Higher Things Reflections

Trinity 5-10

July 21 - August 31, 2019
2019 Reflections
Trinity 5 - 10

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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.
But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.” (Luke 5:5)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Peter here is an example of the Christian life: doubt of God's Word right alongside trust in God's Word. On the one hand, Peter, the fisherman, thinks Jesus probably doesn't know what He's talking about, telling Him where to put the net when they've tried all night to catch something. On the other hand, Peter has heard Christ's Word and has seen what it can do. The Lord's Word and promises win out over Peter's faithless heart.

This is a reminder to us, too. Our Old Adam doesn't fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Our new man in Christ trusts in no one other than Christ. It's a war inside us as to who emerges and wins out. But it's not up to us. The promises of Christ defeat your doubt and unbelief. The promises of Jesus deliver what they say. Jesus says, “There are the fish,” and their boats are sinking because there are so many! Jesus says, “I die to take away your sins.” Your sins are taken away. “I rise to give you life.” You have life.

Those same promises are sealed upon you at the font, confirmed in preaching and Absolution, and given in the Supper. They are Jesus' promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The amazing catch of fish makes Peter recognize what a sinning doubter he is. But it's not the Lord's purpose to shame Peter. Instead, it shows Peter what wonderful promises God has for him. So it is for you. Repent of your unbelief, not to be shamed, but to see that this is the Lord's gift. It shows you that all the promises He makes to you are true and sure and can't be broken. His Word saves you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, who has prepared for those that love You such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward You that we, loving You above all things, may obtain Your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Trinity 5)
Mary Magdalene
July 22, 2019

Today's Reading: John 20:1-2, 10-18

Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her. (John 20:18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Mary’s face was the first face Jesus saw after His coming back to life again on the Third Day. Jesus’ face was the first face Mary saw when she was resurrected, rescued from the darkness and death of being possessed by many demons. They were very close, but when Mary first saw the Lord Jesus on that first Easter, she didn’t recognize Him. She saw Him, heard Him, as a thieving gardener. She pleads with Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” In Mary’s estimation, Jesus is dead, because dead people stay dead.

That’s our problem in the face of death. We’re just like Mary. Once we’ve seen the face of a loved one who’s died, we think that’s it. But Jesus cuts through all the darkness and death. “Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to Him, ‘Rabboni!’” He’s not a gardener who’s a harbinger of death, sweeping it under the rug, bypassing it, ignoring it. Jesus is the type of Gardener who brings life from dust, life from nothing, life from death. He formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Jesus went through death and brought life from it. Life will come from cancer, sickness, pain, tragedy, death. It has to, and He has to because life and immortality shine forth from His empty tomb.

He calls us each by name. He gives His life to us. He prunes us. He tends us. He’s the type of Gardener who gives life. He gives you life. He waters you with it at the font. He bestirs the good air of forgiveness over you in Absolution. He strengthens you with good fertilizer, good food: His own Body and Blood in the Supper. When Jesus gardens you, you have life even in the midst of death. His face will be the first you see when your eyelids close the last time. He will call you by name, and will hold on to you forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

All praise for Mary Magdalene, Whose wholeness was restored By You, her faithful master, Her Savior and her Lord. On Easter morning early A word from You sufficed; For she was first to see You, Her Lord, the risen Christ. (By All Your Saints in Warfare, LSB 518:20)
Tuesday of the Fifth Week After Trinity
July 23, 2019

Today's Reading: 1 Peter 3:8-15

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” (1 Peter 3:14)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. These words of St. Peter take on a certain urgency when we see images of Christians being persecuted. It's strange. We look with horror upon these images and videos of Christians being slaughtered and then go back to watching cat videos on Facebook or arguing about ridiculous things with friends. But whether it's a blade to the neck or a scathing Internet post that mocks everything we hold dear, the apostle's words are a promise from the Lord: “Do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” How can he say that?

Jesus died. He suffered at the hands of His haters and enemies. And He rose again on the Third Day. You have been baptized into His death and resurrection. Therefore there is simply nothing in this world that can truly hurt you. It sure looks scary. It looks violent and painful. But you have the Lord's promise that nothing can truly harm you when you are His.

Christians believe such a promise because we have such a Savior whom the world could not overcome. It may have seemed like it for a time. Remember how the disciples locked themselves in the Upper Room out of fear? But these same Apostles ended up dying because they preached that Jesus was crucified and risen. Why the change? How did they go from cowards to bravehearts? The Holy Spirit put faith in them. They knew and believed and confessed that Christ was risen. If He was indeed alive as they had seen, there was nothing that could keep them down either.

So says your Baptism and Jesus' Body and Blood. The world can do what it wants to Christ's people, but it cannot overcome them. It cannot overcome you. It cannot defeat you. The worst it can do is put you to sleep for a time and then Jesus will raise you on the Last Day and it will be nothing but a distant memory that can't even compete with the joy and glory that is to come.

Do not be afraid. After all, Jesus died and rose. And that means He wins and so do you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

I walk with Jesus all the way, His guidance never fails me; Within His wounds I find a stay When Satan's pow'r assails me; And by His footsteps led, My path I safely tread. No evil leads my soul astray; I walk with Jesus all the way. (I Walk in Danger All the Way, LSB 716:5)
How does God’s kingdom come? God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity. (Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer, Second Petition)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. If God has a kingdom there must be a king. That was Satan’s challenge in the Garden of Eden. It was a power grab. He wanted to rule as king over creation. And if he couldn’t overthrow the king, well, then he would take the crown of creation down with him. But Satan is not the king. He is only a tyrant and an imposter.

And now, our old Adam thinks we’re the king as well and that we are the master of our own domain, the king of the castle, and the king of the hill. But we are not. We are more like the court jester, foolish in sin. But our problem is worse: The longer we go on thinking we’re king, the longer we remain enslaved to our sin. We’re not on the throne; we’re in the dungeon. We aren’t kings, either.

But by God’s grace, we are His subjects. For if God has a kingdom, there must be a king. And Jesus is our King. He rules from the cross to the right hand of God. He reigns in mercy, not tyranny. He comes to set us free from sin by enslaving Himself in our death. He overthrows Satan by ascending the throne of the cross for you. Jesus is the man born King for you.

And His kingdom comes to you by His Holy Spirit and Word. His kingdom comes to you in bread and wine. His kingdom washes over you in water and Word. His kingdom is present for you in His Word. King Jesus has issued His royal decree. You are forgiven! In the Name of + Jesus. Amen.

Your kingdom come. Guard Your domain And Your eternal righteous reign. The Holy Ghost enrich our day With gifts attendant on our way. Break Satan’s pow’r, defeat his rage; Preserve Your Church from age to age. (Our Father, Who from Heaven Above, LSB 766:3)
James the Elder, Apostle  
July 25, 2019

Today's Reading: Today's Reading: Mark 10:35-45

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. James and John, his brother, wanted to call shotgun for when Jesus would enter His glory and kingdom. They wanted the best seats—front row! The other disciples were upset with James’ and John’s request. They were upset because they hadn’t thought of it first!

But Jesus comes not for worldly glory or power. His glory is a cross on a trash-heap called Golgotha. There they crucified Him. There all the power and glory of God is seen when God dies for the sins of the world. “The Son of Man came…to give His life as a ransom for many.” Shotgun couldn’t be called. “With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left” (Mark 15:27).

James wasn’t crucified with His Lord, but His crucified and resurrected Lord sent James to proclaim not a glory and power of this world, not a utopian message, not a better morality, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the sins of the whole world. He was sent to deliver the Lord’s gifts: His Baptism to wash away sins, His Absolution to unlock the gates of heaven, and His Body and Blood to keep us both body and soul to life everlasting.

James would eventually drink Christ’s cup of suffering and would be baptized into death. He was put to death by Herod, but James had done all that the Lord Jesus wanted Him to do. He proclaimed the suffering, dead, and raised Jesus who came “not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many,” for you, for me, for all. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, for James we praise You, Who fell to Herod’s sword; He drank the cup of suff’ring And thus fulfilled Your word. Lord, curb our vain impatience For glory and for fame, Equip us for such suff’rings As glorify Your name. (By All Your Saints in Warfare, LSB 818:21)
For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There is not a way to make the Good News of Christ's death on the cross for sinners less foolish to the world. Tell the world that God became a man, was nailed to a cross, rose on the Third Day, and that all that means you will rise from the dead and live forever—it's pretty unbelievable. And if you've ever heard it paraphrased or parodied by an unbeliever, it's easy to conclude that it is indeed a pretty foolish message.

But we don't believe it because we're crazy. We believe it because the Holy Spirit has taught us God's Word. He has exposed our sinfulness before God with the holy Law that condemns all because no one can keep it. He has put trust in our hearts that relies on the Good News that for Jesus' sake we are forgiven and our condemnation has been laid on Jesus. It's foolish to the world, but to those who believe, this Gospel, this Good News, is life. Salvation. Comfort. Joy. Peace. Certainty.

The Gospel is the power of God. Why? What power? The power to save us from our sins. In fact, it's the only thing that saves us from our sins. Science can't fix everything. Philosophies come and go. Morality and an attempt at a good life won't do it. Only the Good News that the Son of God is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world does it. Only the Good News that sin and death have been defeated by Jesus will rescue us from that same sin and death.

This Good News is powerful. It saves you. It washes you. Absolves you. Feeds you. It denies Satan his accusations against you. It robs the world of its ability to overcome you. It cancels the power of your sinful flesh which would drag you down. Yes, the Good News, the Gospel, the proclamation of Jesus the Savior is utterly stupid in the world's eyes. But by the Holy Spirit we know better. We know it is life and salvation. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Though Satan's wrath Beset our path And worldly scorn assail us, While You are near, We shall not fear; You strength will never fail us. Your rod and staff Will keep us safe And guide our steps forever; Nor shades of death nor hell beneath Our lives from You will sever. (Who Trusts in God a Strong Abode, LSB 714:2)
Hear the voice of my supplications When I cry to You, When I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary. (Psalm 28:2, from the Introit for Trinity 6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When the psalmist says, “lift up my hands toward your holy sanctuary,” he no doubt had in mind the Tabernacle where the Ark of the Covenant rested and the presence of Yahweh dwelt. When we pray these words now, we aren’t “aiming” for the Holy Tent, but to Christ who is the place where God Himself dwells.

And to lift our hands to Christ means to look to Him in His Church where He is present and dishing out His awesome gifts. Beaten down by devil, world, and sinful nature, we come to the Lord's house crying out with the voice of supplication—the “Help me, Lord!” prayer that desires rescue from all these things.

And the Lord answers us when we cry out. He answers with the sign of the cross, reminding you that you are marked with His Name at the font. He answers with Absolution, pronouncing the “not guilty” verdict Christ has earned for you. He answers with the sermon, the testimony from the Scriptures of Christ's death and resurrection to give you eternal life, delivered by your pastor. He answers with the Body and Blood of Jesus, given for you to eat and drink.

The psalms are filled with prayers and confessions and praise relating to the worship of God and His holy temple. When you hear, speak, and sing those words, remember how they are about the Church where Jesus comes to be among us with His saving gifts.

In water and Word, sermon and Supper, Christ is present with His people to deliver them from sin, death, devil, hell, the condemnation of the Law. He is there to comfort you against a troubled conscience and the fear of death. He is there to remind you that you are saved, redeemed, bought with a price, and forever the Lord's. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer; When I call answer me. O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer; Come and listen to me. (O Lord, Hear My Prayer, LSB 780:1)
For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Many people suppose the Pharisees made the Law more difficult because they added all sorts of rules on top of the Commandments. But it's actually the reverse. By making sin just a matter of breaking a bunch of rules, the Pharisees were able to conveniently ignore our real problem: our SINFULNESS, that is, our inward corruption which is turned away from God and loving others and turned inward on ourselves.

Jesus demolishes this sort of convenient dodging of the Law by showing that, for example, murder isn't just killing, it's a matter of hatred and rage in the heart. By teaching us what the Law is really like, He teaches us what sort of sinners we really are: the kind of sinners who cannot save themselves.

If the Law is easy for you, and you pretty much keep the Commandments and don't do any BIG sins, then you've dodged the Law and avoided what it's really all about. On the other hand, if you stare at the Commandments and the only conclusion you can draw is that you are seriously toast, then the Law is doing its work. That's the Law's job—not to tell you how good you are (or how bad someone else is) but to show you why you need a Savior.

And when you can't keep the Law? Jesus fulfills it. All of it. What you didn't do? He does. What you did that you shouldn't have? He doesn't. He lives the life you should according to the Law; He takes the punishment you deserved. And in your Baptism He makes His perfect keeping of the Law yours. Now, in God's sight, you are a commandment keeper and not a breaker. That's what Jesus has done and fulfilled and accomplished for you. And because of that, in you go into the kingdom of God. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord of all power and might, the Author and Giver of all good things, graft into our hearts the love of Your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Trinity 6)
"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. “You shall have no other gods before Me. (Exodus 20:2-3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Why should you have no other gods before Him? Because no other “gods” can do what He did. No other “god” can rescue you from slavery in Egypt. No other “god” can keep a promise to give you the land He said He would give to your forefathers. No other “god” would put up with you when you keep sinning and then bail you out. No other “god” would become man to be one of us. No other “god” would suffer Himself to be rejected and betrayed and tried and mocked and spit upon and beaten and crucified. No other “god” would or could die for you. And no other “god” could actually rise from the dead.

No other “god” would mark you with His own Name to claim you as His own and keep you from the evil one. No other “god” would declare to you that He is not keeping score but has forgiven and forgotten your sins. No other “god” would make the center of His message the Good News that He Himself saves you when you cannot save yourself. No other “god” would give you His own flesh and blood to eat and drink as a pledge and promise of His unwavering mercy toward you.

God is not commanding us not to have other gods. He's telling us there are no other gods. He's it. Because He's the real deal. The Lord doesn't give us the Ten Commandments to burden us with rules but to teach us what a gift-giving God He is: Himself, His Name, His Word, our parents, our lives, our spouses, our stuff, our reputations, and contentment.

And when we don't want that stuff? When we tell God to take a hike and we'll go and get what we want? That same and only God is the one who comes to save us. Die for us. Rise again. Forgive us. Give us His Holy Spirit so that we learn to believe, “Yes, He alone is truly God. There are no others. I don't have other gods because I'm a good and obedient person but because there are no other gods to have and no other god will have me but the true God who loves me and gave His life for me.” And this is because He is the Lord your God. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

To those who help in Christ have found And would in works of love abound It [the Law] shows what deed are His delight And should be done as good and right. (The Law of God is Good and Wise, LSB 579:3)
What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? (Romans 6:1-3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Stop! Don't do it. You're going to read those words above as a command rather than a description. When they hear those words of St. Paul, people hear, “You've been saved, so now stop sinning.” But what Paul is saying is this: “You're saved so now you can't live in sin; you've been rescued from it. That's your reality.”

The difference is this: The first way of understanding these words leaves our Christian life in our own hands as if it's up to us to stop sinning and improve our lives. Now don't misunderstand. The Holy Spirit works the fruits of faith in those who believe so that we do indeed strive to love God and our neighbor. That's what we do as the Spirit lives in us.

But when God looks at you, He doesn't see your sin. He only sees your doing good works and being perfect and holy. How? Because you are baptized. And because your Baptism into Christ means all that He is and has done is yours. You aren't holy in God's sight because you don't actually sin. You are holy in God's sight because you are in Christ, who has covered all your sin and made it His own and died for it and left it in the grave forever.

Many Christians have a misguided idea that if we just tell ourselves (or others) to stop sinning because we're Christians, that's going to work. But that's not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who works through this good news that God doesn't hold your sins against you. It is that Good News that creates in us new impulses and a love for God's Law. It's that work in us through Christ's Word and water and Body and Blood that the Spirit forgives what we have done and sanctifies what we do so that God counts us holy for Jesus' sake.

So it's okay to go ahead and sin because we're forgiven? Of course not! But you can't do that anyway because your sins are buried with Jesus and you are a new creation in Him. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Help us that we Thy saving Word In faithful hearts may treasure; Let e'er that Bread of Life afford new grace in richest measure. O make us die to ev'ry sin, Each day create new life within, That fruits of faith may flourish. (O Holy Spirit, Grant Us Grace, LSB 693:2)
How is God’s will done? God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His word and faith until we die. This is his good and gracious will. (Small Catechism: The Lord’s Prayer, Third Petition)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Next to the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, this is probably one of the hardest petitions to pray. Why? Because in this petition we’re praying against ourselves. We’re praying for God’s will to be done, not ours.

But our old sinful nature is dead set on having our own way. We’re always looking out for ourselves. It’s always iWill be done. And in this way we sin against the First Commandment. We worship, adore, and praise our favorite god: me, myself, and I.

That’s why we pray in this petition that our heavenly Father would break our will, like a trainer breaks in a wild horse. Our will is more than wild; we’re hell bent on doing our will. So, God uses His Law like a bit and bridle. He leads us to the still Gospel waters of His good and gracious will, which is far better than anything we could have imagined or willed for ourselves.

Our will leads to death and destruction. God’s will leads to mercy and eternal life. Our will is a foundation of sinking sand. God’s will is a firm foundation in Jesus’ promises. So God’s will is done when He keeps us steadfast in the Christian faith. God’s will is done when you repent and hear the forgiveness of sins. God’s will is done when your sinful nature is drowned in Holy Baptism. God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven when you kneel and receive Jesus’ last will and testament in His Body and Blood. This is His good and gracious will. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Your gracious will on earth be done As it is done before Your throne, That patiently we may obey Throughout our lives all that You say. Curb flesh and blood and ev’ry ill That sets itself against Your will. (Our Father, Who from Heaven Above, LSB 766:4)
When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. (1 Samuel 17:11)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Trash talking. That's what Goliath the Philistine was doing. And the Israelites were shaking in their sandals! Why? Because they forgot that the Lord who defeated Egypt, parted the Red Sea, fed them manna, and defeated their enemies in the Promised Land was on their side. Same for us. The devil trash talks you. He lies about who you are in Christ. He tries to convince you that you'll never survive against him. That you're going to lose.

We know how this story ends. David stands up and takes Goliath down with one stone to the head. That's how the devil gets his, too. A rock. To crush his head. A Savior to destroy his power. A Lamb to pay for sins. A Jesus to die on the cross. David did it with five stones. Jesus does it with five holes in His hands, and feet and side.

Jesus won't let the devil trash talk you. He won't let him ramble on with lies and half-truths about how God doesn't really love you and that your sins are too many. Jesus shuts down that talk by shutting down the power of sin and the devil and death. He does that by His suffering and death and resurrection.

And now you have five weapons against the devil, too: Baptism; Absolution, Word, Body, Blood. Against those gifts of Jesus, Goliath cannot stand. He falls to Christ's power of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

So when you are afraid—when the devil is loud and boastful—remember your Champion, Jesus. He stands tall and has taken down that enemy. The victory is yours. “Neener, neener, Goliath!” In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

No strength of ours can match his might. We would be lost, rejected. But now a champion comes to fight, Whom God Himself elected. You ask who this may be? The Lord of hosts is He, Christ Jesus, mighty Lord, God's only Son, adored. He holds the field victorious. (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, LSB 657:2)
Friday of the Sixth Week After Trinity
August 2, 2019

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 17:20-47; Acts 26:24-27:8

Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine. (1 Samuel 17:40)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Five smooth stones. To sling against the giant, Goliath. No sword. No armor. No helmet. Just the little weapon that a shepherd might use to scare off a wolf from messing with the sheep. And one of those stones found a place in Goliath's head, taking down the mocking enemy of Israel.

The Son of David. Jesus. Five wounds in hands and feet and side. He takes down the Goliath of sin, death and devil. The enemies of the Lord can't stand against the pierced Jesus who gives His life for sinners. Sin, death, devil, and hell are laid low by the Son of God and Son of David whose five wounds spell the end of their power and strength.

Remember: five stones for you. Baptism, Absolution, the Word, Body and Blood. Five gifts of Jesus by which you cast down sin, death, and devil, laying low the enemies which would destroy you.

These enemies look big. Impressive even. Scary. The whole army of Israel sat and cowered as Goliath came out day after day to mock them. They trembled in their sandals and armor and there was no way they could defeat him. But David didn't trust in himself. He knew the Lord was more powerful than Goliath. Don't fear your sins. Don't fear death or the devil. He who fights for you is mightier than they are. He is the Son of David whose death and resurrection defeat all your enemies.

It's foolish to think we can overcome these things on our own. Being a Christian isn't some self-help program whereby we gain confidence to confront the things that attack us. Rather, being a Christian means you have Christ fighting for you to save and rescue you from all your enemies. Your own sins. The world. The devil. Anything that can harm you. Even death. He stands to fight for you and His weapons can't miss. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Should some lust or sharp temptation Fascinate my sinful mind,
Draw me to Your cross and passion, And new courage I shall find.
Or should Satan press me hard, Let me then be on my guard,
Saying, “Christ for me was wounded,” That the tempter flee confounded.
(Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing, LSB 421:2)
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Those words from tomorrow's Introit sure make it sound like the Christian Church is going to win out over all the nations. But in every nation it seems as if there's nothing but hostility toward Christ and His people, if not outright hatred and murder against them. Around the world it sure looks like the secular and atheistic values of "no religion" are winning out. It looks like the enemies of the cross of Christ are triumphing.

It looks like that. But there is still the “one, holy, Christian and apostolic church.” Wherever Christ's Word is preached, the Holy Spirit is still saving sinners. They trust in Christ and even through persecution and martyrdom, they rejoice in the crown of life they receive.

And it's always been so, from the days of Adam and Eve, through Noah, through the nation of Israel, through the life of the Christian Church since Jesus and the apostles. The world has tried to destroy the Church, wipe out God, and destroy religion and faith. But the Holy Spirit just keeps on saving people through that Gospel.

Tomorrow in the Divine Service, you will see how these words of the psalm come true. The preaching of Christ you hear tomorrow is heard all over the world. Those baptized into Christ are gathered together in magnificent churches or humble huts. The delivery of Christ's Body and Blood happens among many or among few. The Good News of Christ crucified and risen is preached, loudly and openly, sometimes in secret. But this is going on all over the world. And wherever the Holy Spirit is converting sinners into Christians, that is the Lord “subduing” the peoples.

Looks are deceiving. The Church looks like She's in trouble. But She's not. Because Her Lord never leaves Her nor forsakes Her. And that means He never leaves nor forsakes you and those who are a part of His body. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Preserve, O Lord, Your Zion, Bought dearly with Your blood; Protect what You have chosen Against the hellish flood. Be always our defender When dangers gather round; When all the earth is crumbling, Safe may Your Church be found. (Preserve Your Word, O Savior, LSB 658:3)
His disciples answered Him, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?” (Mark 8:4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus has compassion. How can He not? Jesus has compassion on the crowds. His heart is moved, and He cares for them. They’re "like sheep that don't have a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). "I have compassion on the crowds because they've remained with Me already three days, and they have nothing to eat" (Mark 8:2). Jesus is the compassionate One. He’s the Good Shepherd, but what sort of shepherd leads His flock into a desert? Jesus does, and it’s all part of His plan.

 Jesus doesn't just feel for His flock, His crowd, His people, but He also does something. He's moved to action. He doesn't want His people to suffer, to hunger, to die on the journey. He’s the loving Shepherd. How could He do otherwise?

 He can’t but help His people, but we doubt it all the time. We doubt that He’s the fountain and source of all goodness. We doubt that He will supply us, not only with all that we need for this body and life but also for the life to come. We think that He's some sort of stingy God, and if He does dole out gifts, it's only enough to scrape by.

 But this is not the Lord’s way of caring for His sheep. It’s not how He doles out His gifts. There’s always more with the Lord. “They ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments” (Mark 8:8). Four thousand men ate until they were stuffed and there were a bunch of leftovers. Always more from the Lord. Always more forgiveness, life, and salvation: font-ed, pastor-ed, and altar-ed to you.

 Little faith one, how will He not give you much more? He will and does. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, whose never-failing providence orders all things both in heaven and earth, we humbly implore You to put away from us all hurtful things and give to us those things that be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Trinity 7)
Monday of the Seventh Week After Trinity
August 5, 2019

Today's Reading: Genesis 2:7-17  

The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. (Genesis 2:8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “Every good and every perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). This is most certainly true. It’s evident from what we see in Genesis 2. God had just created all that is as a gift for mankind. He had created the sun, moon, and stars to be enjoyed “for signs and seasons, and for days and years” (Genesis 1:14). He had made all the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and every living creature for man to enjoy and care for (Genesis 1:28). All the plants were created for enjoyment, too—for food (Genesis 1:29)!

If that weren’t enough, Yahweh had more gifts to give. A Garden full of trees for eating. There were the life-giving Tree for eating, and the other tree for not eating—both gifts from the Lord. He gave Adam a helper suitable for him, a wife. If we can see and learn one thing about the LORD God from Genesis 2, it’s that He’s not a stingy God. He pours forth His gifts. He showered them upon “the man whom He had formed.” He showers them on us, too.

Yet we doubt the Lord’s generosity. We think He holds back from us. He keeps things from us. We want more (more friends, more popularity, more clothes, better cars and phones), and when the Lord doesn’t give it to us, we think He’s stingy with His gifts, or worse, that He doesn’t love us.

Repent. The Lord showers gifts upon you. Jesus proves it. He came down to earth from heaven to save you. He died and rose. He was showered upon you in the waters of Holy Baptism. You have received Christ who is the light of the world. He is the ultimate perfect gift from the Father of lights. You have Jesus, and as we see in Romans 8:32, through Him a loving, heavenly Father, “who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Evening and morning, Sunset and dawning, Wealth, peace, and gladness, Comfort in sadness: These are Thy works; all the glory be Thine! Times without number, Awake or in slumber, Thine eye observes us, From danger preserves us, Causing Thy mercy upon us to shine. (Evening and Morning, LSB 726:1)
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What does the devil tempt you to do? What about the world? How quickly our flesh gives in to the devil or the world! How willingly it follows wherever they lead! “Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:14-15). There’s lying, cheating, stealing, pornography, sex, pride, deceit, half-truths, lustful thoughts, and actions. All these things and more fill us with regret and shame. When we did them, we didn’t care. We enjoyed it at the time, but Paul’s word rings true: “What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed?” Those things end in death.

It’s true that the wages of sin is death. Sin deserves death. Every sin. All sins. Sinfulness results in separation from God, physical death, and eternal damnation. As you get paid for the work you do, so also sin’s wage must be paid. The question is this: Who pays it?

You can try to pay it with second chances, more and better promises, more heartfelt good intentions, trying again and again. But take heart, Jesus has paid the wages of sin with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. The wages of sin is death—God’s death to save you from death. In Jesus “you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

There’s no more fruit of which to be ashamed. There’s Jesus’ fruit—the fruit which Jesus’ cross produces and which He gives to you. He pours the blood-price over you, washing you in it. He feeds you the payment with His Body and Blood which bore and gave the price of sin. Rejoice, dear saint of God, you are in Christ Jesus. You have eternal life. The wages of sin won’t reach you for you have “eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus has come and brings pleasure eternal, Alpha, Omega, Beginning and End; Godhead, humanity, union supernal, O great Redeemer, You come as our friend! Heaven and earth, now proclaim this great wonder: Jesus has come and brings pleasure eternal! (Jesus Has Come and Brings Pleasure, LSB 533:1)
What does this mean? God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. (Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer, Fourth Petition)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The God who shows mercy is not at the same time a God who makes us beg for what we need. When we ask the Lord for our daily bread (everything we need for this body and life), we aren't begging for Him to give us something He may withhold from us. We're also not reminding Him that we need it. As if we only have daily bread when we remember to tell God we need it!

No, we ask for daily bread so we learn to believe that God will provide what He has promised and thereby trust in Him to do so. To put it another way: We don't pray to make God do something. We pray to learn to trust that He will do exactly as He's promised!

And why would God give us daily bread? Why does He provide for us and take care of us? Because of Jesus. If God the Father gave up His own Son to save us, He'll certainly give us what we need for our tummies, too! It is Jesus, after all, who told us to pray these words. So He must be telling us that our heavenly Father has daily bread for us. And, like the catechism teaches, by praying this, we learn to believe God will give us daily bread and we learn to give thanks for it.

This is Good News in a world filled with the sort of preaching that says, “IF you want God to give you something, then YOU MUST do such and such.” “The more you pray, the better your chances.” “You have to give to God and He'll reward you by giving back.” And on and on. In other words, prayer is taught as something that we learn to do in order to manipulate God.

But we don't have a God like that! Christ teaches us that we have a loving heavenly Father from whom comes every good gift. Praying to Him for our daily bread is just what we do as His baptized and Bread-of-Life-filled people, because He already knows and He has promised to provide it. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Give us this day our daily bread, And let us all be clothed and fed. Save us from hardship, war, and strife; In plague and famine, spare our life, That we in honest peace may live, To care and greed no entrance give. (Our Father, Who from Heaven Above, LSB 766:5)
Thursday of the Seventh Week After Trinity
August 8, 2019

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 24:1-22; 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:16

Then he said to David: “You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil. (1 Samuel 24:17)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. David had been selected by the Lord to replace Saul as King, yet while Saul was still King, David wouldn't touch him or hurt him. Over and over again, David has the chance to hurt or even kill Saul. But he won't do it!

Here David is a picture of Christ who refuses to fight back against those who hate and try to kill Him, and DO kill Him. “Father, forgive them,” He prays from the cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He lets Himself be led away rather than call in angelic reinforcements to smite the bad guys.

In all of this, Jesus is teaching us that if God were to just destroy His enemies, there would be no one left. Not Saul, not the Pharisees and Sadducees, not us. Rather, instead of doing harm to us, Jesus treats us righteously with God's version of “righteous.” That means Jesus taking the hit for us. Jesus taking our sins and their judgment. Jesus paying the price. It means we go free. We are forgiven. We are saved.

David is a picture of Jesus in many ways. In particular, he shows us by his treatment of Saul how the Son of David comes not to destroy His enemies but spare their lives and save them. So Jesus comes not to destroy us but spare us and save us. As proof of his mercy, David shows Saul the piece of his cloak he cut off. As proof of Christ's mercy, He has given us a whole cloak, a garment of righteousness in Baptism. He has given us His Word and Body and Blood. All of these are the proofs and signs of His promise that He spares us and lets us live. More than that, He gives us new and everlasting life. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus in Your dying woes, Even while Your lifeblood flows, Craving pardon for Your foes: Hear us, holy Jesus. (Jesus, In Your Dying Woes, LSB 447:1)
Then Nabal answered David's servants, and said, "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. (1 Samuel 25:10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. David had been anointed as king over Israel but he wasn't on the throne just yet. But Nabal didn't care. He didn't want to help David. He figured big shots were a dime a dozen and so he ignored David's request for help. It's the same in our day and age when the Son of David, Jesus, comes up. "Well," people say, “Nobody knows all the truth. Jesus was just one of many good teachers. All roads lead to God.” And on it goes. Preachers and saviors are a dime a dozen. For the sake of Abigail, the wicked Nabal's wife, David doesn't hurt him. Instead, God strikes him down. And there is a picture of our salvation. For the sake of His Church, the Lord stays His hand. He doesn't destroy this world and all its sinners right away. Rather, He does what He came to do to save them: die for them on the cross. Be punished for their sin. Suffer for their iniquities. The Church pleads for the world. Even though we look around and see nothing but greed and corruption and violence and wickedness, we ask the Lord to spare the world for the Church's sake. The time will come when the Lord will strike down this world and it will be no more. But until that day comes, we pray for the enemies of Jesus to be brought to repentance and faith in Christ. Abigail looked to the mercy of David as the Church looks to Christ's mercy and patience. After all, we were once like the world, walking in the way of unrighteousness and sin until rescued by our Lord. So we live in the promise of our being God's holy people—a promise made in Baptism and confirmed when we hear Christ preached and receive His Holy Supper. And while we live in faith in Christ, we cry out for the Lord's mercy upon the world that those people, too, may be saved. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, O Lord of heav'n and earth, Thy living finger never wrote That life should be an aimless mote, A deathward drift from futile birth. They Word meant life triumphant hurled In splendor through Thy broken world. Since light awoke and life began Thou hast desired Thy life for man. (O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth, LSB 834:1)
Saturday of the Seventh Week After Trinity
August 10, 2019

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 25:23-44; 1 Corinthians 4:1-21

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised In the city of our God, In His holy mountain. God is in her palaces; He is known as her refuge. (Psalm 145:3, from the Introit for Trinity 8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. So much of the language of the Psalms is about God’s presence in His city and being a refuge. It's almost as if the Lord was right there with the psalmist! That's because He was! In the Old Testament, the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle and temple and wherever the Ark was, you knew God was in the house!

When we go to church, that's not all just a distant memory! But we act like it is. We go to church like we go to a museum, just wandering around looking at old dead stuff. But not in Christ's church! In the church, in the holy liturgy, in the Divine Service, we have Jesus Himself. Not just remembered, not just to be thought about, but right there in our midst!

Jesus is God in the flesh. When He walked and talked with His disciples, they were in the very presence of God Himself. When Jesus comes to us in His Word in the Divine Service, He is right there Himself, too. That's why we stand and bow and kneel and sing and face forward. We do those things in church because they are little signs and indications of what we believe is actually going on in church: We're standing there with the Lord Himself. Your church, whether it's a great big one made of stones in a bustling metropolis or a little shack in the woods in the middle of nowhere—God Himself is there.

He's there putting His name on you as He did in your Baptism. He's there with His messenger, announcing your forgiveness, and preaching and teaching what the Lord has done for you. He's there in the public proclamation of the Lord's Scriptures. He's there in the flesh and blood at His holy altar of salvation. No memories and cobwebs here! This is the true and real city of God where the Lord Himself dwells. And He invites you in to receive all of His rich gifts and blessings each week.

Rejoice! For tomorrow you shall be in the Lord's house again. The city of God. The place of refuge. Where the Lord Himself will meet you and load you up with good things. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Open now thy gates of beauty, Zion, let me enter there, Where my soul in joyful duty Waits for Him who answers prayer. Oh, how blessed is this place, Filled with solace, light, and grace! (Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty, LSB 901:1)
The Eighth Sunday After Trinity

August 11, 2019

Today's Reading: Matthew 7:15-23
Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 26:1-25; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What sort of fruit do we produce? You can’t get a good apple from a sick, dying apple tree. You can’t get a rotten orange from a lush, healthy orange tree. Good proceeds from good. Bad proceeds from bad. It’s just how it works, but does the tree know? Can a tree tell you what sort of fruit it’s growing? Or is it the farmer who tells what’s growing from which tree?

The Lord Jesus is the Farmer who tells us what to make of our fruit. We need to repent of looking at our own fruit, of estimating its worth based on what it looks like or how it makes us feel. That’s what we do so often. We gauge our own fruit. We think, “I must be a good person because I do…” “I have to be a Christian because I’ve gone and done so many things in Jesus’ Name.”

That’s fruit coming from the rotten soil and roots of our own hearts. That’s what Jesus means by His terrifying words: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Listen to what they say: “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your Name, cast out demons in Your Name, and done many wonders in Your Name?” (Matthew 7:22).

They judged their own fruit by what they’d done. It had to be good because they did it and did it in Jesus’ Name! But good fruit is good fruit because it comes from Jesus. As He says in John, “I am the Vine. You are the branches” (John 15:5). We have been grafted into Him, into His cross and empty tomb, by our Baptism. His life-blood flows into us and through us because we eat and drink His Body and Blood.

You are a good tree in Jesus. You bear good fruit in Him. Since you are in Him, in the Son, you do the will of the heavenly Father. You can’t be cast out from the Kingdom. Jesus is there, and you’re in Him. His Body and Blood say so. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Grant to us, Lord, we implore You, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without You, may be You be enabled to live according to Your will; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who live and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Trinity 8)
“Am I a God near at hand,” says the LORD, “And not a God afar off?” “Is not My word like a fire?” says the LORD, “And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:23, 29)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God is close at hand. He sees all the stuff that we do that breaks His Law. He sees all the times when we do something that He doesn’t like. It’s not just that He knows it. He’s there when we do it! “Am I a God near at hand,” says the LORD, “And not a God afar off?” We can’t escape from His presence for “in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). He doesn’t just see our actions, hear our words, but He also knows our thoughts. He knows and sees and hears every time we love ourselves more than others, more than Him, and every wicked thought that we keep secret so no one finds out how screwed up we really are.

Against all that stuff the Lord speaks a Word: “That is worthy of hell. My Spirit shall not strive with man forever. You have done what is evil in My sight. You must be cast out. You will perish in your wickedness, and anyone who says otherwise is wrong. I shall carry out My judgment against you. Is not My word like a fire? And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”

The Lord is true to His Word. He will not back down. Repent. The Lord says, “He who has My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully.” It is spoken faithfully—by the Lord Himself! “My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?” “It is finished!”

The fire and hammer of God’s wrath and Law came down on Jesus Christ. He spoke His Father’s Word faithfully. He sets us free from the curse of the Law. He became sin—became the curse for you. God’s wrath was poured out on every idle word, everything we’ve done that we’re ashamed of. Jesus is the one who bore it for you. He’s saved you from it. The Spirit enlivens you to live a life pleasing to God. He does this through the Word which says that the God who sees all, hears all, knows all, and can’t forget does so because of Jesus. You’ve had it washed over you, absolved over you. Truly, “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

To Jesus we for refuge flee, Who from the curse has set us free, And humbly worship at His throne, Saved by His grace through faith alone. (The Law of God Is Good and Wise, LSB 579:6)
The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. (Romans 8:16-17)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You have been made a new creation in Christ Jesus. You’ve been clothed with Him. You’ve been given the Spirit as a guarantee of eternal life. You are now God’s temple: He dwells in you and through you. We don’t owe anything. Such great salvation worked through Christ’s death and resurrection and delivered to you in water, Word, Body and Blood—that salvation is given free of charge, no debt left over.

We’ve been set free from sin and death. Our Old Adam—our flesh, as Paul puts it—has been put to death, drowned in the waters of Holy Baptism, and a new man daily emerges and arises to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. We have not been set free from sin to live in sin. We’re given Christ’s holiness, and were called to live in it. We’re not supposed to think, “I can steal this game because I’ll just be forgiven.” It’s sin to think, “Jesus died for me so it doesn’t matter if I talk about my neighbor behind her back.” Our salvation in Christ, His complete and free forgiveness, isn’t license to go about living willy nilly. “For if you live according to the flesh you will die” (Romans 8:13).

Our Old Adam keeps coming back like a bad penny. He’s the Gollum who follows us all the days of our journey. He seeks to kill us. To pull us back into the darkness, to steal back our life. To lead us back into the slavery of the devil, to sin.

We struggle against him. Well, not us, but it’s the Spirit who fights against Him, who leads us. We are God’s children. We have the Spirit, given to us in Baptism, who dwells within us. He’s the Spirit of adoption. We are now sons of the Father, being placed into Christ Jesus. He works in us and through us. He comes to us in His Word. He’s given to us in the life-giving Body and Blood of Jesus. He is the Spirit who gives life. He leads you in Christ Jesus, and because of this we can be certain we are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” This is the Spirit’s work in us to save us. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Water, blood, and Spirit crying, By their witness testifying To the One whose death-defying Life has come with life for all. (Water, Blood, and Spirit Crying, LSB 597:1)
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. What does this mean? We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us. (Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer, Fifth Petition)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We pray this petition of the Lord's Prayer to learn and believe that we actually don't DESERVE a single thing from God but rather that He gives them all to us by grace. And when we see that word “grace” we should read, “because of Jesus’ living, dying, and rising for us.” That's why our heavenly Father does what He does for us: for Jesus' sake.

This includes the Fifth Petition! Forgive us our sins! Trespasses. Debts. Slip-ups. Deliberate actions that contradict God's Word even when we know better. Forgive them! Overlook them! Forget them! And He does because Jesus died for us. Paid for our sins. Took them away. Baptized. Ears filled with the Gospel. Mouths filled with the Body and Blood of Jesus. These are the answers to this petition: Forgive us our trespasses. He has!

And He has forgiven all trespasses, even the sins of those who sin against us. So it would be silly for us to say that God forgives all our sins for Jesus' sake but then stand in judgment and withhold forgiveness from those who sin against us! And sure, it's hard to forgive others. So we need forgiveness from Christ and then that forgiveness goes from us to them. This isn't a prayer with a condition. It's a prayer in which we learn that because God forgives us, we forgive others. That's how the love of God in us works in us and through us.

So that's life as a child of God: He forgives us and we forgive others. That's the Spirit at work in those who have been born from above in the mercy and grace of Jesus. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore, That they may trouble us no more; We, too, will gladly those forgive Who hurt us by the way they live. Help us in our community To serve each other willingly. (Our Father, Who from Heaven Above, LSB 766:6)
Why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Luke 1:43)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We’d like to think of God as big and powerful. He's an almighty, wonder-working, awesome God! But God has something else up His sleeve besides being so big, so strong, and so mighty. Our God becomes small. He comes to us. The Son, begotten of the Father from eternity, is conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Our God is born, but before that He is conceived and is carried in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary.

This is what Elizabeth confesses to Mary. Mary already knew that "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you...the Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). But Mary hears the truth from Elizabeth, "Why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Mary is the mother of the Lord, the mother of God, the Theotokos, that is, the God-bearer. All that God is, was in her womb. The fullness of God dwelt bodily in Jesus even as He was being formed in His mother's womb.

God becomes small to save you. We need to repent of our wanting a big, powerful God. Jesus suffers and dies. He is buried. He becomes small and weak and uses seemingly small and weak things (water, Word, bread and wine) to save you, to give you His righteousness, His forgiveness, and His Body and Blood. We rejoice over Mary and call her blessed not because of who she is but because of Whom she carried in her womb: Jesus, God in the flesh, who became small to save you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

We sing with joy of Mary, Whose heart with awe was stirred When, youthful and astonished, She heard the angel's word. Yet she her voice upraises To magnify God’s name, As once for our salvation Your mother she became. (By All Your Saints in Warfare, LSB 818:22)
Friday of the Eighth Week After Trinity
August 16, 2019

Today’s Reading: Acts 20:27-38

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Lord Jesus has given you your pastor. He’s the Lord’s man, and he cares for you. When you couldn’t do anything to save you, your pastor was there to baptize you, washing you in Jesus’ blood, clothing you with Him, and giving you the Spirit and faith. When you’re in trouble, you’ve messed up, or are struggling, your pastor is there to forgive your sins, preach the Gospel to you, and to tell you that you have been purchased with the precious blood of Jesus. Your pastor is there to give you the Body and Blood of your Savior to strengthen your faith in God and your love toward others. Your pastor is there to bless you and care for you from font until grave.

He cares for you as your Jesus cares for you. Jesus is your Good Shepherd. “You will not want” not only because Jesus cares for you but because your pastor cares for you. Jesus cares for you through your pastor. Your pastor is an undershepherd. “Pastor” means “shepherd.” He shepherds you by bringing you to Jesus, in all the ways that Jesus has given. He defends you against the wolves who would devour you and protects you from the false doctrines that would hurt and harm your soul. When your pastor does all of this, he’s fulfilling his Jesus- and Spirit-given calling. He fulfills what Paul says, “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Pray for your pastor. Give him a hug. Tell him about Jesus’ love. He needs to hear it, too! Most of all give thanks that you’re led to Jesus and given Him in water, Word, Body and Blood, and that it all comes to you by the mouth and hand of your pastor, whom God has given as a gift to you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

You, O Lord, Yourself have called him For Your precious lambs to care; But to prosper in his calling, He the Spirit’s gifts must share. Give him wisdom from above, Fill his heart with holy love; In his weakness, Lord, be near him, In his prayers, Good Shepherd, hear him. (Send, O Lord, Your Holy Spirit, LSB 681:2)
Save me, O God, by Your name, and vindicate me by Your strength. (Psalm 54:1, Introit for Trinity 9)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Wouldn’t it be great if you could leave your mark on the world? Wouldn’t it be great if everyone—well maybe not everyone—knew your name? What you’ve done? Wouldn't it be awesome if your name could be synonymous with something like Tiger Woods and golf, Steve Jobs and Apple, or Stan Lee and comic books? We all want to be better. To make a name for ourselves. Do something that would make us successful and popular. Then our name would be something really special.

This is why the Lord needs to save us—from us! He delivers us out of the trouble we find ourselves in when we pursue being king of the hill. Jesus comes and redeems us. By His being King on Calvary’s Hill, He redeems us. There His name is posted for our salvation: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. With His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death He redeems us.

The Lord saves us by His Name. He doesn’t do it by making a name for Himself in the eyes of the world. He does it by letting His Name be the worst, and cursed: “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.” The Lord’s Name delivers this salvation to you in the waters of Baptism. Once again the Lord’s Name is saving by doing something simple.

You are saved and made great, not by your own name, but by the Lord’s Name. His Name was nailed to a cross and washed over your forehead. Because of Him your name is great. It’s written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, now and forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

God’s own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ! He, because I could not pay it, gave my full redemption price. Do I need earth’s treasures many? I have one worth more than any That brought me salvation free Lasting to eternity! (God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It, LSB 594:1)
The Ninth Sunday After Trinity
August 18, 2019

Daily Lectionary: 2 Samuel 7:18-29; 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:16

The master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. (Luke 16:8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We want God to make sense. He needs to do what we expect Him to do. He needs to act like we expect Him to. He can’t do anything that doesn’t fit nicely into our God box. He must god the way we think, His god-ing must line up properly.

But God gods the way God gods. There’s no telling Him otherwise. He is God the way He’s promised to be. He acts how He wants. In fact, it seems that He’s most God when He’s acting, when He’s god-ing in a way that doesn’t fit with our expectations. As the Psalmist says, “Our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases” (Psalm 115:3). And what pleases Him is saving you.

God takes on our flesh. God hungers. God gets tired, sleeps. God thirsts. God gets mocked, scourged, crucified, and God dies. This flies in the face of how God should do His god-ing. But this is exactly what Jesus, your God, has done to save you and the whole world. Your God comes to you in water, in Word, and in bread and wine, bringing you salvation, eternal life, and His Body and Blood for your forgiveness. Shouldn’t God be doing something flashy? But this is how God does His god-ing to save you.

Sure, the man was fired. Stole His master’s goods. He went about forgiving debts that weren’t His to forgive. He was giving His master’s kingdom away! But that’s how your God does it. Repent of thinking otherwise! The Son forgives the debts, your debts. He gives His Father’s kingdom away, and gives you the Spirit who is the down payment for your eternal life, which is already in Christ Jesus our Lord. God gods in His way, not yours, and that’s your salvation. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Let Your merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Your humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Trinity 9)
Today's Reading: 2 Samuel 22:26-34  
Daily Lectionary: 2 Samuel 11:1-27; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34  

For by You I can run against a troop; By my God I can leap over a wall. (2 Samuel 22:30)  

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Lord saves us from our enemies. There’s nothing that can truly stand against us. With the devil, the world, and your sinful nature taken care of, what else is there that can harm you? Jesus’ victorious death and resurrection have taken care of all your enemies. Sin, death, devil, and hell are all done for!  
But it doesn’t feel like it sometimes. In our daily lives we have pains and struggles. We fight with our parents. Our friends turn their backs on us. The people who are out to get us seem to get the better of us. We get sick. Our friends and family get cancer. There are people we love who die. The world makes fun of us for our faith.  
It seems like we’re on the losing end, but we’re not. Paul says, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35, 37-39). Because Christ has been crucified and raised, our victory cannot fail. We are victorious. We are baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection. We are fed with His eternal-life-giving Body and Blood. No matter what happens we can face it head on. We’ve already won!  
Nothing can truly get us down. Not sin, not the devil, the world, or even the grave. Christ was victorious, and gives His victory to you. You’re a member of His Church, “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.  

O little flock, fear not the foe Who madly seeks your overthrow; Dread not his rage and pow’r. And though your courage sometimes faints, His seeming triumph o’er God’s saints Lasts but a little hour. (O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe, LSB 666:1)
Tuesday of the Ninth Week After Trinity  
August 20, 2019  
Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:6-13  

God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When we are tempted to do anything against God’s Law, no matter what it is—we’re tempted to think that ultimately it’s up to us to get out of it. We wonder if maybe God leads us to this point so that we can show Him how good we are at keeping His Law. We think that we’ll find some way out of it by our own cunning and strength. After all, “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

But you are not the way out of temptation, out of your own sin, out of the messes you make. Repent of thinking and acting that way. Jesus is the way of escape, for He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus brought you out of the Egypt of your sins. He saved you from the ancient pharaoh, the devil. By His death and resurrection He has opened the way to everlasting life. When we’re tempted, He is our way of escape. His temptation, His cross, His empty tomb are yours. These overcome the crafts and assaults of the devil, the world, and our own flesh. Jesus overcame every temptation. And when you fall into temptation, when you give in and sin, He is your way of escape. His way is still your way until the temptations cease, and you’re with Him forever, never to be tempted again.

Keep the Law. It’s what God calls us to do, but when you’re tempted to do otherwise, look to Jesus. He was tempted for you. When you fall into sin, look to Jesus. He suffered, died, and rose for you. His way of escape leads through an empty tomb (yours!), and then you will live before Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

As true as God’s own Word is true, Not earth nor hell’s satanic crew Against us shall prevail. There might? A joke, a mere facade! God is with us and we with God—Our vict’ry cannot fail. (O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe, LSB 666:3)
Lead not into temptation, Lord, Where our grim foe and all his horde Would vex our souls on ev'ry hand. Help us resist, help us to stand Firm in the faith, a mighty host, Through comfort of the Holy Ghost. (Our Father, Who From Heaven Above, LSB 766:7)
Thursday of the Ninth Week After Trinity
August 22, 2019


So David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David. (1 Kings 2:10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. King David was king for 40 years. Then He died and was buried. On Pentecost, Peter preached that David knew he would die but prophesied in Psalm 16 that Jesus, God's “Holy One,” would not see decay. After all, Jesus died but he didn't stay dead. David was buried. But Jesus had come out of His tomb. It was King David's hope that what happened to his great-great-great-etc. Grandson would happen to him, too. If the Savior would rise from the dead, so will David someday.

And so will you. David died. You will die. Jesus died. But Jesus rose. So David will rise. And you will rise, too, on the Last Day. Christ's resurrection is the “firstfruits.” That means He did it first, but we'll do it later. He was alive the first Easter; we'll be alive again when He comes in His glory.

Jesus rose from the dead to show that what He did on Good Friday worked. He paid for our sins. No more sins for Jesus because He said, “It is finished.” And with no more sins, there is no more death. So He was alive again the Third Day.

Your dying and rising will happen on the Last Day because it has already happened at the font. You died and rose in Baptism with Jesus. Peter told his Pentecost hearers, “David is dead and we know where his tomb is to this day.” We know where your tomb is, too. The watery grave is the font where you were washed with water and the Word; where you died the first time and rose the first time. Death at the end of your earthly life is just the “little death,” a nap, a sleep until the final trumpet calls you forth to life when Jesus comes again.

To die now is just to rest in Jesus until He wakes you up and gives you everlasting life in His eternal kingdom—the inheritance of David and all the saints. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

My flesh in hope shall rest And for a season slumber Till trump from east to west Shall wake the dead in number: Had Christ who once was slain Not burst His three day prison, Our faith had been in vain: But now has Christ arisen, arisen, arisen; But now has Christ arisen! (This Joyful Eastertide, LSB 482:3)
...who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus died and rose to conquer sin and death. One of the greatest gifts we have as Christians is that this promise and certain forgiveness is not just for us but for others as well. Let's face it: You are surrounded with friends and family who are troubled by this world, and the hurt that they see and the death that they experience. What a joy that we can speak and tell them that Jesus has answered for that! As one pastor put it when asked, “How's it going?” said, “Well, Jesus is risen from the dead so I guess everything's going to work out fine.”

The Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection really is meant to be a comfort. The world will make fun of you, of course, for that “pie-in-the-sky” self-help religious nonsense. But that's only because the world is deep down truly afraid of death.

Think of the apostles. These men were terrified when Jesus died. They thought they had lost everything. They huddled together behind locked doors. When they had seen Jesus alive, they then went out and preached the Good News of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus' Name, even when it meant being tortured and killed for doing so. They knew this comfort. It's a comfort that declares that since Jesus died and rose, suffering and death just aren't that big of a deal.

Of course, we make suffering and death out to be the most horrible things ever. Repent! As if Jesus didn't take care of all that. We live as if Jesus didn't actually conquer and overcome those things. But He did. And the comfort He has for you, and you have for others, comes and is strengthened as you remember your Baptism and live in the forgiveness delivered in His Word and Supper. And in those gifts you have not only the promise for you that it will all work out, you have the promise to tell others that it will be okay because of Jesus for them, too. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

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

August 24, 2019

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 5:1-16; 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:17

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. (Luke 22:24)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus' apostles often got into this argument about who was greatest. From what we read in the Scriptures, guys like Peter, James, and John seem like Jesus' favorites or the greatest of the apostles. But Bartholomew? Most of us can't even spell his name without looking! What did Bartholomew ever do? What was he ever known for? Answer: He was sent by Jesus into the world to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' Name.

The greatest, of course, is Jesus, but not for the reasons we usually think. Jesus isn't great because He's powerful and can create the universe and because He knows everything. He's great because He is the least. He is the lightning rod of sin. He is the crucified Savior who did not come to show everyone how mighty He is, but to be mighty by being made as nothing, a criminal, a sinner, nailed to a tree. That's greatness the apostles don't know, until the Lord sends them to lay down their lives for Him in the preaching of His Word to a hostile world that kills them.

Your pastor may not seem like a great guy. But He is if He preaches Jesus. Your pastor has been called, just as St. Bartholomew was, to deliver Jesus to you. He may never have 10,000 people in a stadium church, or write a “Christian” bestselling book. But He baptized you or reminds you of your Baptism. He calls you to repentance and faith in Jesus by the preaching and teaching of God's Word. He feeds you with the Body and Blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. You can't be a greater guy than that, even though the world thinks your pastor is nothing and doesn't understand what he's about.

St. Bartholomew, Peter, James, and John, and the men Jesus calls to be pastors aren't great in and of themselves. But what they have is great, for they deliver Jesus by the Word and Sacraments. And by those gifts, He who is least, Jesus, makes you into the greatest in His kingdom. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

[Of Bartholomew, also called Nathanael]
All praise for for him whose candor Through all his doubt You saw When Philip at the fig tree Disclosed you in the law. Discern, beneath our surface, O Lord, what we can be, That by Your truth made guileless, Your glory we may see. (LSB 518:23)
The Tenth Sunday After Trinity
August 25, 2019

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 7:51-8:21; 2 Corinthians 3:1-18

He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace!” (Luke 19:41-42)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It’s all about Jesus, dying and rising for you. It’s all about hearing Jesus’ Word that delivers His death and resurrection over your forehead, into your ears, and into your mouth. These are all the things that make for our peace. These are all the signs and works that God does to show that He earnestly desires to save, not just you but the whole world. This isn’t just true now, but it was also how it was when Jesus walked, talked, and taught during His earthly life.

The religious leaders had rejected Him. They wanted to have earthly power and control. His people would be stirred up and would reject Him, having Him crucified by their Roman overlords. “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). Because of this Jesus wept over Jerusalem and said, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace” (Luke 19:42). Swift judgment falls on those outside of Christ, who reject Him with their words and actions. Those who try and buy and sell their salvation and merit before God are cast out, those who try to bargain with God through their prayers and those who don’t always gladly hear Christ’s Word fall under judgment.

But we shouldn’t lose heart. Christ’s Word makes us glad: “the things that make for your peace.” He makes our peace. He bears our bargaining, our not holding His Word sacred, our not gladly hearing and learning it. It’s all about what He has done for you. He’s died and risen for all of that. The judgment doesn’t stand against you. You are surrounded not by judgment or enemies, but by Christ and His salvation. You are filled with the Spirit and reconciled to the Father. “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, as You declare Your almighty power above all in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Your grace that we may obtain Your gracious promises and be made partakers of Your heavenly treasures; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Trinity 10)
Monday of the Tenth Week After Trinity
August 26, 2019

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 8:4-12
Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 8:22-30,46-63; 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

“Even the stork in the heavens Knows her appointed times; And the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow Observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the LORD.” (Jeremiah 8:7)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God says in the Third Commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” We know that this means that “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.” The problem is we don’t. So often we don’t care about the Lord’s Word. We don’t really listen to it. We begrudgingly go to church to receive. We don’t even read it on our own! We sing so often, “Alleluia! Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia!” But do we really take them to heart and believe them, and if we believe them, do we live them?

The wild animals listen to His Word. They follow the seasons He controls. They migrate. They are fruitful and multiply according to His Word and will. The animals listen more to what He says than we do. We’re worse off than the beasts of the field or the birds of the air. As David says, “I was foolish and ignorant; I was a beast of burden before You” (Psalm 73:22).

This is exactly why Christ Jesus had to come. He always heard and did God’s Word. He listened and so He bore our sins against His Word, He was crucified for them, shed His blood for them, died for them, and rose on the Third Day so that you would be perfect, holy, and righteous—justified—before God, your heavenly Father.

Now that we’re in Him we joyfully hear His Word. We receive it with joy and gladness. We can’t get enough of it. It’s been washed over our foreheads, placed into our ears and hearts, and placed in our mouths. The Word is powerful and we receive it through font, Keys, pulpit, and altar. There’s always more Word for you. We receive it, we believe it, we live it, in Christ Jesus. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

God’s Word is our great heritage And shall be ours forever; To spread its light from age to age Shall be our chief endeavor. Through life it guides our way, In death it is our stay. Lord, grant, while worlds endure, We keep its teachings pure throughout all generations. (God’s Word Is Our Great Heritage, LSB 581)
Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There is no Law in Christ Jesus. Jesus the telos, the ending, the finishing, the completion of the Law. Christ has accomplished all the Law's demands in your place. There's nothing more that can be done. Christ has done it all. He Himself has said so. "Tetelestai. It is finished," was what Jesus said on the cross. He has said that the Law is finished—accomplished in Him. Paul and Jesus say the same thing. Telos and tetelestai are from the same word. "Christ is the end (telos) of the Law" because in His death and resurrection He has finished it all as He said, "It is finished (Tetelestai)." Jesus is the "it is finished" of the Law.

Yet, we want to put everything back under the Law. We compare ourselves to others all the time. Oh sure, we'll admit that we aren't perfect, that we've sinned, but at least we're not as bad as the next guy. We create our own categories, label people, put them in the "hell" box because they've murdered, stolen, gotten an abortion, a divorce, because we know what they did at that party, and we would never do anything like that. Repent. We are using the Law for righteousness, but "you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?" (Galatians 4:21). There are only two categories when it comes to the Law: righteous and sinner. There isn't better sinner or worse sinner. Repent.

Thanks be to God that in spite of our own laws—our law-ing other people—He saves us. "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes." He has already died and risen, fulfilling the Law completely for you. There's no reason to try anything else, to jockey for position, to climb the mountain a little bit higher. Christ already ascended the mountain. He's given you the best place: He has made you God's child in Baptism and seated you at the foretaste of the heavenly banquet when you receive His Body and Blood. What more is there to be done for righteousness' sake? Nothing. Jesus has done it all. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

By grace! None dare lay claim to merit; Our works and conduct have no worth. God in His love sent our Redeemer, Christ Jesus, to this sinful earth; His death did for our sin atone, And we are saved by grace alone. (By Grace I'm Saved, LSB 566:2)
Wednesday of the Tenth Week After Trinity
August 28, 2019

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 11:1-26; 2 Corinthians 6:1-18

But deliver us from evil. What does this mean? We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, gives us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to himself in heaven. (Small Catechism: Lord's Prayer, Seventh Petition)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, it's not that we're just asking for a bunch of stuff from God. We're learning to trust that before we even ask, He already plans to gives us these many blessings. And finally, we learn to believe the promise that He will keep us in His Word and faith until we die.

Nobody wants to think about dying. It could come in the next instant through tragedy to anyone at any age. It may wait until well into old age. Either way, as Christians, we face death with this petition on our lips, even when we're not thinking about it.

And the petition is this: Deliver us from evil. That is, ultimately, sin and death. The evil one brought evil to mankind with his lying words and his lying words led to disobedience and sin and death. So the answer to this prayer to be delivered from all these evils is Jesus: Jesus who overcomes Satan; Jesus who overcomes sin; Jesus whose Word gives us forgiveness, life and salvation.

By His suffering and death on the cross, Jesus has dealt with, answered, counteracted, taken care of, and done away with evil. He's eradicated the sting of sin, death, and the devil. He's rescued us from all of that. He has delivered you from every evil.

Therefore, when you pray this petition, you are in essence saying, “Lord, you have baptized me and fed me with Christ's Body and Blood; you have filled my ears with the Good News of what Jesus' death and resurrection does for me. Therefore let me fear nothing, and when it's time to die, then take me to be with you forever like you promised.” The Lord promises to deliver you from evil. And He does and always will in Jesus. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

From evil, Lord, deliver us; The times and days are perilous. Redeem us from eternal death, And, when we yield our dying breath, Console us, grant us calm release, And take our souls to You in peace. (Our Father, Who From Heaven Above, LSB 766:8)
For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. (Mark 6:17)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We’ve heard it all week. Those who think they are righteous, persecute those who are truly righteous only by God's Word. Now we have the example of a preacher of righteousness, John the Baptist, who was beheaded, not even by a man who thought he was godly, but just a cruel and wicked king who had John beheaded because his stepdaughter danced provocatively!

John the Baptist, the greatest of all the prophets, did not live to see Jesus die and rise for sinners. It hardly seems fair that the Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness—the prophet sent to prepare the way of the Lord, who pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God—died in such a wicked and brutal way.

But John's death reminds us that this world hates the Lord. It has turned its back on its Creator, despised and rejected its Savior and wanted no part of the Spirit's preaching in the Church. It's a wonder anyone is saved! Christ Himself went to death in this way, was arrested, beaten, and condemned by wicked men. For what reason? So that the Father will no longer count any of that wickedness against us! By Christ's death, our Jesus-rejecting hearts have been cleaned.

John's being beheaded reminds us of something: in the body of Christ, Jesus Himself is our Head! Our Lord, Master, Teacher, Rabbi, Savior and King. What John lost on this earth, his head and his life, is given back in infinite and eternal blessings through Jesus, our Head and life everlasting. John bears witness to this until he and all of God's saints are raised again on the Last Day. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Our thanks for John the Baptist Who, till his dying day, Made straight paths for the Savior And heralded His way! In witnessing to Jesus Through times of threat or shame May we with faith and courage The Lamb of God proclaim. (By All Your Saints in Warfare, LSB 518:24)
No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We misunderstand the Holy Spirit. We try and put Him in a box that He doesn't fit in. We look for Him to be big and flashy. If there's not a spectacle we don't think the Spirit's there and working. We want Him to make Himself known in every possible way except in the ways He wants to be known. We want Him to do things differently from how He wants to do them. We want to run the show.

But the Spirit won't be bound by us. He works as He wills. "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." This is how the Spirit chooses to work. He calls us through the Word. He turns the lights on. We were in darkness but not anymore. The Spirit-filled Word made sure of that.

Only through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in the Word can we say "Jesus is Lord. He's my Savior. He died for me, and shed His blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of my sins." That's the Spirit's work. It's not flashy or a spectacle, but He delivers Jesus to you, His forgiveness, life, and salvation. He pours it over you at the font, He absolves it over you, He gives it through Jesus' Body and Blood in the Supper. Those are the Spirit's gifts, too. When you hear the Spirit-filled Word, when it was washed over you, when it's fed to you, you then have the Spirit.

You can say, "Jesus is my Lord and Savior," because you've received the Spirit. He gives you Jesus, and He works in you to confess and speak of Jesus. It's His work that does it, and it's His work that saves you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, 'tis not that I did choose Thee; That, I know, could never be; For this heart would still refuse Thee Had Thy grace not chosen me. Thou hast from the sin that stained me Washed and cleansed and set me free And unto this end ordained me, That I ever live to Thee. (Lord, 'Tis Not That I Did Choose Thee, LSB 573:1)
Let God arise, Let His enemies be scattered; Let those also who hate Him flee before Him. (from the Introit for Trinity 11)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. In the Old Testament, when the Ark of the Lord was on the move, the enemies of God got out of the way! The Ark, that gold and holy box, was accompanied by the power and might of God. The armies of Israel marched with it and conquered their enemies wherever they went.

When Jesus comes, it doesn't seem quite so dramatic. Baby in a manger. Guy getting baptized in a river. Rabbi teaching on a hill. Man accused like a criminal and nailed to a cross. But this is no mere man. This is the Son of God in the flesh. He arises on the cross to draw the judgment of God like a lightning rod. He arises from the tomb and throws down death. He arises and ascends into heaven. When Jesus does what He came to do, His enemies—sin, death, devil, hell, the curse of the Law—are all scattered. They can't harm His people anymore.

When you go to the Divine Service tomorrow, the Lord will arise. Beginning with the Name put on you in your Baptism, through the pronouncement of Christ's Holy Absolution, to the reading of the Scriptures and the preaching of the Word, to the appearance of Christ in His Body and Blood, God will be arising. Where His Word is heard and His Name is put upon you, His enemies are scattered.

When you go out into the world after church, bearing Christ, His enemies will be scattered. There is nowhere the devil can go where the name of Christ won't cause him to fear and tremble. That's the Name that you bear. When you walk out the door, Christ living in you goes with you. And none of His enemies can hurt you. They can try. But the victory of Christ is your victory and they can't stop Him. And they can't keep you down, either. Where Christ's Word and Sacrament are given, there the Lord arises and His enemies are scattered and flee before Him. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
Martin Luther’s Morning and Evening Prayers taken from the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther

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