Higher Things Reflections

Pentecost - Trinity 4

June 9 - July 20, 2019
2019 Reflections
Pentecost - Trinity 4

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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.
Today’s Reading: John 14:23-31
Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 8:1-21; John 12:36b-50

I am leaving peace for you. I am giving My peace to you. I am not giving to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled or afraid. (John 14:27)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Are you at peace? Or is it only a truce? Peace is lasting and permanent. A truce isn’t. How are things at home, work, or school? You’ve only got friends. No enemies or frenemies, right? You’re nice to everyone, to their faces and behind their backs. They’re that way with you, too, right?

Oftentimes peace in this life is only a truce. It’s temporary. Everything will be going great and then all of a sudden you do something, they do something, and then everything is not good. You’re fighting, you’re not talking, you’re not even friends anymore. You’re all alone. No one to trust except me, myself, and I. That’s a peaceless life.

That’s the life Jesus went through. The Son of Man didn’t have peace. He had some truces, but not lasting peace in this life. His own people rejected Him, the religious leaders handed Him over, His closest friends left Him. In fact, even His Father forsook Him on the cross!

He went through all of that for you. He endured what you endure. He suffered what you cause others to suffer. He takes all our sins, all the ways we mess up our relationships, and He sheds His blood for them. All those ways that we sin against those around us also set us apart from our heavenly Father. There Jesus makes true and lasting peace.

You have peace with God—lasting peace, eternal peace in Jesus. There are no temporary truces with Him. The blood of Jesus says so. God’s peace is passed along through you to your life, to those around you (your loved-ones, your friends, and especially your enemies).

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace” (Galatians 5:22). That’s the sort of peace Jesus gives. He gives you Spirit-filled peace, joy, and love through His death, and the power of His resurrection works those in you. They are yours. You’re baptized. You have the Spirit, you have Jesus and His lasting peace. In and through you, Jesus and the Spirit make sure those around you do, too. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, on this day You once taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending them the light of Your Holy Spirit. Grant us in our day by the same Spirit to have a right understanding in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy consolation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Collect for Pentecost)
And the LORD scattered them away from there over the face of the entire world, and they stopped building the city. (Genesis 11:8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Everyone was at peace. They all got along. They all had the same plan. They all even spoke the same language! So they moved to the land of Shinar, and built a city and tower there. “We’ll make a name for ourselves!” they thought. “We’ll all be together so we won’t be scattered over the face of the earth.”

Only one problem. There wasn’t true peace. They wanted to get back to God on their own. They knew there wasn’t peace with God, and so they saw to it themselves. “Bricks for stone, bitumen for mortar,” and “a tower with its top in the heavens.” That would solve the problem. Then there would be peace on earth and peace in the heavens. Then Yahweh’s judgment: Mix them up, scatter them!

We get ourselves into trouble. We sin. We turn from God. We turn on those around us. We turn inward on ourselves and act selfishly. And if that weren’t bad enough, when we start working together with others we’ll sin all the more! We’ll turn more from God. We’ll have our clique, our special group of friends, our tribe, and work against him or her or them! We’re one misspoken word away from all-out war—not just in the big wide world but our own lives, too, with our parents, siblings, even friends!

That division with God is a result of our sin. Our division with each other is, too. No amount of hard work either alone or together will fix it. There’s no tower or city or relationship we can build to fix it. We try. We promise. We’ll be better. But in the end, that solution is a dead end.

Only God can fix the problem. He does. In Jesus, He does. Jesus is lifted up, exalted, with His head in the heavens as He is crucified. He takes sin, our sins, and the division between God and man caused by it all, and He takes it into His own body, sheds His blood for it, dies for it. In Him and His death, division is divided and dead. God Himself makes peace with you in His own death for you and for others.

Jesus delivers that peace to you and to others in that Gospel. The Spirit undoes Babel at Pentecost through the preaching of the Gospel. What Jesus does cuts across all division because what He does is for all people, as the Spirit makes known. In Holy Baptism you’re in on what the Spirit is doing—delivering Jesus’ peace. His true peace. His lasting peace. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
St. Barnabas, Apostle
June 11, 2019


When [Barnabas] came and saw the gift that was from God, he rejoiced and comforted all to wait for the Lord with steadfast heart. (Acts 11:23)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, was also named Barnabas by the apostles, this name means, Son of Comfort” (Acts 4:36). And that’s what he did. He comforted. He encouraged. He brought peace. The apostles nicknamed him, but it fit, because that’s exactly what Barnabas did. He fulfilled his name by preaching the Gospel, both alone and with Paul.

He comforted not only Jews but Gentiles. He preached Jesus. He fulfilled the work of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, in preaching Jesus, in delivering Jesus’ Gifts, and in showing mercy to many within the church by bringing money and supplies to those in need. In all these ways the Spirit, the Comforter, brought comfort and peace through Pastor Barnabas.

The Spirit also wants that same peace and comfort brought to us. You and I need it, too! So the Spirit uses another “Son of Comfort” to do it. He uses your pastor. If things are rough, if you’ve got sins, if you’ve got worries, doubts, and fears, the Spirit put your pastor there—right there!—for you. He’s your own personal Barnabas. Your pastor will certainly rejoice with you at happy times, but your pastor’s spiritual joy is to deliver Jesus, His Word, His Absolution, His Body and Blood, to you. In those things you have peace, Jesus’ peace, and you have the Spirit’s comfort in them, too. In those Gifts, you have the Comfort and Peace, knowing that, no matter what, Jesus is with you, you’re His, He’s yours, and you’ll be with Him forever. When you’ve got that going for you, you’ve got everything! The Comforter has made sure you have it.

Pastor Barnabas went everywhere doing the Spirit’s work of preaching the Gospel and delivering the Sacraments, and that’s how He brought the Spirit’s comfort and Jesus’ peace to the saints. Your Barnabas, your pastor, doesn’t go everywhere, but the Spirit sent him to your congregation to do all the same things St. Barnabas did. The Spirit has done that for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The minister, whom Christ has sent, is but His humble instrument… When ministers lay on their hands, Absolved by Christ the sinner stands. (“As surely as I Live,” God Said, LSB 614:5-6)
You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way. (Small Catechism: Eighth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Reputation, a good name, is a good gift from God. It’s a gift that flows out of the First Article, that God is “maker of heaven and earth.” It’s a Fourth Petition gift, part of “daily bread” that God “certainly gives to everyone…even to all evil people.” The Eighth Commandment also addresses this good gift of God—your neighbor’s and NOT yours.

God didn’t give the Eighth Commandment for your benefit. That’s not how the gift of reputation works with Him. The Eighth Commandment shows us that we are baptized to guard, protect, preserve, and improve our neighbor’s reputation. We’re baptized to be a gift to our neighbor, to be a gift to his or her reputation. That’s why you were baptized—so you’d no longer live for yourself, but the Spirit would use you to live for others.

Now you don’t tell lies (or TRUTH!) about your neighbor that’ll hurt him, you don’t betray your friends, you don’t slander your enemies. You have no enemies! Not in Jesus you don’t. You are in Jesus, baptized into Him. You “explain everything in the kindest way.” Through the power of Jesus’ resurrection given in Holy Baptism, you cover all that your neighbor says and does with Jesus’ forgiveness, mercy, and love. You’re at peace, you’re patient, you’re kind, gentle, faithful to your neighbor. This “fruit of the Spirit” is worked in you through your Baptism.

Jesus was slandered, betrayed, gossiped about for our doing those very things to those around us. He bore those sins—your sins—in His body on the tree. He washes them off you in Baptism, and there He enlivens you with His resurrection and the Holy Spirit, too. Because of all that, your reputation with God is spotless, pure, and holy. He turns you away from you and sets you free to worry about your neighbor’s reputation, not only to defend it but to cover your neighbor’s words and actions with the blood of Jesus, just like your own reputation and standing with God have been covered. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

“Bear no false witness nor defame Your neighbor nor destroy his name, But view him in the kindest way; Speak truth in all that you say.” Have mercy, Lord! (These are the Holy Ten Commands, LSB 581:9)
Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. (Acts 2:21)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus’ Name will save you. His Name delivers peace with God. His Name works peace with others through you. You trust Him; you have faith. That’s what “call upon His Name” means. You fear, love, and trust in Him above all things.

We killed Him, though. Our sins did. He was the long-promised, long-awaited Savior. When God shows up to save His people, to save sinners, they reject and kill Him for the trouble. Yes, He died for our sins; yes, we should have welcomed Him, but God used even our rejecting Him, killing Him, and turned it for good, eternal good. Now, there’s “no other Name under heaven by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The Spirit makes it all happen for you. He “cuts you to the heart” through the preaching of His Word. He brings you to Jesus, and Jesus to you, not only in the Word, but through Jesus’ gifts, too. Through Baptism the Spirit sanctifies us, cleanses our consciences, and makes us children of the Father, brothers with Christ. Through Jesus’ Supper, the Spirit unites us with Christ and His forgiveness in the eating and drinking of His Body and Blood. Through that same Supper, we have unity with each other in the bond of peace.

That’s how Pentecost ends. We always remember the tongues, but “those who received Peter’s Word were baptized, and 3,000 souls were added that day. And they were devoted to the Apostles’ teaching, to the communion that breaks bread, and to the prayers” (Acts 2:41-42). There the Spirit was “daily adding to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

Actually, that’s how Pentecost continues for you. Yes, Pentecost continues for you. The work of the Spirit continues within you and on you. Through Jesus’ Word and Gifts, the Spirit grows, works, and creates His own gifts within you (Galatians 5:22-23). You call upon the Name of the Lord Jesus because of the Spirit. He’s working in the Word and the Body and Blood, just as He worked in the water and Word of your Baptism.

Now, you trust Jesus; you have faith. You call upon His Name. That’s what the Spirit continually does for you until He raises you from the dead on the Last Day. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Spirit, water, blood entreating, Working faith and its completing In the One whose death-defeating Life has come with life for all. (Water, Blood, and Spirit Crying, LSB 597:5)
He ordered they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. (Acts 10:48)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Cornelius was a Roman Soldier, a centurion. A centurion was in charge over Jesus’ execution. The Romans weren’t just non-Jewish (Gentiles), they oppressed the Jews. But Cornelius didn’t just live and work in Caesarea, He worshipped there! (Acts 10:2) He worshiped Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. He was a proselyte—a non-circumcised Gentile who trusted in Yahweh.

He may be top of the food chain within the Italian Regiment, but clearly he’s second-class within God’s Kingdom. That’s what many Christians, including Peter, thought back then. You needed to become Jewish before you could become a Christian, at least, a full Christian.

But Peter “comes to the conclusion that God shows no partiality.” The prophets preached this. So did Jesus. He did in a vision to Peter (Acts 10:9-15), but it’s also why Jesus gave His marching orders to preach repentance and forgiveness to all nations (Luke 24:47) and to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching (Matthew 28:19-20).

Peter preaches. The Spirit comes, even upon Gentiles. Peter gives his orders: “Baptize them.” He got his orders from Jesus, and now we can rejoice that there’s peace between God and all nations.

Cornelius shows us the truth of the Gospel—that there’s no second-class citizen in Jesus’ Kingdom. But we think there are those who are second-class in the Kingdom—or shouldn’t even be in the Kingdom!—because of what they’ve done or who they are or were. But the real truth is this: you shouldn’t just be a second-class citizen, you shouldn’t even be in the Kingdom because of what you’ve done!

But you are in the Kingdom. The same way Peter is. The same way Cornelius is. It’s all through Jesus. It’s all through the Spirit. Jesus really did die for all: for Peter, the circumcised (Acts 10:44), Cornelius, you, and me. The Spirit is for all, too. In the font, in the Word, in the Blood, the Spirit is made yours, He makes Jesus yours, and “everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His Name” (Acts 10:43). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

To His disciples spoke the Lord, “Go out to ev’ry nation, And bring to them My living Word And this My invitation: Let ev’ryone abandon sin And come in true contrition To be baptized and thereby win Full pardon and remission And heavenly bliss inherit.” (To Jordan Came the Christ, our Lord, LSB 406:5)
Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength. (Psalm 8:2a, from the Introit for Trinity Sunday)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. How does the Lord do that? It seems crazy. Babies and infants don’t really say much. They cry. They goo and gah. They screech. They do all sorts of things. How is it that “strength” or in some translations or places “praise” is established “out of the mouth of babies and infants”?

It doesn’t have anything to do with them. No, they’re just babies, after all. This has everything to do with what the Lord Himself does. He’s the One who establishes strength. He’s the One who lifts up babies and infants. He’s the One who saves you, me, everyone in His Son’s death and resurrection.

But the Lord’s not done. It’s all wrapped up in His Name. “How majestic is Your Name in all the earth!” (Psalm 8:1) His Name does great things. And baptized into that Name, babies, infants, you, and me are pleasing to our Father in heaven.

This is how the Lord “destroys the enemy and avenger” (Psalm 8:2b). The Lord drowns His enemy, your enemy, too, in His own Name. At the font, the Lord’s Name is yours. His salvation is yours. Jesus is yours. The Father is yours. The Spirit is yours.

That’s our true joy on Trinity Sunday, which is tomorrow. It’s not that we get to say the longest creed we’ve got in the hymnal. It’s not that we’re right about who God is and others aren’t. It’s not that we understand Him and can get our minds around the teaching of the Holy Trinity.

It’s that this Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has conspired in Himself from eternity to save you. That the Father would send His Son to die for you and everyone, that the Spirit would go out through the Son’s preaching and gifts and would create faith in Jesus who reconciles to the Father. Our joy is that this God has baptized you into His Name—the most majestic Name in all the earth! He’s done this for you and for infants, too.

In Holy Baptism, your prayers and praises and creeds are strength that the Lord has established within you. He does that for babies, too. How wonderful! “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your Name in all the earth!” (Psalm 8:9) In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
"God loved the world this way: He gave His only Son.” (John 3:16)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “So the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but only one God” (Athanasian Creed). Neither the Father nor Spirit died, though, “but the Son is both true God and true man. He died for me and shed His blood for me” (Christian Questions with Their Answers).

Without this God you would die, you would perish, you would be damned in hell, apart from Him forever. Your sinfulness and the sins that grow from it “daily and much” do it. “Whatever is born from flesh is flesh,” Jesus says (John 3:6), and “flesh” will not inherit the Kingdom of God, won’t even see it! That’s how far your sins keep you from God.

You know what you’ve done. So does God. When you don’t think anyone else sees or hears or knows, He does. In fact, He knows all of them—your sinfulness, too—from your conception to your last breath. Now, this isn’t to scare you into getting your act together. You should do that and should want to do that because you love God who’s saved you.

All this is to remind you of how the Father loves you. He doesn’t love by damning you or other sinners or even the entire world! No, His love, mercy, kindness, His almighty power and Kingdom are all put on display for you in the death of His eternal Son, Jesus, to save you from your sins and sinfulness. His love is tying you into that Kingdom in Holy Baptism—the washing, new birth of water, Word, and Holy Spirit. The Spirit creates faith in Jesus within you. He holies you. He will resurrect your flesh holy on the Last Day to inherit the Kingdom of God.

Holy Trinity Sunday isn’t a test on what facts you know about God. It’s about God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who saves you in the death of the Son, and makes you a part of that by baptizing you into the Triune Name of God. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and eternal God, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, You have shown Your rich grace and mercy to us. Eternal Father, You created us at the beginning. Eternal Son of God, for us You became fully human, and for our sins You bore the cross. Eternal Spirit, You proceed from the Father and the Son from eternity, and through Your holy Gospel You give us faith and holiness. O one, eternal and almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, keep us in Your grace until our life’s end in the eternal blessedness in the life to come. Amen. (Veit Dietrich, Collect for Trinity Sunday¹)
Monday of the Week of Holy Trinity
June 17, 2019

Today's Reading: Isaiah 6:1-7
Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 17:1-28; John 16:17-33

One of the Seraphim flew to me, and there was a coal in his hand. He had taken it with tongs from on top of the altar. He touched it to my mouth and said, “Look, this touched your lips, so your transgression is forgiven, your sin is covered.” (Isaiah 6:6-7)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Prophet Isaiah goes to church. He goes to the temple. At some point in the year King Uzziah dies (740 BC), Isaiah sees the Lord. He shouldn’t be all that surprised. Yahweh promised that He would dwell in that house. But Isaiah’s faith in Yahweh and His promises united with sight, when Yahweh pulled back the curtain and allowed Isaiah to see with his eyes what’s really going on.

This was a problem for Isaiah, as it is for all of us. Yes, we would love to see God face to face as Isaiah did. But we’re sinners, and to sinners the Lord is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24). Face to face with the Lord, we’d also say, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I am a man who lives among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh Sabaoth” (Isaiah 6:5).

What can help? Isaiah’s being a prophet of Yahweh didn’t help. Nothing you do helps either, even though you try. We compare ourselves to others. We know what we’ve done. We know our sins. But no amount of sins will keep you out, and good works, right answers, knowing more stuff about the Trinity, or even knowing the year when Uzziah died—none of that helps get you in.

So the Lord was high and lifted up. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3:14). Jesus was crucified for you, for your sins. He’s your face-to-face God. God becomes man to hide Himself not only so that you don’t burn up but to be consumed into death Himself for you and your sins.

He makes that redemption yours. He delivers it. The messenger Seraph delivered it to Isaiah. Your pastor does to you. You eat and drink Jesus’ Body and Blood. “Look, this touched your lips, so your transgression is forgiven, your sin is covered.” Now you will live in the Lord’s presence forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

“Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth; heav’n and earth are full of Thy glory. Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He, blessed is He, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.” (Sanctus, LSB 195)
O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and untraceable His ways! (Romans 11:33)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You can’t know God. You can’t wrap your mind around Him. You can’t understand Him. You don’t get—can’t get!—what He’s doing. He’s God. You’re not.

He makes Himself known to you. He makes Himself your God. He makes you His child. God reveals Himself in the person of the Son—Jesus. Jesus is the eternal Son who comes to ransom you to His Father in heaven. He sheds His blood and rises from the dead to do it. Jesus sends the Spirit to you, and the Spirit, in Holy Baptism, makes you a child of the Father and brother with Jesus.

We can’t fathom or understand or wrap our minds around the Trinity. We receive Him. He delivers Himself to you—on your forehead! “I baptize you into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

We confess the Trinity. We use lots of words to do it, but our temptation is to claim that we’ve got God, that we’re saved because we understand the words or the ideas. We think that we can put God in a box, define Him, claim ownership of Him. “Because I know the words, because I’ve made it through confirmation, because I know the Creed, or I listen to what my pastor says, that means I’m saved.”

You and I aren’t saved by what we do, what we know, or what we say. God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, saves us. We trust Him. Jesus died for us. He’s the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no one gets to the Father without Him. The Spirit delivers Him. Right to you. Into your ears, over your forehead, into your eyes or ears right now, depending how you’re receiving this Reflection!

We express our faith, our hope, and our confidence, but that expression doesn’t save. The Triune God makes Himself your God. Chiefly in Baptism He does it. He claims you. He defines you. He places you in communion with Himself forever. You’re a child of the Father, a brother with Jesus, and made holy by the Holy Spirit. He’s God. You’re not, but you are saved. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Baptized into Your name most holy, O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I claim a place, though weak and lowly, Among Your saints, Your chosen host. Buried with Christ and dead to sin, Your Spirit now shall live within. (Baptized into Your Name Most Holy, LSB 590:1)
You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not entice or force away our neighbor’s wife, workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty. (Small Catechism: Ninth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “Every good and every perfect gift comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow because of change” (James 1:17). That’s true for you and true for your neighbor, too. Your Father in heaven gives you everything. He gave His only Son into death for you, He raised Him for you, you’re His child and His Son’s brother in Holy Baptism. You’ve been baptized to be a child of God and that means also that you are to fear, love, and trust in Him and not what you have or don’t have.

You’ve been baptized to be content because you’ve been baptized into God’s own Name. How could you not be content? Jesus is risen from the dead. Why worry about your life? Jesus is ascended and rules over everything. Why worry about, or be jealous of, or try to get what those around you have?

You don’t need what they have. Your Father gives you your gifts. He gives your neighbors theirs. Baptized into Jesus, enlivened at the font with His resurrection, we rejoice in what our neighbor has. In the power of Jesus’ resurrection, we “help and be of service to him in keeping it.”

We should covet, that is, desire, what we already have—the Lord Himself! You’re His, and He’s yours. He made sure of that. He died and rose. He reconciled you to His Father and brought you into Himself in Baptism. You’re a child of God. The Spirit was also given you at the font, and He works new life in you through the Word and the Body and Blood Jesus gives you.

The Triune Creator of the universe is on your side. He loves you. He redeemed you to Himself. Tied you to Himself. How will He not care for you? There’s no need to worry. He’s shown Himself trustworthy at the cross, the empty tomb, font, and altar. You really do have everything you need for forever. He’ll give you what you need now, too. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
Jesus answered, “My Kingdom is not from this world.” (John 18:36)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “For God loved the world this way: He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The Triune God will save you. The Father did it in giving His Son into death. The Son did it by giving His life. The Spirit did it in giving you faith to believe it. In today’s reading from John 18, we see that all getting worked out. Jesus was born for this moment. He comes not to be an earthly King. He doesn’t come to set up a Christian empire or nation or kingdom. He didn’t stand before Pilate to unseat him. He stopped His disciples from taking up the sword. Peter tried; Jesus stopped him. Jesus even healed the high priest’s servant’s ear.

Sometimes Christians want there to be those sorts of things—a Christian nation or whatever else. But that’s not why Jesus came. He is King—King of kings and Lord of lords, in fact. He is almighty, powerful—omnipotent, in fact. He uses His power and mighty to set up a different sort of Kingdom.

He sets up a Kingdom of mercy, love, and forgiveness. That’s the “truth” of who He is, the “truth” of what He says. Pilate balks at it, and says, “What is truth?” But Jesus is. He’s the Truth, the Life, the Way. He leads us to the Father. He’s died and risen for the world. The Father sent Him to do that. The Spirit creates faith in Jesus, drawing you into Jesus’ Kingdom, the Holy Christian Church.

You’re in the Kingdom of God, Jesus’ not-earthly Kingdom. It’s for everyone, for all people, for all nations. You’re baptized into it. “Unless you’re born of water and the Spirit you will not enter the Kingdom of God” (John 3:5). You are born from above, you’ve been baptized “into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus is now your King. He showed it by dying and rising for you, and He made Himself your King and you His citizen at the font. You’re in that Kingdom now and forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

All who believe and are baptized Shall see the Lord's salvation; Baptized into the death of Christ, They are a new creation. Through Christ's redemption they shall stand Among the glorious, heav'nly band Of ev'ry tribe and nation. (All Who Believe and Are Baptized, LSB 601:1)
Now Pilate also wrote an inscription and placed it on the cross. It was inscribed: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” (John 19:19)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Every king needs a Kingdom. We heard about that yesterday. Jesus’ Kingdom isn’t an earthly Kingdom, but a heavenly one. One that’s all about mercy, love, and forgiveness. His Kingdom is the Holy Christian Church.

A king also needs a crown and throne. We have that today. Jesus is crowned with thorns. He is enthroned on the cross. That’s where Jesus is exalted and lifted up (John 3:14; 12:32). It’s why He’s there. He is the King of the Jews. That’s the charge against Him. He’s condemned for the truth.

The Jewish leaders reject Him. “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). So did the Jews: “Crucify Him!” We reject Him, too. For our lives, our sports, our families, our time, our jobs. Those things rule our lives. They shouldn’t. But He would let you reject Him, just like the Jews. He’d give you what you most wanted—not Him.

But He wants you—you who don’t want Him. So, the true King dies. He’s crowned. He’s enthroned. All for you. You reject Him; He is rejected. He is rejected; you are saved. Reigning from His throne, He gives His life. He cries out, “It is finished!”

He ties you to Himself. Your King’s water and blood are yours at the font and Altar. There you are brought into and kept in the Kingdom. He reigns over you with mercy, love, and forgiveness there. He forgives; you are forgiven. He loves; you are loved. He lives; you live in Him.

That’s His reign. It all began at the cross. He is your crucified King, your Savior King. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

What fading flow’rs His road adorn; The palms, how soon laid down! No bloom or leaf but only thorn The King of glory’s crown. The soldiers mock, the rabble cries, The streets with tumult ring, As Pilate to the mob replies, “Behold, behold your King!” (No Tramp of Soldiers’ Marching Feet, LSB 444:3)
Saturday of the Week of Holy Trinity
June 22, 2019


I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me. (Psalm 13:5-6, from the Introit for Trinity 1)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The antiphon for tomorrow’s Introit is what’s true about you. There are times when life hits you hard, when your sins pile up, or when those you love are hurting, sick, or dying. In those times it looks like the Lord has forgotten you or forsaken you, has turned His face from you, or even just left you to your enemies—sin, death, even the devil and hell!

But that’s not true. You have a steadfast love, you have a Salvation, you have a Jesus. Jesus is the steadfast love of the Lord. He’s the Lord’s salvation. He went through it all for you. Because of Him you’ll never be left or forsaken. Because of Jesus you’re never not saved!

It’s not just that He died and rose. It’s not just that He was forgotten and forsaken for you. It’s not just that He endured sin, death, devil, hell—yours FOR YOU. It’s that He delivers Himself—His steadfast love, His salvation—right to you. You’re baptized, and nothing in all creation, nothing in all eternity can change that. Not sickness. Not death. Not even the devil himself with all his power and demons.

Life is bad sometimes. I can’t explain it beyond saying that sin breaks stuff, corrupts it, destroys it. It makes things rotten to the core, and because of sin people die—you and those you love. It’s horrible. It really is. But that’s not true about you. That’s not lasting.

The antiphon for tomorrow’s Introit is what’s true about you. There are times when life hits you hard, when your sins pile up, or when those you love are hurting, sick, or dying. In those times it looks like the Lord has forgotten you or forsaken you, turned His face from you, or even just left you to your enemies—sin, death, even the devil and hell!

You’re baptized, so you will rise from the dead. You will see your Jesus, your salvation, your steadfast love face to face. That’s the Lord’s promise to you. Signed, sealed, delivered. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

In a wat’ry grave are buried All our sins that Jesus carried; Christ, the Ark of Life has ferried Us across deaths raging flood. (Water, Blood, and Spirit Crying, LSB 597:2)
There was a certain rich man…and a certain poor man whose name was Lazarus.
(Luke 16:1-2)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You either have a name or you don’t. The rich man did. Why wouldn’t he? He was rich. He feasted sumptuously, lavishly, luxuriously every day. It even sounds like he lived in a gated community! (Okay, so they didn’t quite have those back then, but you get my point.) He was rich. He lived the part, dressed the part, and ate the part.

But He didn’t have a name. He’s nameless. All his stuff may have made him rich and wealthy, but they didn’t give him a name. All the gods of his possessions were powerless and vain. They couldn’t help this man when “died and was buried.”

Lazarus. He had a name. By what people could see, all he had were the wild dogs. They were his only friends. He had no one. He had nothing. His only desire was to eat the scraps and partially eaten food that fell from that rich man’s table.

His physical eyes may have been focused on the food he needed, but his eyes of faith were fixed on the One who gave him his name—the Lord. Lazarus had faith in Him who saved him. No matter what happened around him, the things the Lord had promised and done for Lazarus were all that mattered. The angels of the Lord watched over him, and when he died, they took him to “Abraham’s bosom,” that is, a way of talking about eternal life.

You have a name. It’s yours in Baptism. There you’re given all that your Savior and Lord and God Jesus has done for you. You receive His suffering, death, and resurrection. Nothing can change that. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He gives you His Word, Moses, and the prophets and the apostles, telling you again what He’s done for you—died and risen. He heals your wounds, feeds you His Body and Blood.

You either have a name or you don’t, and you do. It’s not from your life or stuff or popularity. It’s from Jesus your Savior, and you have it forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, the Strength of all who trust in You, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing, grant us Your grace to keep Your commandments that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Trinity 1)
The Nativity of St. John the Baptist
June 24, 2019

Today’s Reading: Luke 1:57-80
Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 30:1-9, 18-33; John 20:1-18

“…to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins.” (Luke 1:77)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. John was a preacher. We normally of thinking of him as a baptizer. I mean, it’s even in his title: John the Baptist. But still, he was a preacher. He was the forerunner of Jesus. He was preparing the Lord’s way, Jesus’ way, the Way’s way. He was like the surveyor or the crew who tears down the trees so that the road can be built.

John was a preacher and baptizer, and he did both for the same reason. He didn’t just preach doom and gloom. He did preach repentance, but He also preached forgiveness of sins. He delivered Baptism “for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3). That was John’s work, which is good, because sinners need that.

You and I do, too. We all need preachers and baptizers. Sure, they aren’t forerunners anymore. They’re messengers of what’s happened in Jesus, that He died and rose, that He forgives sinners, He baptizes them, that He eats with them, feeding them His own Body and Blood which were given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

We doubt the Lord’s Word. We live for ourselves. We reject His message and gift of new life and forgiveness, choosing to live in our sins and unrighteousness. We do that daily and much. We’re like John’s dad Zachariah, who didn’t listen to the Lord’s Word that was preached to him.

Rejoice! Jesus doesn’t leave you alone. He sends you a John—a preacher and baptizer. Your pastor does those things for you so that you would be given the knowledge of salvation in the forgiveness of your sins. Forgiveness is yours: in the Word, in the water, in the Body and Blood.

Remembering John’s birth, we’re thankful for the forerunner, but we’re also thankful for our modern day “Johns” who deliver Jesus’ cross-won forgiveness to us. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, through John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, You once proclaimed salvation. Now grant that we may know this salvation and serve You in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life; through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for the Nativity of St. John the Baptist)
There is no fear in love, but the finished love throws fear outside. (1 John 4:18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus said, “It is finished!” Salvation done. Suffering. Death. That’s how God loved the world. He gave up His Son. God put His love on display at Calvary. “God is love.” (1 John 4:16) He is love in the giving up of His Son, Jesus. Jesus is love in giving up His life into death for you. The Spirit is love by producing this fruit (love) in you through the Word and Gifts of Jesus (Galatians 5:22).

Jesus dead on a cross is everything. He was thrown outside the city for you. He finished everything. He finishes love all the way to suffering, death, and grave. “In this way His love is finished with us, and so we have boldness on the Day of Judgment” (1 John 4:17). We have His “finished love.” It’s His gift for us and to us.

We reject the gift by how we live toward others. We don’t live for them with Jesus’ love. We say we love God, but we don’t love those around us—not with Jesus’ finished love. Oftentimes in our daily lives, love isn’t finished. There’s always something else for them to do, and if they don’t do it, well, we go after them, are harsh with them, rude to them, mean to them. Maybe not to their faces, though, but certainly behind their backs. Our love for others isn’t just seen in how we treat them to their faces, but how we treat them behind their backs, too. “If anyone says, ‘I love God’ and hates his brother, he’s a liar” (1 John 4:20).

But love isn’t finished with us. It’s finished in Jesus’ cross. “It is finished,” He said. He delivers that love to us. He washes us in His love and forgiveness. He unites us in His Body and Blood, a meal of love—forgiveness not just for you but for those around you, too. He showers His finished love upon you again and again so that you have no fear. “Whoever’s afraid is not finished in His love” (1 John 4:18). He would finish you in it, just as He already finished once for all at Calvary.

“We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). That’s just what happens. God loves you. He is love. The Father is love in the giving up of His Son. Jesus is love in giving up His own life for you. The Spirit is love by producing growing love within you (Galatians 5:22). That’s how He loves you, and that finished love He will finish within you, both in this life and the life to come. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

He who began a good work in you will fully finish it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)
What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not entice or force away our neighbor’s wife, workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty. (The Small Catechism: Tenth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “Evil thoughts come out of the heart” (Matthew 15:19). That’s our problem—a heart problem. It draws us after so many other things, even after other people! We don’t’ “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Instead, we desire, crave, want all sorts of other things.

We don’t cherish what God has given to us, and so we want other things, even and especially the stuff He’s gifted to those around us. We also do it with people. It seems a little odd that God would command us not to desire or want other people. If we’ve got friends, maybe we want better ones. Sometimes we like our friend’s parents or siblings more than our own. Maybe we want a different coach or teacher or boss or coworkers. We want different stuff, different people in our lives. So we crave more. When we do that, we reject the Lord’s gifts, and we also reject being a gift for others.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). We need the Lord to do this for us. We could pray this our entire life, and we should! The Old Adam heart, a heart of stone, works death our entire life. But the Lord and His Spirit really do give us a new and clean heart. He secured it with His cross. He desired to save you. He wanted you to have a new heart instead of the covetous one you’ve got. His own heart was pierced for it.

Now, He delivers it in Holy Baptism. There your heart is cleansed, and your new heart and life are strengthened through Jesus’ Body and Blood. So we keep asking the Lord to do what He’s already doing and will continue to do: “Let us approach with a true heart in boldness of faith, our hearts being sprinkled from an evil conscience and our body washed by clean water” (Hebrews 10:22).

Your coveting has been paid for by Jesus’ blood. You’re washed clean from it with His water and blood (John 19:34). Now, you’re baptized to be a gift to others and love them, serve them, forgive them. They are your gift from Him, too. The Lord’s given you all that you need! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
And he believed in Yahweh, and He credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Word of the LORD paid a visit to Abram. The Word of the LORD appeared and spoke to Abram about the blessings that would come from Abram. A Savior and salvation would come from Abram.

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1). That Word came to Abram, and the Word came from Abram. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

We forget that Abram is just like us. He’s a sinner, of course. But the people in the Old Testament weren’t saved by the Law or by good works or by anything that they thought, said, or did. They were saved by Jesus, the Word of God. In fact, Jesus, the Word of God, appeared to Abram, spoke to him, preached the Gospel to him. Abram heard the preaching of the Savior ahead of time from the Savior Himself: “In you all nations of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).

Abram believed this promise. He believed in Yahweh and in the Word of Yahweh. Sure, Jesus hadn’t been born yet, but He was delivered to Abram’s time through the Lord’s own preaching. “And he believed in Yahweh, and He credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

You, too. Jesus is delivered to you now. You believe in Him, too. He’s saved you, too. Died for you, rose for you, preached to you just as much as He did all those things for Abram. What Jesus has done for you is credited to your account. His righteousness is yours. His salvation yours. It’s all yours by faith alone. Faith He creates within you in the same way He created it in Abram—through His Word.

The Word of the LORD paid a visit to Abram. He saved him. The Word of the LORD, Jesus, visits you, too. He saves you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The whole triumphant host Give thanks to God on high. “Hail, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!” They ever cry. Hail, Abr’ham’s God and mine! I join the heav’nly lays: All might and majesty are Thine And endless praise! (The God of Abraham Praise, LSB 798:9)
Friday of the First Week after Trinity
June 28, 2019


Immediately they fell from his eyes like scales, he received his sight, and also, after he got up, he was baptized. (Acts 9:18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Paul was a bad dude. He killed people, or at least was there and was super happy they were being killed. He was an accomplice to the murder of Christians just because they were Christians.

Jesus fixed that. He fixed Paul. He repented Paul. But it wasn’t just what Jesus did. It’s what He said, “Paul, why are you persecuting Me?” “Um, who are You, Lord?” Paul knowingly asked. But Jesus wasn’t out to strike Paul dead. He did kill Paul, though, and brought him back to life. Paul was baptized.

What Jesus did for Paul, He does for all Christians. He saves them, brings them out of their sins, and resurrects them to new life in Him. It doesn’t matter if they’re murderers or prostitutes or tax collectors. It doesn’t even matter if it’s people like you and me! Jesus would save us.

He does! He already did! He died for us on the cross. There He “bore our sins” (big ones, little ones) “in His own body on the tree. By His wounds you are healed” (1 Peter 2:24). Through His Word, through His preacher, through His Baptism, Jesus removes the scales from your eyes so you can see Him, and He baptizes you into His death and resurrection. In short, He saves you.

Paul’s life is for our comfort. If Jesus saved the likes of him, he’ll save the likes of you and me, too! No amount of good works gets us to Jesus, no amount of sins keeps us away from Him, either. Jesus fixes you, saves you. He calls you from your sin and death to forgiveness and new life. He calls you to love and serve those around you.


Praise for the light from heaven And for the voice of awe; Praise for the glorious vision The persecutor saw. O Lord, for Paul’s conversion, We bless Your name today; Come shine within our darkness, And guide us on our way. (By All Your Saints in Warfare, LSB 517:12)
When they understood the gift that was given to me by God, they extended the right hand of fellowship to me and Barnabas, that we would go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised, for the One who worked in Peter for the sake of circumcised worked also in me for the sake of the Gentiles. (Galatians 2:7–9)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “The Lord gives His gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8). That’s what He does. He delivers Gifts, His salvation, to us. “For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man” (Nicene Creed). The preaching of His salvation is also for everyone.

It’s true that He was “born of the house and lineage of David” (Luke 2:4). Jesus was a Jew. But even during His ministry many Gentiles came to Him in faith, trusting that He would save them or those they loved from sin, death, and the devil.

Yes, He sent His apostles to preach Jesus’ free salvation. He sent them to both Jews and Gentiles. Same Gospel. Same Jesus. For everyone. Works didn’t save them. Circumcision didn’t save them. Their bad deeds didn’t unsave them! Jesus delivered this preaching to the Jews through Peter, and He also delivered it to the Gentiles through Paul.

You, too! Whether you’re of Jewish descent or not, whether you’ve been a life-long Christian or not, faithful or not, have big sins or not, have lots of good works or not, Jesus is for you. He died for you. He rose for you. He’s delivered to you, just the same as He was then. Through preachers. Sure, it’s not Peter and Paul now (unless that happens to be your pastor’s name). But Jesus still delivers His cross-won, empty-tomb-certain salvation right to you in water, Word, and Body and Blood.

“The Lord gives His gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8). That’s what He does. He delivers Gifts, His salvation, to us, to you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful and eternal God, Your holy apostles Peter and Paul received grace and strength to lay down their lives for the sake of Your Son. Strengthen us by Your Holy Spirit that we may confess Your truth and at all times be ready to lay down our lives for Him who laid down His life for us, even Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles)
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The man who said this while eating bread with Jesus was speaking presumptuously. “Blessed is everyone, myself included, who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.” He presumed he was an insider, probably because he was religious.

Jesus serves up a parable. A man threw a great banquet and invited all his important and influential friends to come. But when the feast was ready, the A-listers had other plans and a bunch of excuses. This made the man angry, so he told his servants to go out into the streets and alleys and round up those who had never been invited to anything—the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind—beggars all.

The man’s banquet hall was filled with beggars of all sorts. But there were still empty seats. So he told his servants to go out to the highways and shake the bushes and literally compel people to come to the feast. No invitations; compel them. He wants a full house.

In the end, the only people who are left out of the party are those who should have been there in the first place. And whose fault is it? It’s their own fault, their own most grievous fault for refusing a free meal.

Remember this parable the next time old Adam tempts you to skip out on church, forego the Sacrament, or despise preaching and God’s Word. You have only yourself to blame for missing out.

Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed! The table is set. Come, fill God’s banquet hall with beggars! Come to the Supper for sinners! Compel old Adam to get up and get to church. The Lamb, who was slain, lives and reigns for you. The Good Shepherd has prepared a banquet table for you in the face of your enemies: sin and death. The Spirit invites you, urges you, compels you to come to the Feast. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Feast is ready. Come to the Feast, The good and the bad. Come and be glad! Greatest and least, Come to the Feast! (O Kingly Love, That Faithfully, Lutheran Worship, 346)
Monday of the Second Week after Trinity
July 1, 2019

Today’s Reading: Proverbs 9:1-10

“Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight.” (Proverbs 9:6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. In the Proverbs, Lady Wisdom is the virtuous woman, the Holy Housekeeper who has built her home, slaughtered the fattened calf, fermented her wine, and sent her servant girls into the streets inviting everyone to come to her feast. If you’re wise, you’ll take her up on her invitation.

The opposite of Wisdom is Folly. She’s the loose woman, the kind your father warned you about. She’s seductive and her wine is sweet, but her ways are foolish and her end is your destruction. Stay away from her! Lady Wisdom’s house is where you belong.

Lady Wisdom invites the simple, those of childlike trust, to come and learn her ways. Only the simple are teachable; the learned already know everything. Their minds are closed. Jesus said, “Unless you become as children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” Not childish, but childlike; simple not stupid.

Christ is our Wisdom. He is the Wisdom of God incarnate. Don’t be distracted by the flip-flop in pronouns. “Wisdom” is a feminine noun in Hebrew and in Greek. Christ is Lady Wisdom of the Proverbs, calling out to God’s children, “Come to my house; eat my bread, drink my wine, hear my Word and became wise to your salvation in me.”

We think we know it all, don’t we? Just because we’ve heard something, doesn’t mean we know it or trust it. Such foolishness! That’s why we return to church each week to hear the same message. That’s why we return to the catechism like a little child learning his ABCs. The simple know that they don’t know and are eager to be taught. That is being wise in the Wisdom of God, being faithful, full of faith in Jesus, who is the Wisdom of God come down to us. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Father in heaven, show us our simplicity that we may become wise in Your Wisdom, who is our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. They were two very unlikely mothers-to-be: one, a virgin, the other old enough to be your grandmother or even great-grandmother. Fresh from the angelic news that she would conceive the Son of God in her virginity, Mary scampers off to the hill country of Judea to stay with cousin Elizabeth, who was six months pregnant in her seniority. With God, nothing is impossible.

The Holy Spirit prompts Elizabeth to bless Mary and her Baby and to confess her younger cousin as “mother of my Lord” with insight that would take the Church almost 400 years to figure out. Even John does a pre-natal leap for joy at the sound of Mary’s voice. That Baby is His Lord, too, for whom he would be the prophetic forerunner.

It seems all so strange to us skeptical, sophisticated, scientific people. We know from basic biology that virgins don’t conceive, nor do women past the childbearing years, medical interventions notwithstanding. We know from our own experience at funerals that dead men don’t rise from the dead.

But nothing is impossible with God. A virgin conceived. Her crucified Son rose from the dead. The Word became Flesh. Sinners are forgiven and stand justified before God for Jesus’ sake. Elizabeth and Mary testify to the power of the Word of God to do what it says. The Word brings life to the barren womb and the virgin womb as surely as it causes light to shine out of darkness and life to spring from the barren earth. The Word does what it says.

You, baptized into Christ, are a child of God, an heir of eternal life. God has spoken His life-creating Word to you. Blessed are you who believe what the Lord has spoken to you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Father in heaven, with You nothing is impossible. An old woman and a Virgin both conceived and bore sons. Your Son, the Child of the Virgin, died and rose, bearing our Sin. You have made us your children in Baptism. Grant us to believe what you have spoken to us, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
Wednesday of the Second Week after Trinity
July 3, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 8:1-28; Acts 11:1-18

“I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God.” (Small Catechism: Close of the Commandments)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jealousy doesn’t seem to be an appropriate adjective or attribute of God. Loving, merciful, gracious, and forgiving—yes. But jealous? We associate “jealous” with the stalker boyfriend or girlfriend, the one who is always suspicious and doesn’t trust anyone, who wants to know where you’ve been and who you’ve been with and always assumes the worst.

Our jealousy is not the same as God’s. Our jealousy comes out of a sinful, self-centered heart. It seeks to control others and take them captive to our will, whims and wishes. Jealousy turns our loves into hostages.

God’s jealousy is different, though it may at times look the same as ours. His jealousy is the flip side of His love. He loves us so much that He wants us all to Himself and will share us with no other gods. That’s why He gave Israel the commandments. Israel was uniquely His holy people, and He was jealous of the Baals, the Asherahs, the Marduks, and the other “gods,” not because they were competition but because they threatened to get between Him and His people.

The commandments were given to guard the Israelites against the seductions of other “gods,” to ensure right worship, to protect the gifts of authority, life, sex, property, reputation, and contentment. But the Israelites, like each of us, were sin-enslaved and death-driven, and wanted to keep a few “gods” on the side along with the Lord.

The Lord is a zealous God. And in His zealous love, He sent His Son to bring us back to Him. Jesus is the love of God in action. He seeks the wayward and lost. He goes to the depths of death to bring us back to God. He does the commandment and lets the commandment kill Him, and He won’t stop loving until you belong to Him completely. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Father in heaven, your zeal for my salvation leads You to be jealous of anything that gets between us. Your Son Jesus, my Savior, has brought me to you by His Spirit. Grant me the same zeal for you that you have for me. Amen.
By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. To love is to lay down one’s life. Husbands lay down their lives for their wives; wives lay down their lives for their husbands. Father and mothers lay down their lives for their children. Soldiers lay down their lives out of love for country. “Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends,” Jesus said. “I am the good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” Jesus laid down His life in order to save us; and we in love lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Note the order carefully. We love because God in Christ first loved us. We must first be loved by God before we can love one another. Jesus must first lay down His life on the cross before we can take up our cross, follow Him, and lay down our lives for one another. God’s love in Christ always comes first because our sin-sick humanity cannot, indeed will not love sacrificially.

Old Adam loves those who love him. He lays down his life only when there is something to be gained, some return on his sacrificial investment. His love is self-centered, not other-centered. But that’s not the way of Jesus, nor is it the way of the baptized child of God in Jesus. We are given a new way to love one another: as Christ first loved us. That’s how the new you in Christ loves – with that same seeking, sacrificing, love with which God loved the world, and you, in Jesus. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

My song is love unknown, My Savior’s love for me, Love to the loveless shown That they might lovely be. Oh, who am I That for my sake My Lord should take Frail flesh and die? (My Song is Love Unknown, LSB 430:1)
Friday of the Second Week after Trinity
July 5, 2019

Today's Reading: Ephesians 2:13-22

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You know how it feels to be the “outsider”—not invited to the party, not chosen for the team, not asked to the dance. You know how we build walls—boundaries that divide us into tribes, sub-cultures, the “good guys” and the “bad guys.”

In the Old Testament Scriptures, a wall separating the Israelite from the non-Israelite, God’s people from “the nations,” the circumcised from the uncircumcised. If you were an uncircumcised Gentile, you were an outsider, not chosen for God’s team, a foreigner to the people of God. That division was a picture of a yet deeper division: sin that divided us from God, and the Law that walled off the sinner from the holy God.

Christ came to break down dividing walls, demolish barriers, bring those far off near, and unite all of humanity under one Head. He preached peace to the Israelite and non-Israelite, the insider and the outsider, the religious and unreligious. Like the shape of His cross, Jesus’ peace is both vertical and horizontal. He reconciles humanity to God and humanity with itself.

You are no outsider or stranger to God. Baptized into Christ you are a citizen of God’s kingdom, a member of God’s household, a living stone of a holy, spiritual temple built upon the prophets and apostles with Christ the Cornerstone. You have access. The Law that walled off the sinner from God has been torn down by the blood of Jesus just as the curtain of the temple was ripped from top to bottom at Jesus’ death.

There may be times when you feel as though you are nothing in this world—alone, outcast, a stranger and foreigner. But in Christ, you are a saint, a citizen of heaven, a priest in Christ’s priesthood, a part of Christ’s Body, a member of God’s family. And in Christ, there are no walls to separate us ever again. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Father in heaven, remind us each day of who we are in your Son Jesus Christ, and make us instruments of His peace; through Christ, our Lord. Amen.
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Loneliness is different from solitude. Solitude is a peaceful form of being alone. It gives us space for prayer, for study, for thoughtful reflection on God’s Word. Loneliness is isolation, being turned inward, walled off from others. You can be lonely in a crowded room.

Afflictions and troubles can bring loneliness and isolation. We hide ourselves behind closed doors. Pain, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, can cause us to shun the company of others.

Sin isolates us. Luther called original sin the heart turned inward on itself. Sin isolated Adam from his wife, and it isolated him from God. It isolates us as well. We stay away from church. We stop talking to people. Perhaps we said it, or maybe we just thought it. “I just want to die.”

You are not alone. The saints of Scripture all went through the same kind of thing. Jeremiah was constantly distressed over his prophetic vocation. Elijah once sat under a broom tree and asked God to take his life. The apostle Paul spoke of his many afflictions. Luther called it “tentatio,” a time of testing.

Jesus knows well the loneliness of affliction. He is the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with suffering. He felt the abandonment of God: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He prayed in anguish, alone in the Garden, without any answer from His Father. He knows what it’s like to be alone and in anguish.

For Jesus’ sake, we can turn to God in our loneliness and pray, “Turn to me, O Lord, and be gracious to me,” trusting that He will turn and be gracious. He hears our cries, He considers our troubles, He forgives our sins. He blesses and restores us. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Father in heaven, you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. Thank you that we have a Savior who truly understands our sufferings and that through Him, your Son, you hear us when we cry out to you. Amen.
The Third Sunday after Trinity
July 7, 2019

Today's Reading: Luke 15:1-10

Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Luke 15:1-10

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Which of you would leave 99 sheep alone in the wilderness to go after one stray sheep, and when you find it, carry it back home, and throw a party in its honor? The answer is: No one in his right mind would do that! Which of you would spend all day looking for coin, and when you find you, throw a party and spend ten times what the coin was worth? Answer: No one.

God’s ways aren’t our ways. He seeks the lost and rejoices in the found. The religious were grumbling over Jesus’ dining habits. “He receives sinners and eats with them.” Outrageous! Shame on Him!

Shame on them, and us, too, when we judge the sin of others and fail to confess our own. Imagine a church with no sinners. It would be empty. Imagine a Lord’s Supper without sinners. There would be no communicants. Imagine if God just let sinful humanity grope in the darkness to find its way home. No one would be found. As Adam was banished to the wilderness, so we are born as lost sheep. And God sent His Son Jesus to find Adam and his children. You and I are that lost coin, a dead asset unable to find itself. And Christ spent everything He had to find us, redeeming us not with gold and silver coins, but with His precious blood and death. The joy of Jesus is the joy of your salvation for which He endured the shame of the cross.

This is the searching, seeking love of God that restlessly pursues the lost until they are found, and when they are found there is rejoicing in heaven. Whenever you confess your sinfulness, whenever you kneel at the Lord’s Table, whenever a sinner is baptized into Christ, there is rejoicing among the angels in heaven.

This Man receives sinners and eats with them. Thanks be to God! That means He receives you and wants to eat with you at His table! Rejoice! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Father in heaven, Your Son sought me when I did not seek you; He found me in my lostness; He brought me. The angels rejoice, and I praise you, for Your Son’s sake. Amen.
Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? (Micah 7:18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God is unique. Well, of course He is! There is no other God except the Triune God who made the heavens and the earth and redeemed the world by the death and resurrection of the Son. But God is not like the “gods” we invent for ourselves.

Our “gods” are bargaining gods. Dealing with them is like negotiating for a raise or a Persian rug in a street market. Our gods demand payment, bribes, retribution. If you do well, they might reward you; if you don’t do well, they will punish you. You have to climb the holiness ladder up to them. You have to rise up to meet their standards. You have to keep your end of the deal, and maybe they will keep their end. You have to impress them with your creeds, your worship, your keeping of commandments.

Not so the true God. He pardons iniquity; He passes over transgression. He delights in covenant love—love to the loveless because He promised to love. He is compassionate, slow to anger, quick to forgive. He doesn’t trample His worshippers; He tramples their sin and casts it into the deep. He is the God who keeps His promises even though His worshippers are promise-breakers.

He is the God who becomes Man, the Creator who becomes the creature in order to save His creation. He is the God who lies swaddled in a manger, who grows up humbly as the son of a carpenter in Nazareth, who is baptized as a sinner, who suffers, bleeds, and dies so that sinners might be justified.

We would never invent such “gods” for ourselves. The religions we invent are always about sinners trying to appease some angry god because that’s how we are when people sin against us. We want our “pound of flesh.” We want justice. We want retribution and repayment.

Who is a God like the Lord, our God? There is none but Him: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. We know Him through the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful, compassionate, forgiving God in the Flesh. Thanks be to God! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. (1 Timothy 1:15)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The sins of others always look worse than our own. It’s easy to look at the world and see a bunch of sinners far worse than me – the murderers, adulterers, thieves, liars. We read the news and think, “Thank God I’m not like those sinners out there.”

Jesus reminded the religious Pharisees that their own hearts were just as sin-filled as the sinners they judged. They imagined they were pure and holy for keeping God’s commandments, yet their hearts were filled with the same murder, adultery, theft, and lies they saw in others. It’s terribly easy to see that speck in the brother’s eye and not deal with the two-by-four in our own eye made out of the very same wood.

The apostle Paul sets a good example for us all. When it comes to sin, take the first seat as “chief of sinners.” Paul had good reason to say this. He was a blasphemer, a persecutor of Christians, a stubborn opponent of Christ. Yes, he acted out of ignorance in unbelief. But that’s no excuse, and Paul makes no excuses. He is the chief of sinners.

Yet God used Paul. He made an example of mercy out of him. The blasphemer becomes the baptized confessor. The persecutor becomes the defender of the faith. The stubborn opponent becomes the apostle of Christ. And this wasn’t Paul’s doing, but the grace of God that overflowed with faith and love in Christ. In Paul, God showed the world what it means to confess, “Christ Jesus came to save sinners.” Each of us can rightly confess the same thing. We are the worst of sinners. And Christ is always a greater Savior.

Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me. Died that I might live on high, Lives that I might never die. As the branch is to the vine, I am His, and He is mine. (Chief of Sinners Though I Be, LSB 611:1)
Our Father who art in heaven. (Small Catechism: Introduction to the Lord’s Prayer)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There is an invitation in these words: God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.

To call God, the Maker of the universe, “Father,” seems a bit familiar if not somewhat “cheeky.” It’s like calling a judge in court or the police officer who pulls you over for speeding by his first name. That’ll land you in jail. We’re talking about the God who made the heavens and the earth by the power of His Word. How dare we call him “Father,” “Abba,” “Daddy.”

How dare we, who are sinners, call God Father? Who are we to presume that we are on such good terms with God? How dare we? Well, we dare because Jesus, the Son of God, said so. “When you pray, say, ‘Our Father in heaven.’” And Jesus the Son knows what pleases His Father.

The tender invitation comes in Baptism where we are birthed as children of God. There we receive the Spirit of adoption who cries out, “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). There we also received the Our Father, the prayer Jesus gave His disciples. Baptism is our permission to call God “Father” with delight. We are His children in Christ, and the Father loves to hear His children say “Abba, Father.”

It means that God obligates Himself to hear our prayers. Imagine the Father relaxing in His favorite easy chair, and suddenly the phone rings, much like that parable of the friend pounding on the door at midnight. The Father just wants to relax, so the Son picks up the phone and says, “Dad, you need to take this one. It’s family.”

Your Father in heaven always takes your call, because Jesus the Son insists upon it. He died and rose to win you the privilege to call God “Father.” You are family. You are a child of God, baptized into the Son, praying in the Spirit. When you pray, say, “Our Father.” In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Humility seems to be in short supply these days. That’s because we don’t like to admit that we are helpless. Helplessness is a sign of weakness, and weakness means that you get beat up on the playground of life. The spoils go to the strong, the bold, the confident. It takes a measure of arrogance to stand up in public and say, “Vote for me,” “Listen to me,” “Buy my recording.” To quote an old country-western song, “It’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way.”

Our anxieties remind us that we are not as mighty as we think we are. If we were, we would have no anxieties. We would worry about nothing because we would conquer anything that gets in our way. But our anxious hearts tell us something different. We are under the mighty hand of God, and the sooner we recognize this, the better it will be for us.

We cannot conquer our spiritual enemies: sin, death, and the devil. The devil knows this, and he stalks around looking for the lone sheep, the one who is isolated from the flock, the one who thinks he or she can go it alone. “Resist him,” Peter says. Resist the devil by standing firm in the faith, which means, resist him with Christ. Christ alone conquers sin, death, and devil for us. He was humbled in our flesh to death on the cross. He died our death and was buried in our tomb. And from the depths of death, He was exalted as Lord of all, in heaven, on earth, and even under the earth (Philippians 2:5-11).

In Him you are exalted, even now, at the right hand of God. So humble yourselves. Humble old Adam and put him in his place, drowned in the baptismal deep. God will lift you up in Jesus. He already has. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Lord Jesus, teach me the way of humility, the way of your cross, the way of dying in order to live. I cast my cares on you, for you care for me. Deliver me from the evil one and his lies, and grant me to resist him standing firm in the confession of your holy Name. Amen.
Friday of the Third Week after Trinity
July 12, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Judges 7:1-23; Galatians 1:1-24

And the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars, holding in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow; and they cried, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” (Judges 7:20)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Gideon had a decent army to fight the Midianites: 32,000 men. Gideon, like any warrior, was thinking in terms of strength in numbers. Outnumber your opponent, and you will gain the victory.

But the Lord works in weakness. With an army that large, the Israelites would take credit and say, “We beat them with our own hands,” forgetting that it was the Lord’s hand at work. So God winnowed down Gideon’s forces from 32,000 to 300. That was more than 100 times fewer soldiers! God’s strength is in weakness.

The apostle Paul noted the same thing with the Corinthians as he boasted in his weaknesses. He prayed three times for the Lord to remove a particular weakness, some “thorn in the flesh,” but God’s response was, “No. My grace is sufficient for you; for my power is perfected in weakness.”

Our tendency is to rely upon our strength; God’s tendency is to use our weakness as His strength. We may be ready to draft an army of sword-bearing soldiers to fight for the kingdom of God, but God gains the victory with a handful of soldiers armed with trumpets, torches, and clay jars.

The Church in this world never appears to be very strong. Its strength is Jesus Christ and His cross. At times, the Church may seem to be nothing more powerful than 300 Israelites with trumpets, jars, and torches against a world full of Midianites conspiring against it, but with the Lord, the resurrection victory is always sure.

Jesus conquered sin and death with His solitary death on a cross. He conquers the world with His preached Word, with baptismal water, with Communion bread and wine. Even two or three bending their knee in the Name of Jesus can conquer sin, death, and hell. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Lord, teach me the way of weakness that I may conquer in the strength of Your cross. Amen.
The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1 from the Introit for Trinity 4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Fear is the great paralyzer of our humanity. Adam hid from God because he was afraid. We fail to take risks, venture into new things, reach outside of our comfort zone because we are afraid.

Fear, like love and trust, is a pointer to potential idols. God wants our love and trust above all things. He also wants our fear. “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things” (Small Catechism). “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). God deals with fear by becoming our biggest fear, and therefore, we have nothing left to fear. “Of whom shall I be afraid?”

The greatest fear of our humanity is death and damnation. We fear that which can destroy our bodies: violence, illness, misfortune. The bullet, the cancer cell, the car accident. Even more fearful is the just judgment for our sin, which is damnation, the “second death” (Revelation 2:11).

Jesus came to absorb all our fears. He took on death by dying. He took on damnation by being condemned for us. The cross disarmed the Law, taking away the venom of death’s sting (1 Corinthians 15:55). In Christ, there is no fear, only perfect love which drives away every fear (1 John 4:18).

Baptized and believing in Jesus, you can live fearlessly in this world. What is the worst that can happen to you? Christ has you covered. The Lord is your light and your salvation; whom shall you fear? The Lord is the stronghold of your life; of whom shall you be afraid? Your enemies are conquered; your Savior lives. You are free to risk, to venture, to reach out, to serve Him without fear all the days of your life. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

He lives to silence all my fears; He lives to wipe away my tears;
He lives to calm my troubled heart; He lives all blessings to impart.
(I Know that My Redeemer Lives, LSB 461:5)
The Fourth Sunday after Trinity
July 14, 2019

Today's Reading: Luke 6:36-42
Daily Lectionary: Judges 14:1-20; Galatians 3:1-22

Be merciful, as your Father in heaven is merciful. (Luke 6:36)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Children reflect their parents, for good and for ill. We have the DNA of our mothers and fathers, half of each, giving us our genetic identity. We look like our parents, walk like them, talk like them, act like them. We reflect our first parents as well, as children of Adam and Eve. We have the same sin at work in us that led them to disobey God. We all share in their sin and death.

Baptized into Christ, we are twice-born, born “from above” (John 3:3, 5) by water and Spirit. We have God as our Father, holy Church as our Mother, Jesus as our Brother. As God’s children, we reflect our Father in our new birth. The Father is merciful; His children are merciful.

Jesus came to do God’s mercy in the world. He was judged for us. He was condemned for us. He came to forgive and to give the gifts of His kingdom. He came not to judge but to forgive, not to condemn but to save. Jesus is the mercy of God in the Flesh. And you in Him are merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful.

We don’t judge others, because we ourselves are not judged. Jesus was judged in our place. To judge others is to say that Jesus’ death means nothing. Yes, we do judge works and actions, as our works and actions done in the flesh will be judged. But we are not judged, nor are we condemned. Christ was condemned in our place.

It’s so easy to spot that speck of sin in our brother’s eye and yet fail to recognize the beam in our own eye made of the very same sinful wood. What we see in others is also at work in us. This is why Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive us our trespasses,” for we daily sin much. But God is merciful in Jesus. He deals with the beam in our eye to give us the vision to help our brother with the speck in his eye.

We are forgiven, and so we forgive. We are mercied, and so we are merciful. And in our giving and forgiving, we resemble our Father in heaven. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Father, teach us the way of repentance and faith, that we may be merciful even as you are merciful in Jesus. Amen
Monday of the Fourth Week after Trinity
July 15, 2019

Today’s Reading: Genesis 50:15-21
Daily Lectionary: Judges 15:1-16:3; Galatians 3:23-4:11

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Genesis 50:20)

Joseph’s brothers had good reason to worry. They sold him to slave traders. They told his father he was dead. He went from Pharoah’s prison to high office in Pharoah’s government, in charge of all the food supply in Egypt. He helped his brothers in need. And now Father Jacob was dead, and the brothers were worried. Would Joseph take revenge?

They told him that their father had said on his deathbed that Joseph must forgive them for what they had done to him. They bowed before him as his servants. But Joseph says something amazingly faithful: “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.” They sold him into slavery, and out of his slavery he saved his family from famine and starvation. God took evil and made good out of it.

Joseph is the Christ figure of this story. His brothers’ sin is used to work their salvation. The world meant it for evil when it crucified Jesus, the sinless Son of God, yet God used Jesus’ death for good, working the salvation of the world.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). That reconciliation works in two ways: God forgives the sinner for Jesus’ sake, and through the all-reconciling death of Jesus, God makes good out of evil. Jesus prays, “Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.” And then He dies, bearing in Himself the sin of the world, including those who crucified Him.

You are forgiven in Jesus Christ. Your sins are washed away in His blood. The evil you’ve done has been reconciled for good by the God who works all things together for good. That goes also for the evil done to you. It’s all reconciled to God in Christ and woven together into a tapestry of good. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Father in heaven, by Your grace Joseph forgave his brothers and recognized the good You worked through their evil. Teach us to forgive in the same way and trust the reconciling death of Jesus in all things. Amen.
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We are made to live in community – family, congregation, society. It’s not always easy, even as sanctified sinner-saints. Just look at the number of times the apostle Paul has to remind Christian congregations to get along with each other. Living together in close proximity is like dancing on a crowded dance floor. Inevitably people are going to crash into each other and step on one another’s toes. The only way to avoid that is to live alone in isolation, and that is not good.

The apostle Paul gives us a recipe for life together as God’s children. Bless your persecutors. Rejoice with rejoicers; weep with weepers. Be sympathetic to those around you. Live in harmony. Life together is a symphony, not a bunch of soloists. Don’t be proud. Pride is the first of the deadly sins, and for good reason. It’s the arrogance of old Adam. The antidote to pride is to hang out with the kid no one talks to, the person everyone avoids, the outliers. Don’t think you are so wise; you’re not. Do what is honorable. Don’t take revenge; leave it to the Lord to settle scores. If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. Deal with the pollution of evil by diluting it with good.

That’s the life of Christ at work in the lives of His saints. And you are one of His saints, baptized into His life, death, and resurrection. Old Adam, our sinful self, wants to make it all about “me.” But the saint lives in Christ, and Christ lives in him.

When our life together as family, congregation, and community reflects the life of Jesus, then we will be as salt to the earth and light for the world. Don’t be afraid to live as Christ in the world. You have His Spirit. You have been crucified with Christ. You no longer live, but Christ lives in you, and life you live in this flesh, you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and who gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Jesus, teach me each day to rise to live in You, that your life may shine through my life, and that the evil of this world would be overcome by the good of Your cross. Amen.
Hallowed be Thy Name. (Small Catechism: The Lord’s Prayer, First Petition)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What does this mean? God’s Name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also.

How is God’s Name kept holy? God’s Name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God’s Word profanes the Name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!

This time, rather than reflect upon this petition in our usual commentary fashion, let us pray together a four-fold prayer in the way of Luther:

Gracious Father in heaven, Your Name is holy as You are holy. You have made me holy by your Name in Baptism and have made me your child. By Your Name you forgive me and bless me.

I confess that I have profaned your Name on my lips and in my life. I have not spoken faithfully from your Word. I have dragged your Name into lies and deceit. I have not lived as your child according to your Word and have brought shame upon your Name. For this, I ask your forgiveness of Jesus’ sake.

I thank you that you have placed your Name upon me, that I may call upon you in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks to you. I thank you that you have given me my identity as your Child, bearing your Name, that I may know that I belong to you.

Teach me to hallow your Name in daily repentance and faith. Cleanse my lips from all falsehood, lies, and deceit. Cleanse my life from anything that would bring dishonor to your Name. Preserve me in your Name all the days of my life. Grant it for your Name’s sake. Amen.
For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The apostle Paul speaks twice in Romans of suffering. The first is in Romans 5 where he says we rejoice in our sufferings because suffering produces patient endurance, character, and hope. It’s something like the “no pain, no gain” philosophy of the gym. In Romans 8 Paul again returns to suffering, this time in comparison with the glory that is coming with the returning of Jesus on the Last Day. The two do not compare. The glory to come far surpasses the sufferings of this present moment, like the dim light of a candle compared to the sun.

The problem with suffering is that it is most intense when you are in the midst of it. It may be a deep emotional wound, a grief or loss of some sort, or physical pain caused by an illness or accident. It may be psychological suffering due to depression or some other malady. The pain is real, and everything of our body and being is focused on the pain. We see no way out. It’s like a prison cell with no windows.

This is where the life of faith in Christ takes on its true meaning as a life under the cross. Jesus promises no easy detour around pain and suffering. We must walk through the dark valley of the shadow of death. There is no other route through life. But like a good shepherd, Jesus goes ahead of us through that same valley. He suffered. He hurt. He died. And the end of His suffering and death brought resurrection to life. He rose, and because of Him, we, too, will rise.

The apostle Paul uses the same image that Jesus used of the sufferings of the end times: labor pains. The sufferings of this age are the labor pains of the new creation. Labor pains are suffering that brings life, not death. And the suffering of a mother in labor gives way to the joy of a child born into world. Jesus suffered so that your suffering would be sanctified, made holy, and birth you into resurrection and life in Him. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Lord, be with me in my suffering. Be my shepherd as I walk through this dark valley of death and tears. Let your wounds be my healing, let your tears be my joy, until that day I rise in your glory. Amen.
And there arose a sharp contention, so that they separated from each other; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. (Acts 15:39-40)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Sometimes we think that everything in the New Testament church was perfect and everyone got along without any arguments. But Luke tells a different story in Acts, one that demonstrates the reality of the church as a gathering of sinner-saints.

The mission to the Gentiles caused trouble. Uncircumcised Greeks were joining the church! And they were bringing unclean foods to the potluck! They had to call a special council to hear from the apostles and elders and figure out what to do. And they did, guided by the Holy Spirit, recognizing that Jesus came to save both Jew and Greek.

Later, at Antioch, Paul and Barnabas decided to go and revisit all the church they founded on their first missionary trip. Barnabas wanted to take his nephew John Mark along, to give him a second chance after returning home early the first time. But Paul didn’t want him. That started such an argument between the two apostolic missionaries that they had to go their separate ways. Paul took Silas and went to Asia Minor. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus.

Two missionaries disagree and split, and the Gospel is preached in two places instead of one. The Lord is resourceful. Is there any situation He can’t use to spread the Gospel of Jesus? In the book of Acts, persecution by the government and the religious authorities pushes the Gospel further and further out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. And the Word of the Lord grew.

Don’t imagine that God can’t work unless everything is peace, love, and harmony. God does His best work in the heat of conflict and controversy. As it is with Christ, so with His Body, the Church—God’s strength hidden under weakness. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Father, teach me to trust that Your will is done even when it doesn’t appear to be the case. Remind me not to be offended by the weakness of the church and her ministry, but to glory in the cross of Jesus and the Gospel, which is Your power for my salvation. Amen.
Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord! (Psalm 27:9 from the Introit for Trinity 5)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Waiting tests our patience. We wait in lines, in traffic, in waiting rooms. Waiting means doing nothing as precious time ticks by. Too often our impatience gives way to anger: road rage, angry thoughts, words, and actions.

Our technologies have shortened our attention spans and made us even more impatient. When a website takes more than a second or two to load, it seems like an eternity of waiting. We live in an “instant” society, where waiting more than a day or two for a delivery is unacceptable.

The Introit for tomorrow calls us to wait for the Lord. Jesus told His disciples that He would be coming soon and quickly. And here we are, almost two thousand years later, and still we wait. Is the Lord slow? Yes, by our impatient way of keeping time in hours, minutes, and seconds. But He is not slow in His way of time, where a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day (2 Peter 3:8).

We live in an end times pause between the old and the new creations. It’s history’s Sabbath Day, the day of God’s rest. The work of redemption is done. “It is finished.” Jesus has returned to His glory at the right hand of the Father. The Spirit has been poured out upon the earth. God’s pause is a time for repentance and faith for all people.

Waiting is a gift for the heart that has its rest in Jesus. You can pray when stuck in traffic. You can read the Scriptures in the waiting room. You can talk to the people around you in line and get to know them. And in those “do nothing but wait” moments, you can learn the discipline of Sabbath, rest, waiting on the Lord. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious Father, teach me the way of patient waiting, that I may rest in You. Give me the strength to do nothing, and the courage to trust in You for all things; in Jesus’ Name. Amen.
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.

1https://www.academia.edu/27888007/The_Collects_of_Veit_Dietrich)

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