. You can depend on the Lord always!

It is the Creator of the heavenly lights who created the Church. He brought us into being by the word of truth. In other words, He gave us new life through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who was crucified for us and raised for our salvation.

For what purpose did He bring us forth? He brought us forth by means of the Gospel so that we could be the firstfruits of His creatures. Normally the risen Jesus is called the firstfruits, but here James applies that terminology to you. God is restoring His creation, beginning with humanity. The Christian Church is the beginning of the New Creation!

And you can be sure that the work begun by God will be brought to its completion. You can be sure that your regeneration will be completed on the Last Day, that your body will be raised from the dead and that your soul will be purged of sin. You can be sure that the whole earth will be renewed and that you will live in it forever.

You can be sure of that because your God isn't fickle. He gave you His promise in Baptism and He always keeps His promises. He won't change His mind. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Preserve, O Lord, Your Zion, Bought dearly with Your blood; Protect what You have chosen Against the hellish flood. Be always our defender When dangers gather round; When all the earth is crumbling, Safe may Your Church be found. (Preserve Your Word, O Savior, LSB 658:3)

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Easter

May 22, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 23:23-44; Luke 12:35-53

You shall not murder. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need. (Small Catechism: Fifth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We are like the animals in many ways. We are physical, material creatures. We breathe, eat, and sleep, like the animals. God created both man and animals from the dirt on the sixth day (Genesis 2:7 & 19). God told both man and animals to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:22 & 28).

Still, humans were created to be different than the animals. Humans were made to rule the animals on God's behalf. Humans reflect God's own character when they rule with kindness and mercy, sacrificing their own well-being for the sake of others.

Then Adam obeyed the serpent, that crafty beast. Mankind became like the beasts. We became violent and oppressive, sacrificing others for our own wellbeing. Read Genesis 4-11. They describe a "survival of the fittest" kind of world. Read the book of Daniel. The pagan emperors and their kingdoms are described as monstrous beasts.

The Son of God, who is "the exact imprint of [God's] nature" (Hebrews 1:3), became a human being so that you might be the image of God once more. Our Creator became human to restore our broken human nature. As the fully-human One, Jesus sacrificed Himself for the well-being of others. The curse pronounced on mankind fell upon Jesus.

Then Jesus stepped out of His tomb as the New Adam, the beginning of a new creation. He gave us His Spirit, who is transforming us into the image of Christ, "from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV). By means of the Spirit, we crucify the beastly desire to hurt and harm our neighbor, and we put on Christ, adopting His self-sacrificing love.

May the Lord come quickly, to purge our hearts entirely of murderous desires and to abolish all death and decay. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"You shall not murder, hurt, nor hate; Your anger dare not dominate. Be kind and patient; help, defend, And treat your foe as your friend." Have mercy, Lord! (These Are the Holy Ten Commands, LSB 581:6)

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Easter

May 23, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 24:1-23; Luke 12:54-13:17

If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him. (Leviticus 24:19-20)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Many of the commandments given on Sinai were moral in nature. "You shall not murder," because murder is wrong. Murder violates God's intention for man to live forever.

However, the Israelites are sinners. So people are going to commit murder. People are going to abuse and hurt their neighbor's body. God isn't naive. He knows it will happen. Since Israel is a state, Israel must have laws concerning what to do with a man who hurts his neighbor. In other words, Israel needs civil laws.

In Leviticus 24, Israel is given an important principle: Do to the perpetrator what he has done. For example, if he murdered his neighbor, then he must be put to death. The punishment must fit the crime. This important principle does two things: It guarantees that the punishment is severe enough that it discourages further crimes, and it prevents the community from punishing the criminal too severely. Remember, revenge tends to escalate indiscriminately, until things get out of hand. "You killed my brother? I'll kill all of your siblings!"

The Pharisees abused this principle of civil law by turning it into an excuse to never forgive an offense and to never show mercy. Thus Jesus had to correct them and show His disciples a better way (Matthew 5:38-42). Yes, all just governments must hold to an "eye-for-an-eye" principle, lest society falls into chaos. However, when it comes to our personal relationships, Christians are free to *not* strike back at those who strike them. We are free to let go of our grudges, to forgive our enemies, and to give without expecting anything in return.

That's what Jesus did for you, right? When we insult or hurt Him, He doesn't get back at us. He doesn't expect us to pay for our sins. In fact, He paid for them all with His own blood! Jesus forgives all people and offers eternal life in His Kingdom, even to those who nailed Him to a tree. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls And bid resentment cease; Then, bound to all in bonds of love, Our lives will spread Your peace. (Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive, LSB 843:4)

Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter

May 24, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 26:1-20; Luke 13:18-35

“You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 26:2)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You are probably familiar with the Sabbath day. Every Saturday was a day of rest. The Israelites were to give their employees, slaves, and animals the day off. The Israelites were not supposed to do any work, but simply depend on God and enjoy the land and other gifts that He had given to them.

Did you know that God gave Israel other Sabbaths, too? Every seventh year was the Sabbath year. The Sabbath year was all about giving the land rest from the plows and the pruning hooks. For 365 days, the Israelites were to let their fields and vineyards sit fallow. They were not to sow any seed or prune any vines. Yahweh promised that the land would supply the Israelites with enough food, even though they didn't sow or prune.

Also, the fiftieth year was the Year of Jubilee. Again, the land was given rest. All original land grants were restored, all debts were canceled, and all slaves were set free. The Year of Jubilee was the year of freedom and forgiveness!

In Leviticus 26 Yahweh tells the Israelites to obey His rules, and He mentions specifically His Sabbaths, which were described in the previous chapter. Then Yahweh says that if the Israelites break His covenant, He will punish them and eventually drive them out of the land. “The land shall enjoy its Sabbaths...while you are in your enemies' land,” (Leviticus 26:34).

God isn't interested in giving rest, peace, and liberty only to humans. He wants to give His entire creation rest, peace, and liberty. As Paul says in Romans 8:18-25, the earth itself is in bondage to death and decay, but Jesus was crucified and raised to release His creation from such bondage. Thus, when the Lord returns, He will purge your body from death, making you immortal, and then He will purge the earth from death and decay, too. We will live on the renewed, liberated earth, as we were meant to, and we will enjoy perfect rest, no longer burdened by diseases, disabilities, or death. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

City of God, Easter forever, Golden Jerusalem, Jesus the Lamb, River of life, Saints and archangels, Sing with creation to God the I AM! Jesus is risen and we shall arise: Give God the glory! Alleluia! (Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen, LSB 474:5)

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Easter

May 25, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 26:21-33, 39-44; Luke 14:1-24

With a voice of singing, declare, proclaim this, utter it to the end of the earth. Alleluia. The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob! Alleluia. (Isaiah 48:20, from the Introit for Easter 6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When Rebecca gave birth to her twins, they were tussling in the womb, fighting to be the firstborn. Esau was born first, but Jacob was gripping his heel, refusing to give up. This is why Rebecca named him “Jacob,” which means “he grips the heel.”

The name suited Jacob. He was anything but apathetic. When he wanted something, he really wanted it, and would do anything to get it. Jacob was willing to lie, deceive, trick, bargain, and blackmail to get whatever he wanted. Thus, his name came to mean “Crooked Guy,” “Deceiver,” or “Trickster.”

The nation of Israel is often called “Jacob.” The descendants of Jacob inherited their father’s character. Israel should have been a noble nation, a nation of righteousness and wisdom, but it became a nation of liars and cheaters.

We sing and we celebrate, because the Lord has redeemed Jacob! He redeemed His people! To redeem means to liberate someone, usually by buying his freedom. God’s people have been set free!

Jesus liberated us from sin. He paid for our freedom with His own blood and death. Your sins were condemned in His crucified body so that you can go free. Jacob won’t be sentenced to death for his lies and his tricks, because his lies and tricks were imputed to Christ.

The Hebrew word which means “to make right” looks surprisingly similar to the word “Israel” but it means “wrestles with God.” And so God changed Jacob’s name to Israel, God made the crooked guy straight or right. Likewise, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to all of God’s people, making them right in God’s eyes.

This is what Easter is all about! We celebrate that our Lord accepts us and sets us free! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

All righteousness by works is vain; The Law brings condemnation. True righteousness by faith I gain; Christ’s work is my salvation. His death, that perfect sacrifice, Has paid the all sufficient price; In Him my hope is anchored. (If Your Beloved Son, O God, LSB 568:4)

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 26, 2019

Today's Reading: John 16:23-33

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 3:1-16, 39-48; Luke 14:25-15:10

"Take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Here the word "world" doesn't refer to the soil, the water, the flowers, and the beasts. The "world" refers to people. It refers to unbelievers—sinners who refuse to acknowledge God as King. It refers to violent societies and ungodly kingdoms.

Humans were created to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with families, communities, and cities. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve decided that they weren't going to trust God to decide what is and is not good. Ever since then, humans have created communities governed by their own values and their own goals.

Naturally, the world that hates God will hate those who serve God. For example, Babylon persecuted the Jews. Later, the unbelieving Jews and the Roman Empire would persecute Christians. How does the world fight against God's people? The world fights with threats, violence, and death.

When God sent His Son into the world, the world didn't receive Him. He preached God's reign. So when the world couldn't silence Jesus by bullying Him or by buying Him off, the world crucified Jesus.

"I have overcome the world," Jesus said. The world killed Jesus, but Jesus didn't stay dead. He came back, alive and immortal. The world did its best to destroy Jesus, but Jesus was better. Life proved greater than death.

So you have nothing to fear. The world still considers you an enemy. Yes, you might be pressured to give up your faith or be punished for your allegiance to King Jesus. Nevertheless, you know that the world has already been beaten. The world can kill you if it likes. It doesn't matter. Jesus will raise you from the dead on the Last Day.

Since you don't fear the world's death threats, you are free to follow Jesus. You are free to speak the truth and to serve your neighbor. You can follow Christ, and there's ultimately nothing the world can do about it. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God our Father, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Your humble servants, that by Your holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by You merciful guiding may perform them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for the Sixth Sunday of Easter)

Monday of the Sixth Week after Easter

May 27, 2019

Today's Reading: Numbers 21:4-9

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 8:5-26; Luke 15:11-32

So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. (Numbers 21:9)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. A snake has bitten all of us. The serpent came into the garden and filled Adam's veins with the poison of sin. Adam passed his condition on to us. Now the venom of sin courses through your veins, too. The serpent has wrapped his cold coils around your heart, squeezing the life out of it. Because of your sin, you must die.

Gee, it sure would be nice if there was a serpent lifted high on a pole, which we could gaze at and thereby receive life. Oh, that's right, we have Jesus! "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

Jesus took the venom of sin into Himself. He carried the sins of the world (John 1:29). He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Then Jesus was lifted up onto a cross. God sent His Son to die on a cross and God made a promise: "Everyone who looks at My Son with the eyes of faith will live!"

Where can you go to gaze upon the crucified Christ? He isn't on the cross anymore, you know. You won't find Him in modern day Jerusalem. No, you must go to the Divine Service, to the assembly of Christians. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them" (Matthew 18:20).

The cross is held before your eyes whenever your pastor preaches about Jesus and how He was crucified for you. Life is offered to you in the Name of Jesus every time your pastor speaks the words of Absolution. You receive the actual Body of Jesus, once nailed to the cross, whenever you receive the Lord's Supper. At the Divine Service you gaze upon the crucified Christ and you receive life. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Gospel shows the Father's grace, Who sent His Son to save our race, Proclaims how Jesus lived and died That we might thus be justified. (The Gospel Shows the Father's Grace, LSB 580:1)

Tuesday of the Sixth Week after Easter

May 28, 2019

Today's Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-6

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 9:1-23; Luke 16:1-18

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Notice what Paul calls Jesus. He calls Jesus “the man.” Jesus is a human being. Maybe that doesn’t seem very controversial to you, but it was at one time. There were some heretics who claimed that Jesus only appeared to be a man.

Notice that this man is our mediator. He stands before God, speaking on our behalf. What kind of man can stand in the presence of God? Also, He gives His life as a ransom for all people. A ransom is a payment given to liberate someone. Jesus gave His life in exchange for every other human life. He died so that everyone else can go free. But how can one man exchange His life for so many other lives?

Jesus isn’t merely a man; He is truly God. Jesus is God-made-man. The divine Son of God can stand in the Father’s presence. God’s own life can be given in exchange for the whole world. Jesus can save us because He is truly God.

That was controversial at one time, too. The Arians denied Jesus’ divinity. The divinity of Jesus is still controversial. People reject His divinity all the time.

We deny neither the humanity nor the divinity of Jesus. This is our confession: Jesus is man and God at the same time. The Creator became a creature, without losing any of His divine attributes or prerogatives. And this confession matters, because it means that Jesus can save us. He can become our ransom and our mediator because He is one of us, and He can rescue all of us because He is not an ordinary man, but God Himself.

The next time you attend the Divine Service, pay special attention to the Nicene Creed. Really think about those words and confess them boldly. The Gospel itself hangs on the accuracy of those words. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Christ, the Word of God incarnate, Lord and Son of Abraham; Christ, the radiance of the Father, Perfect God, the great I AM; Christ, the light, You shine unvanquished, Light and life You bring to all; Light our path with Your own presence, Grant us grace to heed Your call. (Christ, the Word of God Incarnate, LSB 540:1)

Wednesday of the Sixth Week after Easter

May 29, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 10:11-36; Luke 16:19-31

You shall not commit adultery. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we lead a chaste and decent life in what we say and do, and husbands and wives love and honor each other. (Small Catechism: Sixth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What we believe about sex and marriage really matters. Obviously it matters for practical reasons. Sexual sins have a tendency to create huge messes and hurt lots of people, including children. It also matters because of God's creation and God's Law. God created us male and female, designed us for sex, and instituted marriage.

Sex and marriage matter for another reason. According to Paul, marriage should be a picture of Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5).

The husband rules, but not in a worldly, self-centered way. He rules in the manner of Christ, who gave up His own life for His Church and leads Her with gentle love.

The wife submits to her husband, namely by trusting him to protect her and provide for her. She isn't forced to follow his lead, but follows willingly and gladly, just as the Church follows Jesus.

From the marital relationship, life is produced and sustained. Where can you find abundant and everlasting life? You find it wherever you can find Christ and the Church.

As Christians we need to ask ourselves: Do our marriages illustrate the intimate union between Christ and the Church? If we are honest, we must admit that too often they don't. That's why we need pastors who are not afraid to tackle this touchy subject with Law and Gospel. We need to learn about what marriage is supposed to look like and be encouraged to pursue a godly marriage. More importantly, we need to hear that the Bridegroom doesn't stop loving us whenever we fail. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"Be faithful to your marriage vow; No lust or impure thoughts allow. Keep all your conduct free from sin By self-controlled discipline." Have mercy, Lord! (These Are the Holy Ten Commands, LSB 581:7)

The Ascension of Our Lord

May 30, 2019

Today's Reading: Luke 24:44-53

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 11:1-23, 31-35; Luke 17:1-19

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Luke 24:44)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Everything written about the Messiah in the Old Testament must be fulfilled. Of course, this includes the coming of the Messiah, His birth in Bethlehem to a virgin. Of course, this includes His death, by which God's people are justified and the serpent defeated. Of course, this includes the resurrection of the Messiah.

The Old Testament says something else about the Messiah. The Old Testament says that the Messiah will rule. He will rule, not only over Israel, but over the whole world. His reign will last forever. Consider, for example, Psalm 2, Psalm 72, and Psalm 110.

Today we celebrate the ascension of the Messiah to His throne. Today we celebrate that the Lord's Kingdom has been established and His victory has been secured through His crucifixion and His resurrection. Today we say, "He is risen ... and He reigns!"

In fulfillment of the Old Testament, repentance and forgiveness must be preached to the world in His Name. In other words, the whole earth must hear that the principalities and powers have been dethroned and a new Emperor has been crowned. Everyone must hear that Jesus is Lord. Everyone must hear that the new King is gracious and that He is ready to pardon all traitors and rebels that come to Him.

In a sense, conversion is a change of allegiance. When we confess that Jesus is Lord, we are pledging our fidelity to Him. When we say, "Jesus is Lord," we are saying, "Jesus is *my* Lord. He has pardoned *me* and has accepted *me* into His Kingdom!"

Soon we will celebrate Pentecost, which marks the day that the Church began Her mission to announce the ascension of the new King. May our congregations continue to announce that Good News to the world. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You have called Your Church to witness that in Christ You have reconciled us to Yourself. Grant that by Your Holy Spirit we may proclaim the good news of Your salvation so that all who hear it may receive the gift of salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Prayer for the Mission of the Church; LSB pg. 305)

Friday of the Sixth Week after Easter

May 31, 2019

Today's Reading: James 1:22-27

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 11:24-29; 12:1-16; Luke 17:20-37

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:25)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When I worked for Fred Meyer, a grocery store popular in the Northwest, I restocked and reorganized shelves. It left me alone with my thoughts. Over the speakers the store played the same 100 songs over and over, including Michael Jackson's *Man in the Mirror*. It's a song about honest self-evaluation, about changing the world by changing yourself first.

James wants us to do some honest self-evaluation. You have received the Gospel, which James calls the "word of truth" and the "perfect Torah of liberty." God spoke a word to Israel at Sinai, but it enslaved Israel to their sinful passions and condemned the nation to death. The Gospel saves us from condemnation and frees us from sin.

You have received the Gospel, or have you? It was offered to you, certainly. It is offered to you at the baptismal font, at the pulpit, and at the altar.

Doers of the Word follow Jesus. Mere hearers of the Word will listen to the Gospel for a time, but they then they will embrace their selfish impulses. Either you recognize Jesus is your Lord (He is whether you acknowledge that or not), or sin is your Master.

Good works don't save you. Jesus' works save you. Good works are the fruit of salvation. When Jesus liberates you from sin, His Spirit takes up residence in your heart and causes you to love others, just as Jesus loves you.

James wants us to look in a mirror. This mirror is not the Law, which shows us our sins. This mirror is the Gospel. Look at the Gospel and remember who you are! You are not a slave to sin, because Jesus liberated you! So don't obey your former master, but live out the destiny your Savior prepared for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You gave Your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon Himself. Grant that we, Your adopted children by grace, may daily be renewed by Your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Prayer for Spiritual Renewal; LSB pg. 312)

Saturday of the Sixth Week after Easter

June 1, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 13:1-3, 17-33; Luke 18:1-17

Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice! Alleluia. Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide Your face from me. Alleluia. (Psalm 27:7-9, from the Introit for Easter 7)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Sometimes it feels like God is hiding from us. Sometimes it feels like God doesn't care. Sometimes we suffer and think, "Where is the Lord?"

No matter what you are going through, you can be certain that your Father has not forgotten you. He sees you, even when you cannot see His face. He loves you, always and no matter what.

How can you be sure? Jesus won't allow you to be forgotten or forsaken. The sins that might sever you from God were taken by Jesus. On the cross, He died in your place, cut off from His Father. "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Because your sins must be punished, the Father hid His face from Jesus.

Even though Jesus could not see or hear His Father, He never lost faith. Even on the cross, Jesus put His confidence in God. "Father, I put My life into Your hands." When the Father hid His face, the Son sought Him and cried out to Him.

Since Jesus put His faith in His Father, God raised Him from the dead and exalted Him, seating Jesus at His right hand. Jesus has promised to intercede for us there, to ask His Father to give us His attention and His care. Since we are always in Jesus' heart, God will not forsake us. Since we are always on Jesus' lips, God will not forget us.

So whenever you are suffering, alone, or feel forgotten, cry out to your Lord. Seek Jesus, the One who laid down His life for you. Look to Him and you will find the face of a gracious God. You might carry a heavy cross, but God will not allow it to destroy you. If Jesus was raised from the dead and exalted, then you can be certain that God will save you, too. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

From God's joy can nothing sever, For I am His dear lamb, He, my Shepherd, ever. I am His because He gave me His own blood For my good, By His death to save me. (Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me, LSB 756:4)

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

June 2, 2019

Today's Reading: John 14:23-31

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 14:1-25; Luke 18:18-34

Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word." (John 14:23)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Have you studied the book of Deuteronomy? If you haven't, you should. Lately I've come to realize just how important that book is. For example, Jesus' discourse in John 14-17 is full of allusions to Deuteronomy. Like Deuteronomy, Jesus' discourse talks about listening to God's Word, loving the Lord, and "keeping" His instructions.

In Deuteronomy, Moses encourages the Israelites to love Yahweh above all things, for He rescued them from Egypt and carried them through the wilderness. If they love Yahweh, then they will listen to His Word. Again and again, Moses says, "Listen, O Israel! Listen!" Yahweh gave Israel the Law and Moses tells Israel to "keep" it.

Moses predicted that Israel would not love Yahweh or listen to Him. He predicted that Israel would disregard the Law. Because Israel was hard-hearted, Yahweh would curse Israel and exile them from the land. However, Moses predicted that Yahweh would circumcise the hearts of His people someday, so that they would love Him and listen to Him.

Jesus is the fulfillment of this story. He is Yahweh revealed in human flesh. He came not to rescue His people from an oppressive empire, but to rescue His people from their own sins and from His own curse. He allowed His curse to fall upon Him. He was exiled from the land of the living, so that His people could live with Him in a new creation, a place of everlasting rest.

Rules written on stone cannot make people love the Lord, but the good news about our Lord's self-sacrificial love can warm our cold hearts. We love the Lord, because He loved us first. Since we love Jesus, we will "keep" His Word. That is to say, we *treasure* it. We believe His promises. We are moved by His own love and treasure His instructions about loving each other. Even though we struggle with sin, we want to love Jesus and to be loved by Jesus, now and forever. And we will get what we want. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty, everlasting God, cause us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for the Seventh Sunday of Easter)

Monday of the Seventh Week after Easter

June 3, 2019

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 36:22-28

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 14:25-45; Luke 18:35-19:10

“And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:27)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul contrasts two covenants. The old covenant was good. More than that, it was glorious! It was a gift from the Lord! Nevertheless, the old covenant was a series of conditional promises—promises conditioned on obedience to laws written on stone tablets. These rules are good, but they do not change the heart. Thus, “the letter kills,” (2 Corinthians 3:6). The old covenant was a ministry of death, for it produced only divine condemnation. That’s why Israel suffered in Babylon!

God promised to do something new. Jeremiah described it as a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31). According to Jeremiah, this covenant would be a covenant of forgiveness, or, as Paul calls it, a ministry of justification. And instead of writing laws with ink, God would pour out His Spirit into His people, so that they would walk in His statutes and desire to obey His rules. “The Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Covenants are instituted with blood. Jesus instituted the new covenant by shedding His blood on the cross (Matthew 26:28). He suffered the curse of the Old Covenant so that we can receive unconditional forgiveness in the New Covenant. Then, having risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to His Church.

Now we loathe ourselves for our iniquities (Ezekiel 36:31). We repent. We take off our old selves, with our old vices and evil desires, and we put on Christ. We imitate the Lord, whom we love.

God’s rules can be a helpful guide. They tell us which behaviors and attitudes we need to cast off. But why do you want to take off your old selves? You want to do that because of the Gospel, which elicits love of Christ and bestows on you the Spirit. This is why your pastor must preach Law and Gospel. He should give you guidance, but he must also give you the love-producing Gospel. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

*Help us that we Thy saving Word In faithful hearts may treasure;
Let e’er that Bread of Life afford New grace in richest measure.
O make us die to ev’ry sin, Each day create new life within,
That fruits of faith may flourish. (O Holy Spirit, Grant Us Grace, LSB 693:2)*

Tuesday of the Seventh Week after Easter

June 4, 2019

Today's Reading: 1 Peter 4:7-14

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 16:1-22; Luke 19:11-28

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. (1 Peter 4:10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God showers His grace onto His Church, but we each experience that grace differently. It is a varied grace. In other words, while certain gifts, such as forgiveness, the Spirit, eternal life, faith, hope, and love, are given to all Christians, some gifts are given only to a few.

For the first century Church, that meant receiving different supernatural gifts, like the ability to heal the sick, the ability to speak different languages, and the ability to receive and interpret visions. These gifts were given only to that first generation of Christians, but there are other gifts the Spirit is distributing today. For example, He gives some people the Pastoral Office, others the ability to become a lay leader of a congregation, some the ability to console with the Gospel, others the ability to pray unceasingly, some the gift of hospitality, others a stronger faith that doesn't waver, etc.

Peter's point is that every gift is an opportunity to serve others. We are stewards, granted various gifts to help manage God's household. These gifts are not opportunities to brag, but opportunities to love.

The Son receives every good thing from the Father. Did He use any of these good things for His own advantage? No! He used every good gift for you. He used His wisdom and compassion to comfort sinners. He used His power and might to heal the sick. He gave up His very own life, so that it could pay for your sins and merit eternal life.

This is what the Christian life is about: The Lord gives to you freely and abundantly, so that you can give to others freely and abundantly. Jesus serves you and you serve your brothers and sisters. God pours so much grace upon you that you fill to the brim and overflow! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

As You, Lord, have lived for others, So may we for others live. Freely have Your gifts been granted; Freely may Your servants give. Yours the gold and Yours the silver, Yours the wealth of land and sea; We but stewards of Your bounty Held in solemn trust will be. (Son of God, Eternal Savior, LSB 842:2)

Wednesday of the Seventh Week after Easter

June 5, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 16:23-40; Luke 19:29-48

You shall not steal. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income. (Small Catechism: Seventh Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Theft is silly. Why should a Christian steal? Indeed, we should be the most generous and charitable people on the planet.

Think about it. You have the most generous Father in the world. Your heavenly Father loves you. He wants to provide for you and protect you. He says, "Ask, and you shall receive!" So why would you need to take your neighbor's belongings? Do you really think your Father, who takes care of lilies and sparrows, doesn't care about you?

Your Lord is rich, but he became poor so that you could become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). Your King became a slave so that those enslaved to sin could become His royal viceroys. In Baptism, the entire new creation was given to you as your inheritance so that you can rule it alongside Jesus (Revelation 22:5). Your Lord has conquered the powers of evil and rules over all things, forcing all things to work for your benefit. So why would you steal from others as if you have nothing?

When we steal or when we act in a stingy manner, we don't merely offend our neighbor. We offend our God. We confess with our behavior that our Father doesn't care and that our Lord has not exalted us. Theft is blasphemy.

So repent. Recognize that thieving and accumulating won't extend your life, or make you more secure, or make you happier. Give up thinking you're a pauper. Return to your God, for His mercy is abundant. He has so much forgiveness that He casts it about willy-nilly! Go collect that imperishable inheritance and live like the prince or princess that you are! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"You shall not steal or take away What others worked for night and day, But open wide a gen'rous hand And help the poor in the land." Have mercy, Lord! (These Are the Holy Ten Commands, LSB 581:8)

Thursday of the Seventh Week after Easter

June 6, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 16:41-17:13; Luke 20:1-18

On the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and behold, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds. (Numbers 17:8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. As the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness, they rebelled against their leaders frequently. They rebelled against Moses, the Lord's prophet. In our text from Numbers, they rebelled against Aaron and his sons, the Lord's priests.

This story should serve as a warning: Do not rebel against those authorities God has appointed over you. Rebellion is not pleasing to the Lord. Seizing authority for oneself is a sin. Since all authority comes from God, whenever we disrespect or despise our parents, pastors, and other authorities, we are guilty of disrespecting and despising God Himself.

We believe that the Old Testament isn't merely a set of rules or moral examples, but that it points to Christ. Where can we find Christ in this story?

Perhaps we should remember that the Levitical priesthood was only temporary. These priests were ordained by God, but they were sinful and mortal. They must be replaced by a sinless, immortal High Priest, one in the order of Melchizedek (Psalms 110:4).

How can we be sure that Jesus is the High Priest ordained by God? How can we be sure that His sacrifice appeased God's wrath and that His blood purified the conscience of every believer? How can we be certain that He stands within God's heavenly temple, interceding for us and offering to the Father the incense of our prayers?

The people of Israel knew that Aaron was their high priest when his staff, a piece of dead wood, blossomed and produced ripe almonds. We know that Jesus is our High Priest because His cross—a piece of dead wood which should produce only dead men—produced life.

Behold, our crucified Lord lives! Behold, everlasting life flows from the cross to you! Behold, Jesus, your High Priest! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Christ's altar was the tree, Where on the world's behalf He shed a blood, unlike the blood Of goat or calf, To seal God's guarantee Of grace that cannot fail; With blood He entered for our good Behind the veil. (Christ Sits at God's Right Hand, LSB 564:3)

Friday of the Seventh Week after Easter

June 7, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 20:1-21; Luke 20:19-44

But he said, "You shall not pass through." And Edom came out against them with a large army and with a strong force. (Numbers 20:20)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Edom knew about Israel's hardships. Israel promised to pass through Edom's land without taking any food or water. Nevertheless, not only did Edom refuse to allow Israel safe passage, but Edom threatened Israel with a great army.

Other inhabitants of the land reacted to Israel in much the same way. For example, King Sihon of the Amorites and King Og of Bashan refused Israel safe passage and sent their armies toward the Israelites. Israel had to fight and conquer them, lest they be conquered.

Often we feel uncomfortable with Israel's war against the Canaanites described in Numbers and Joshua. Doesn't God desire peace? Yes, He does, but the Canaanites did not. The Canaanites were not interested in sharing their land or allowing Israel safe passage. The Canaanites were the first to draw the sword. Still to this day, it is just for a government to raise an army and fight in self-defense.

Furthermore, we must remember that a lot more was at stake than simply the survival of this single generation of Israelites. When the Canaanites threatened the people of Israel, they were threatening God's plan of salvation, for the Savior would be born an Israelite! If the Israelites are wiped out by the pagans, then the Savior cannot be born in order to die for the sins of the whole world (including the sins of these Canaanites).

Remember what God said to Abraham in Genesis: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," (Genesis 12:3). If the Canaanites had welcomed and blessed Israel, then they would have been blessed. Indeed, Gentiles are receiving God's blessing to this very day through Jesus, the obedient Israelite, the offspring of Abraham. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Crowns and thrones may perish, Kingdoms rise and wane, But the Church of Jesus Constant will remain. Gates of hell can never 'Gainst that Church prevail; We have Christ's promise, And that cannot fail. Onward, Christian soldiers, Marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus Going on before. (Onward, Christian Soldiers, LSB 662:3)

Saturday of the Seventh Week after Easter

June 8, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 20:22-21:9; Luke 20:45-21:19

The Spirit of the Lord fills the world. Alleluia. (Psalm 68:3, from the Introit for Pentecost Sunday)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Of course, the Spirit is omnipresent. He's God, and so He is everywhere. "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?" (Psalms 139:7 ESV). Still, the Spirit isn't present everywhere in the same way.

For example, sometimes the Spirit is visibly present, but other times He hides Himself. Also, the Spirit is with unbelievers in some sense, but not in the same way that He is with His Church.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit was present with His people in some ways, and yet He was absent, too. God did not pour out His Spirit on most people (Numbers 11:26-30). Sometimes God would pour out His Spirit on special people, people who had special vocations like kings, prophets, and judges. God gave people His Spirit to empower them for a particular ministry.

The new age is different. Now, "the Spirit of the Lord fills the world." In other words, every Christian is given an equal portion of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit resides in every Christian, regardless of gender, race, nationality, or vocation. The Spirit resides in you *with His grace*. He applies the blood of Christ to you in order to make you His holy temple (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The Spirit's presence is a source of comfort, because He is a down payment (Ephesians 1:14). In other words, if you have the Spirit, you belong to the new creation and eternal life is your inheritance! The Spirit has made you a member of God's family and He will nourish your faith, lest you fall away.

Like I said, God gave special people His Spirit in the old age to empower them for special tasks. If you have God's Spirit, then you have a special calling. You are a priest and a king. Through the Spirit's power, you will bring God's blessing to others and serve your neighbors in imitation of your King. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest, And make our hearts Your place of rest; Come with Your grace and heav'nly aid, And fill the hearts which You have made. (Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest, LSB 499:1)

*Martin Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers taken from
the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther*

Unless otherwise noted, Biblical quotations are from the ESV.

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