Higher Things Reflections

Trinity 17 – Last Sunday of the Church Year
October 13 – November 30, 2019
2019 Reflections
Trinity 17 – Last Sunday of the Church Year

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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.
And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” (Luke 14:3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath Day or not? Healing is sort of the point of the Sabbath. Yet sin makes you so blind that you see it as an obligation. Maybe not “do no work” as the Pharisees teach, but still, Old Adam always sees worship as a burden, not a gift. They made hard work of not working. We act like we deserve extra credit for putting on pants to receive forgiveness, life, and salvation from the God who bought and delivered it. Sin makes you stupid. The Pharisees are so proud of doing nothing that they stick a suffering man in front of Jesus and would honestly rather see him ignored than helped. He's so disfigured by disease, so uncomfortable, so afraid to say anything to draw attention to what everyone is already thinking about that he becomes nothing more than what he would give anything not to be. A counterpoint to how good the Pharisees look. Everybody gets what they desire. The man, who can’t utter a petition in his shame, is healed. The Pharisees get nothing, just like they wanted. And Jesus gets to save a sinner in need and preach to those who do not yet believe.

God calls us to remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. He doesn’t want you to have a vacation from work, He wants you to have time so He can spend it with you. For you. For every illness, every shame, every time we just want to crawl into a hole and pull the whole thing on top of us just to disappear and not be who people talk about. Jesus would even be near the Pharisee who only wants to trap Him. The Sabbath Day is not about behaving like Jesus, it’s about being near Him. You aren't made holy by where you sit, by how you behave, or what you do or don't do. You're made holy by Jesus. He died for you, bore your sins and your sicknesses, then rose to be present for you in Word and Sacrament. The Sabbath Day is for healing. The Sabbath Day is for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

Lord, we implore You, grant Your people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow You, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. (Proverbs 25:11)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It doesn’t take much more time to ruin a reputation than it does to stab someone. The knife wound heals more quickly. Reputation is a fragile thing. A good one is a gift from God. He cares about your reputation. He cares what people say about you, even though He knows every terrible thing you’ve thought but knew better than to say out loud. He wants them to see you the way He does. Forgiven. “Talk about this person like I took their sins away and washed them white in my blood,” says the Lord. He wants you to look that good, because that’s how He sees you. Pure. Holy. Worthy of love. Christ-washed. Baptized.

He cares about your neighbor’s reputation, too. That doesn’t mean you should ignore their sin or call it good. It doesn’t mean you should pretend to be an optimist or pretend you’re not hurt or angry. Start with Jesus, not your heart. Hear that Jesus loves your neighbor. He died for her. If you can’t see past her sin, see it on the cross where He bore it, then ask how He would speak of her: the same way He does for you. Not eager to condemn, but not ignoring wrong. Bearing it Himself in mercy.

This changes our words. Reproof becomes like a gold ring because it isn’t about casting someone down. Jesus already fell into the pit for them. It’s about raising them up. Sin breaks stuff. I don’t want you to hurt. We don’t need to put ourselves forward on the basis of what we’ve done.

Your reputation matters, but that’s because God has earned it. He fulfilled the Law for you. In the pit of your sins, you were told “Come up here” By the Lord who would dive down into the pit to raise you up Himself. “Don’t stay down there. Be with me,” says the King of kings to you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

Thou art King of Glory, Christ; Son of God, yet born of Mary. For us sinners sacrificed, As to death a Tributary, First to break the bars of death, Thou hast opened heav’n to faith. (Holy God, We Praise Thy Name, LSB 940:4)
Tuesday of the 17th Week after Trinity
October 15, 2019

Today's Reading: Ephesians 4:1-6

...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. I’m tired of waking up to hear about death on the news. I’m tired of suffering. I’m tired of not being surprised by it anymore. Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. Humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love. Sounds great. You catch glimpses of it after a tragedy, even among the unbelievers. Blood banks full of people donating. Volunteers picking through rubble. Tragedy brings us together. The problem is, when the threat passes, we remember how much we hate each other. We need an enemy. Us vs. them is easy. There’s a reason we devolve into fighting after the threat passes.

Paul calls us to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Not us vs. them, but a unity that endures in more than brief flashes in the face of the ugliest of days. Unity, not in a common enemy or cause or hatred, but a common Spirit. One Lord. One faith. One Baptism. Love, not from our hearts, but from our God. In the face of darkness, sin, and evil, this love was made manifest. It took flesh. Love was named Jesus, who bore our sin and tragedy and division unto death. He died for victims and monsters alike. We have unity in His Cross, where God reveals the bond of peace that was made by nails pounded through the hands and feet of our Lord. For you. For all.

This love is not for the cloister or your private heart. It’s for life in this world wrecked by sin. It’s for the sinners. It’s for you. It’s for all. We are bound by a peace nothing can take. Not sin, not death, not the devil. Those are our enemies. Call them what they are, no matter what masks they wear. Then call them defeated. Christ has conquered them on the cross. Be at peace. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

Thou camest to our hall of death, O Christ, to breathe our poisoned air, To drink for us the dark despair That strangled our reluctant breath. How beautiful the feet that trod The road that leads us back to God! How beautiful the feet that ran To bring the great good news to man! (O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth LSB 834:3)
“Honor your father and your mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”
(The Small Catechism: Table of Duties - To Children)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Vocation bears a promise. It’s law, but the law still bears a promise. Not just do this get that. It’s simpler: God wants this done. The promise behind the Table of Duties is that your God wills these things to be done. If He has to use you, so be it. God wills children to be faithful, so He gives them parents to raise them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. God wills children to have shelter and safety, so He gives them parents to care for them.

The worst thing we do is kick Him out at this point. Okay, God. You did your part, now it’s my turn. If I do it right, my kids won’t leave the faith. If I behave well enough, I’ll get a longer life. As if God hands us the ball and goes back up to heaven to see how it turns out. What if the God who worked to give you the gift of family wasn’t content to be apart from it?

Vocation bears a promise because you can see the means God wishes to use as well as the end He aims for. He’ll be a part of it, too. Parents, if your kids have strayed, remember that God is the Good Shepherd who seeks His sheep. Remember that the Word you taught them is His living and active Word. He is at work through it, even now. Kids, if your parents are sinners, realize that’s how the world works since Adam and Eve broke it. None of us does this perfectly. God calls us to honor our parents because He is the one working behind and through them to care for us.

Honor has to be earned, but God’s gift is that He will work inside of vocation, so the honor is earned by Him, not us. Honor your father and mother, not because they’re without sin, but because the God who bore their sin on the cross promises to grab hold of them and take care of you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

Hear us, dear Father, when we pray For needed help from day to day That as Your children we may live, Whom You baptized and so received. (Lord, Help Us Ever to Retain, LSB 865:3)
Thursday of the 17th Week after Trinity
October 17, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 15:19-16:22; Matthew 13:44-58

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matthew 13:44)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Bible is not about you, the Bible is about Jesus, for you. It’s either/or; it can’t be both. We misunderstand, more often than not. We convince ourselves that we’re doing what Jesus wants, all the while ignoring Him.

Jesus isn’t welcome in His hometown because they can’t see Him as a Savior, even though they recognize him as a wise man in spite of being born of Mary, if not begotten by Joseph. Note that unbelief still hung on every word out of Jesus’ mouth. The people marveled, but did not see. They missed the treasure. That’s okay.

The treasure hidden in the field is not God. It’s you. He sought you out. He paid the price for you. Not just with gold or silver, but with His holy and precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death. All so that you would be His own.

Some things aren’t understood, but they can still be received. It is a mystery why someone would sell a house for a pearl. It is a mystery why God would leave behind His home to redeem a sinner. I don’t understand it. But it happened. Jesus did it. For me. For you. It’s salvation that names you righteous at the end of the age. It’s Jesus for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

Salvation unto us has come By God’s free grace and favor; Good works cannot avert our doom, They help and save us never. Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, Who did for all the world atone; He is our one Redeemer. (Salvation Unto Us Has Come, LSB 555:1)
“Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’” (Luke 10:5)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Worry injects something toxic in this little word called missions. Somewhere it stopped being about helping other people, and started being about making sure we survive or making sure the institution survives. Missions becomes the measurement of health in a church, so we count people, volunteers, money, programs, technology, kids. Usually we’re convinced we need more. It leads to a kind of desperation that’s hard to be anything but selfish. It’s hard to think about my neighbor’s daily bread when I’m starving. It’s hard to think about the well-being of the so-called lost when you think the so-called found are about to go under. We paint a picture of a church on the brink of extinction, complain about it, then act shocked when nobody else wants to join us.

This is who Christ sends the 72 out to. It wasn’t different then. Same fears, same selfishness, same idolatry, same sin. He’s still sending. And we’re still more focused on what we don’t have than what we do. The kingdom of God has come near. Jesus didn’t send the 72 because He was too busy. It wasn’t because He wanted to be farther from the people, but closer to them. Look. Listen. See. Taste. Your God is not far away. In Word, in Sacrament, He brings that gift to you. He who went to the cross for you sends His servants to bring You to Him. He gives them simple words to speak that do the very things they say. It’s the sign of a healthy church.

Peace is not measured in stuff, but in the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away sin of the world. There’s Jesus here. His kingdom has come near you. His peace is with you. Really here. Really for you, when everything else falls apart. When everything else is devoured. Christ will feed you, too. And this is real healing. We’ll abide now in a land of not enough, because Christ speaks peace to us here. And that’s enough. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

Here a maid was found with child, Yet remained a virgin mild. In her womb this truth was shown: God was there upon His throne. (Savior of the Nations, Come, LSB 332:3)
Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you, and let your prophets be proven faithful. 
(From the Introit for Trinity 18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. O Lord, let your prophets be proven faithful. Because without that, the whole psalm turns into something false. O Lord, when Your prophets are unfaithful, when they do not forgive those you call them to forgive, when they despise your gifts and withhold them, when they muddle your law into something they think their people can accomplish, it leaves Your peace far away. I dread going to the house of the Lord to be told lies in His Name. I dread going to hear my sins rebuked and told that mercy is not for me, but for those who have tried harder, done more. There is no security there, only whitewashed tombs and sinners pretending to be righteous.

O Lord, let your prophets be proven faithful. Let them speak the truth. All of your Law. All of your Gospel. Otherwise, we can find no peace. Otherwise, we might look for it elsewhere and grasp at it as it crumbles in our hands. Let your house be a place where that peace is given, that I would be glad to go there. Let me find Jesus there. Let me eat and drink His Body and Blood, shed for me for the forgiveness of my sins. Let me find hope. The good of the Lord that we seek is this: mercy given to sinners. Mercy given to me.

It matters what church you go to. While we wait for the Lord, we can wait under the death of the Law, or the promise of the Gospel that is already fulfilled. Go to the church that gives Jesus to sinners. Hear from faithful pastors that your sins, which merit death, have been forgiven, and that even as you wait, you do not do so alone. God is here for you. In Word. In promise. In Sacrament. The peace of the Lord, the blessing of Aaron, is found there. It’s for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

The sower sows; his reckless love Scatters abroad the goodly seed, Intent alone that all may have The wholesome loaves that all men need. (Preach You the Word, LSB 586:3)
Today’s Reading: Matthew 22:34-46
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 19:1-20; Matthew 15:1-20

...saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” (Matthew 22:42)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Pharisees were a lot of things, but stupid wasn’t one of them. The question was too easy. What’s the core of the Commandments? Love. But the real question was underneath it: If that’s all it takes…what are you doing here?

Old Adam is always convinced he has love figured out. From false religion to sappy movies, everyone acts like love is the most profound thing, but only manages to say that it’s feeling happy or being kind to people when you feel so motivated. So the Pharisees ask a law question about love. We want to scoff. Idiots. Enemies of God. They try to use a law that commands love as a weapon. They aren’t as smart as they think.

We fall into the same trap. We measure love by the heart. We don’t like their hearts, so we paint them as the enemies Jesus loves to make fools of them. They ask a law question about love. Jesus shows us what love is. The Gospel. He is David’s son, yet David’s Lord. He is the God made flesh, born of the line of David to die for sinners and enemies of God. Pharisees and Sadducees. You. His enemies were put under His feet. Not people, but sin, death, and the power of the devil. These enemies were conquered at the foot of the cross. All to save us.

Love is not measured in the heart. It’s measured on the cross. God died for us while we were still sinners. The law is fulfilled in David’s Lord. And the law is fulfilled for you. Love that doesn’t start there always devolves or tapers off by the time it gets to our enemies. Start at the cross. Jesus died for His enemies, for your enemies, and for you. This is love. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

O God, because without You we are not able to please You, mercifully grant that Your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
Monday of the 18th Week after Trinity
October 21, 2019

Today's Reading: Deuteronomy 10:12-21
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 20:1-20; Matthew 15:21-39

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. (Deuteronomy 10:17)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” No big deal, right? Look at all the great stuff God has done for you. You owe Him. Honestly, you owe Him more than He asks. He hasn’t just saved ancestors. He hasn’t just given you all you have in this life. He sacrificed His Son to save you. Repent. Repent, because it isn’t God who would use His good works as leverage to extract something from you. It’s you who use your works as leverage to demand from God. It’s you who thinks your good deeds require recompense from your neighbor. God did not send His Son to die as a guilt trip.

And more, it wouldn’t have even worked. We are indebted to God. That’s not in question. But it’s like handing a 4-year-old a bill for room and board. They can’t pay it. You can’t, either. God doesn’t want you to. He is not partial and takes no bribes. He just loves sinners. Even you, who can’t hear His promises without thinking about leverage and paybacks. For even this, Jesus has died for you. You are forgiven. Not because you’ll ever earn it, but because God loves you.

He loves us so much that He wants to see orphans and widows and sojourners cared for even though they can’t pay. He gives it all as a gift. That which He requires of you? He fulfills it for you in the person of His Son. He works it through you for the good of your neighbor. The Law demands more than we could ever give. But God provides everything the Law demands. That way your works aren’t your praise. Your God is. He is the one who has accomplished all for sinners. Jesus paid everything for you. You owe nothing. Rejoice in Him who made you free. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

The royal banners forward go; The cross shows forth redemption’s flow, Where He, by whom our flesh was made, Our ransom in His flesh has paid: (The Royal Banners Forward Go, LSB 455:1)
To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours…(1 Corinthians 1:2)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. I have a bad habit of skipping Paul’s greetings. Get to the point, my friend. We can pretend I’m so pious that I just can’t wait to get to the good stuff. The introductions are always more or less the same. You shouldn’t recycle material, Paul. It’s lazy.

When it comes to Corinth, I think maybe the introduction is the point. Read it. It doesn’t sound like the Corinth that we hear about in the rest of the letter. This doesn’t sound like a church divided. Full of sexual immorality, idolatry. Ignoring the widows in order to get drunk. Mishandling the Lord’s Supper. Bragging about spiritual gifts to raise themselves above each other. Corinth is messed up. But Paul writes to the holy ones, sanctified in Christ Jesus.

Because that’s who they are. The thing that unites us across time and space, that lets Paul write an introduction to Corinth that sounds like the introduction to Galatia and Ephesus and Philippi, is the Gospel: grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Corinth is not known by the cesspool of sin, but by the God who promises to give grace, forgiveness, and peace. The testimony is confirmed among the believers there. Their sins are forgiven because Christ is risen from the dead. Because Christ gives them His Body and Blood to eat and drink. Because Christ unites them into one body. The proof of Christianity isn’t in our works, but God’s.

He joins us into fellowship across time and space into the mercy given by the cross. The introduction is the point because God’s Word does what it proclaims. It gives grace, mercy, and peace to them, and to you. That sustains us to the end. Guiltless. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine! We feebly struggle, they in glory shine; Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine. Alleluia! Alleluia! (For All the Saints, LSB 677:4)
St. James of Jerusalem, Brother of Jesus and Martyr
October 23, 2019

Today's Reading: Acts 15:12-22
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 24:10-25:10; Matthew 16:13-28

“‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it.’” (Acts 15:16)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We treat religion like a sliding scale rather than a declaration from God. There are people we see as “more religious”. And others are, well, less. Funny how we always come to those conclusions based on their works, and not God’s grace. You are more religious. You come to Bible study more, know more, give more, help more, do more. Are more? No.

Christianity is not a sliding scale. Christianity is God’s making dead men live by dying on the cross and rising from the dead. We love to measure works. It was true in Acts, too. Gentiles heard the Word. The Spirit gave them life and hope. But…shouldn’t they be…more religious? Circumcised? Ceremonial law followers?

Barnabas, Paul, and Peter say no. Rejoice that they believe. Jews who come to faith are not more Christian than Gentiles. Gentiles who are not circumcised are not less Christian. Baptism is the great equalizer. We are sinners crucified with Christ and raised with Him. Live without offense to God and neighbor, but see yourself for exactly what you are, and exactly what God names you: His child.

Measuring our works to feel more religious only leaves us playing pretend in the ruins of the tent of David. Christians celebrating Seder because it makes them feel more connected to God miss the fact that God makes Himself present with them in the Lord’s Supper in a way that the Seder only pointed to.

Measure God’s promises, not our works. Measure God's grace, not your responses to it. Measuring Christ’s promises to you doesn’t leave you with terms like “more” or “less”. Just Christian. Saved by Jesus. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

We are God’s house of living stones, Built for His own habitation. He through baptismal grace us owns Heirs of His wondrous salvation. Were we but two His name to tell, Yet He would deign with us to dwell With all His grace and His favor. (Built on the Rock, LSB 645:3)
Thursday of the 18th Week after Trinity
October 24, 2019


...like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men. (The Small Catechism: Table of Duties - To Workers)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Words are like luggage. They carry whatever we put into them. The word “slave” has some baggage. It’s pretty ugly. I’m not sure I can explain it away. People sinned. That’s bad. It shouldn’t be excused or explained away. Jesus had to die for those sinners. He did, though. If nothing else, they were purchased and won, not with gold or silver, but with His holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. They are His own.

He died for us, too. Purchased us, too. Owns us, too. While I can’t unpack the word “slave” so that it isn’t offensive and full of the history of man’s sin, I can show you where God would carry that baggage. He died on the cross for sinners. For you. That doesn’t make the word acceptable now. But it does make the sinners forgiven, which is how we are to see them as we serve in our vocation today. Serve your boss, your master, your manager, as if God wants something to do with them, even if they’re sinners.

None of us are as free as we like to think. That’s a good thing. God would rather have us as His own. God would see us as more valuable than gold, more valuable than His own blood. Let your reward be found there, in His grace to reward you for even the good He does through you. In His mercy to give you gifts not rooted in your birth, your race, or your occupation, but rooted in His sacrifice.

Then rejoice, because He would use you as a gift to someone else, too. Serve as the gift of God that you are, all the while singing hymns of praise that you, purchased at a cost higher than anything else in creation, would be a blessing to another sinner whom God would see helped. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

Lord, help us walk Your servant way Wherever love may lead And, bending low, forgetting self, Each serve the other’s need. (Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant Way, LSB 857:5)
Friday of the 18th Week after Trinity
October 25, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 27:1-26; Matthew 17:14-27

As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” And they were greatly distressed. (Matthew 17:22-23)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. I’m with the disciples. I can’t move mountains or heal the sick, but I really want to. I can, however, pay taxes, but I’d rather not do that if possible. We covet that which we can’t do and flee from that which God has given us to do. We make the whole thing about us, not to do more, but to do our will instead of His. Forget taxes. I want to move mountains. Don’t ask me why. I haven’t really thought that far ahead most of the time.

We read that it only takes a mustard seed’s worth of faith to move mountains, then try to read that as some kind of challenge. The independence is hilarious. We figure the goal is being able to do everything ourselves. We’ll get there by fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. We want enough faith to not need the God we have faith in. Sin makes us stupid, but the Son of Man has this under control. He goes to bear the cross for sinners and rise from the dead. It’s distressing because it’s not our will: We’re too busy trying to move mountains.

Aim higher than a seed. You were never supposed to move the mountain. God put it there. You don’t need to heal the sick. God does, and if the sickness seems to win, He insists they be healthy and raises them from the dead. He even gave you your vocation that lets you pay taxes. The point isn’t how to not need God, but to realize you don’t need control. God is at work, even here and now, through Word and Sacrament. His will is done, and more, His will is good and wise. Breathe. It’s not about control. It’s about Jesus, and Jesus bears the cross to save us, even from ourselves and mustard seeds. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

The will of God is always best And shall be done forever; And they who trust in Him are blest; He will forsake them never. He helps indeed In time of need; He chastens with forbearing. They who depend On God, their friend, Shall not be left despairing. (The Will of God is Always Best, LSB 758:1)
Saturday of the 18th Week after Trinity
October 26, 2019

Today's Reading: Introit for Trinity 19
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 28:1-22; Matthew 18:1-20

Say to my soul, “I am your salvation!” (From the Introit for Trinity 19)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Who talks to his own soul? Every Christian who is commanded to pray. God doesn’t need to be reminded to help us in our time of need. He already did that. It is finished. He doesn’t need us to explain to Him what’s wrong when we pray. He speaks to us in parables and utters dark sayings from of old. Prayer is not our telling God what to do then trying to make Him do it. Prayer is given for our comfort, that we would speak God’s promises to God even as we plead with Him for help. I wonder if He didn’t command this just so that our souls could eavesdrop. Pray, so your soul can hear the Lord’s promises, His identity, and His mercy. That’s where it really needs to be heard anyway.

God doesn’t need to be reminded of His promises, but we do. Say to my soul, “I am your salvation.” Remind me of who you are. Give me Your Word to reflect on Your promises. Teach me through my fathers and the generations before them, that I would recount the same promises to the generation to follow. All the while, He has already acted. The Lord saved him out of all his troubles. Past tense. It is finished. Christ has rescued you through His death and resurrection. He has conquered all your enemies already. Past tense. Ongoing effect. Ongoing promise. This is our God, our God forever and ever. Soul, relax. Remember who your God is. Remember what He’s already done. Find peace in His promises. Your Jesus has saved you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Harrison Goodman

Be still, my soul; though dearest friends depart And all is darkened in this vale of tears; Then you will better know His love, His heart, Who comes to soothe your sorrows and your fears. Be still, my soul; your Jesus can repay From His own fullness all He takes away. (Be Still, My Soul, LSB 752:3)
“But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – he then said to the paralytic – “Rise, pick up your bed and go home…” (Matthew 9:2)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “Question authority.” “Fight authority.” “I don’t need your authority.” Slogans like this are a reminder that our fallen world, and our sinful flesh, have authority issues. At times it’s because sinful people abuse, misuse, and confuse their positions of authority. Other times it’s because we want to be our own authority.

Yet in reality, everyone is under some kind of authority. Students have teachers. Padawans have Jedi masters. Sailors have captains. Christians have the God’s Word and Jesus, the Word made flesh.

The scribes in Matthew 9 had an authority issue, too. “This man is blaspheming,” they said. “Who does this guy think he is, claiming God’s divine authority of forgiveness for himself?”

If Jesus were any ordinary man, they would have a point. But Jesus is no ordinary man. Jesus is God and man incarnate. He’s God’s authority in human flesh.

Where we use God’s gift of authority for sinful, selfish ends, Jesus’ authority is saving, selfless, and sanctifying. Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and earth through His death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus exercises His authority over us in love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness of sins. Jesus showed His authority over disease, sin, and death by placing Himself under earthly authorities for you. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, and now lives and reigns to give us His authority in the forgiveness of sins. Let us glorify God that He has given such authority to men. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz

The gifts flow from the font Where He calls us His own; New life He gives that makes Us His and His alone. Here He forgives our sins With water and His Word; The triune God Himself Gives pow’r to call Him Lord. (The Gifts Christ Freely Gives, LSB 602:2)
Today's Reading: John 15:12-21
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 30:1-20; Matthew 19:1-15

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:12-13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Today the Holy Christian Church remembers St. Simon and St. Jude.

In love, Jesus called them as His disciples to follow Him, bear the cross, and be witnesses of the cross Jesus bore for them, for you, and for the life of the world.
In love, Jesus taught them His Holy Word, gave them His authority to teach, preach, baptize, and deliver His Holy Body and Blood, for the forgiveness of sins.
In love, Jesus kept the commandments that Simon, Jude, and we have failed to keep.
In love, Jesus sent them and the other apostles out to preach and proclaim the Good News that "greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends." What’s more, that Jesus laid down His life for His enemies, for you, for me, for the life of the world.
In love, Jesus chose Simon and Jude to bear the fruit of good works in their calling as apostles.
In love, Jesus does the same for you, too. Jesus calls you His beloved, baptized saint. Jesus teaches, washes, and feeds you with His life-giving Word, water, Body and Blood. Jesus sends us and chooses us to be His servants in whatever vocation He calls us into, to bear the fruit of good works—the fruit of Jesus’ love for us.
A blessed St. Simon and St. Jude’s day to you! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
-Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz

Praise, Lord for Your apostles, Saint Simon and Saint Jude. One love, one hope impelled them To tread the way, renewed. May we with zeal as earnest The faith of Christ maintain, Be bound in love together And life eternal gain. (By All Your Saints in Warfare, LSB 5:18:28)
Tuesday of the 19th Week after Trinity
October 29, 2019

Today's Reading: Ephesians 4:22-28
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 31:1-29; Matthew 19:16-30

...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Holy Scripture begins and ends with clothing. After the fall into sin, God clothes and covers Adam and Eve's nakedness, guilt, and shame with animal skins. God clothes them in the first sacrifice. In Revelation God reveals to St. John the saints in heaven who are clothed in white robes made white in the blood of the Lamb.

Everything that happens between Genesis and Revelation is the story of God's clothing His people. God's covering His people's sin. God's ending the veil of death that hangs over our heads. God's wrapping us in His promises in Jesus who robed Himself in our humanity to clothe us in His death and resurrection.

Though all our righteousness is like filthy rags, and our sin like scarlet, in Jesus we are washed whiter than snow. Though we are as guilty and ashamed as Adam and Eve, God covers us with the sacrifice of His own Son, who hung on the cross to bear our nakedness, guilt, and shame. Though our enemies of the devil, world, and sinful flesh daily hurl flaming missiles of temptation our way, we're clothed with liquid armor in Holy Baptism.

This is what God does for us in Holy Baptism. Like Joseph and the prodigal son, our Heavenly Father robes us in something far greater than any invisibility cloak or Kevlar vest. God clothes you in Jesus' death and resurrection. “Jesus thy blood and righteousness; thy beauty are my glorious dress!” In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz

In Baptism we now put on Christ – Our shame is fully covered With all that He once sacrificed And freely for us suffered. For here the flood of His own blood Now makes us holy, right, and good Before our heav'nly Father. (All Christians Who Have Been Baptized, LSB 596:4)
Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? ’So the last will be first, and the first last.’” (Matthew 20:15-16)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. At some point in our childhood we’ve probably all played the “opposite game”. You know the rules: up is down; yes is no; near is far, and so on.

In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, it seems like Jesus is playing the opposite game with us, too. Only it’s not a game; it’s simply how Jesus works. The lost are found. The least are greatest. The poor in spirit are rich in His grace. The weak are strong. The humble are exalted. The dead are raised up. Sinners are forgiven freely in Jesus crucified and risen. Or, as Jesus says in this parable, “the last will be first.”

Jesus’ way, the way of the cross, sounds absolutely outrageous to our sinful flesh and the world. In this life, “if you’re not first, you’re last; make that list and check it twice; last one to the playground is a rotten egg.” Our sinful flesh loves to talk about fairness and getting what we deserve because we think (foolishly) that we deserve something good from God.

Thank God He’s not fair! Thank God He doesn’t give us the punishment and death sentence we deserve, but rather gives His undeserved grace and His steadfast love. Jesus, who is first, became last, so that we who are last become first in Him.

At the end of the day, all the laborers received the same wage. They didn’t get what they deserved. Neither do we. In Jesus, we get something far better. Jesus took what we deserved: death, judgment, and God’s wrath, so that we get what we don’t deserve: life, forgiveness, and eternal joy. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz

Thine the kingdom Thine the prize Thine the wonderful surprise Thine the banquet then the praise Then the justice of Thy ways Thine the glory Thine the story Then the welcome to the least Then the wonder all increasing at Thy feast at Thy feast. (Thine the Amen, Thine the Praise, LSB 680:4)
Reformation Day
October 31, 2019

Today's Reading: Romans 3:19-29
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 32:28-52; Matthew 20:17-34

For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:23-24)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Turn anywhere in Scripture and we find God’s Word of Law and Gospel. Like a good book, bound in thread, God’s Law and Gospel weave their way through every Testament, book, chapter, and verse of Scripture. Remember Genesis and Exodus? The flood was Law. The ark was Gospel. The 10 plagues were Law. The Passover and Exodus were Gospel. Mt. Sinai was Law. Mt. Calvary is Gospel. Knowing all of this, St. Paul proclaims God’s Law and Gospel.

To be sure, the Law is a guide and gives us discipline in the Lord. It also is a curb or damage control for a sinful, fallen world. Here in Romans 3, God’s Law is the mirror revealing the diagnosis of our sin. Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the guiltiest sinner of all? You, me, and everyone else. Like a pole vaulter running down the track and face-planting yards before the pit and the bar, all have fallen short of God’s glory.

Thankfully, God’s word of Law isn’t His last, or only word to us. God’s Law shows us our sin. But His Gospel shows us our Savior. The Law kills. The Gospel gives life. The Law condemns us. The Gospel saves us. The Law declares we are guilty. The Gospel declares we are acquitted. The Law is the judgment of God against our sin. The Gospel is Jesus who was judged in our place. The Law causes us to despair of our sin. The Gospel brings us comfort. The Law reveals we are slaves to sin. The Gospel sets us free in Jesus. “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz

The Law of God is good and wise And sets his will before our eyes, Shows us the way of righteousness, And dooms to death when we transgress. (The Law of God is Good and Wise, LSB 579:1)

The Gospel shows the Father’s grace, Who sent His Son to save our race, Proclaims how Jesus lived and died That we might thus ne justified. (The Gospel Shows the Father’s Grace, LSB 580:1)
For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Revelation 7:17)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Sometimes we try and hide them. Sometimes we try in vain to wipe them away. Still other times, we try and act tough: “I’m not crying; you’re crying.” But the truth is, we all have tears.

Tears of joy like Sarah laughing at the birth of Isaac, the outrageously gracious, unexpected son promised by the Lord. Tears of longing like the Israelite exiles weeping beside the rivers of Babylon. Tears of guilt, and sorrow, the kind that sting behind the eyes, like David mourning the death of his son. Tears of grief like our Lord wept at the tomb of Lazarus. We live in a vale of tears.

And yet with David, we find comfort in the God who knows our tossing, turning, and every one of our tears (Psalm 56:8).

With Isaiah we rejoice that the Lord will swallow up death forever, and wipe away tears from all our faces (Isaiah 25:6-9).

With St. John, we long for the day when we will see Jesus, our Shepherd, and the Lamb who reigns on the throne who will guide us to streams of living water, and will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 7:17).

And until that day, Jesus, who knows the every hair on our heads, also knows our every tear, sorrow, and grief. Jesus, who wept for us, promises to be with us in our weeping, too. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz

O sweet and blessed country, The home of God’s elect! O sweet and blessed country That faithful hearts expect! In mercy, Jesus, bring us To that eternal rest With You and God the Father And Spirit ever blest. (Jerusalem the Golden, LSB 672:4)
Oh come let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! (From the Introit for the 24th Sunday after Trinity)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. In karate, a student bows as she enters the dojo. In many cultures, bowing is a form of greeting or goodbye. In the days of kings and castles, knights would bow, offering their service (or perhaps their neck) at the mercy of the king. Bowing and kneeling are physical signs or symbols of reverence and respect.

Holy Scripture is full of examples of bowing and kneeling. The First Commandment instructs and warns us against bowing down to false gods. As we learn in the Small Catechism, we should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Isaiah bowed before the Lord’s presence in Isaiah 6, as he confessed his sin before God and received the Lord’s absolution and atonement from the altar.

Psalm 95, the same psalm we hear in Matins, and in Divine Service tomorrow, invites us to join the faithful saints of God in worshiping and bowing down before the Lord, our Maker. For He is our God. We are His beloved, baptized people.

And Jesus, too, bowed His head on the cross, and gave up His spirit for you. Jesus bowed His head for all the times we’ve bowed our heads, hearts, and hands inwardly on ourselves. Jesus knelt under the weight of our sin for all the times we’ve failed to kneel before Him. Jesus perfectly feared, loved, and trusted the Father for you.

And now, in Christian freedom, we come to Divine Service and bow, kneel as we receive Him who bows down and descends to us in His Body and Blood to feed and forgive us in body and soul. We kneel, stand, sing, pray, praise, and give thanks to our Lord who bowed and kneeled down to save us. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz

At the name of Jesus Ev'ry knee shall bow, Ev'ry tongue confess Him King of Glory now. 'Tis the Father's pleasure We should call Him Lord, Who from the beginning Was the mighty Word. (At the Name of Jesus, LSB 512:1)
Sunday of the 24th Week after Trinity

November 3, 2019

Today's Reading: Matthew 9:18-26
Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 3:6-4:2; Matthew 22:1-22

And when Jesus came to the ruler’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, “Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. (Matthew 9:23-24)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The crowds laughed at Jesus’ words. They jeered His words about death as sleep, here in Matthew 9, even as the crowds would later mock and jeer Him as He hung crucified on the cross. But to Jesus, death is no laughing matter. Death is cause for weeping. Death is the last enemy. And yet, for Jesus death is weaker than a Sunday afternoon nap.

This is why He raised this ruler’s daughter, to show the crowds, you, me, and the world that He holds the keys to death and Hades. To reveal that in His death and resurrection, we find our healing, our life, and our resurrection. To proclaim to all, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

Think about how hard it can be to wake someone up from a good night’s rest. We might have to nudge their shoulder, call their name, or blast an air horn a few times before they wake up. Not so for Jesus. All it takes is one word: arise. “Arise,” Jesus said to that little girl. And she rose. “Arise,” He said to Lazarus. And he rose. “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again.” And Jesus rose.

The same is true for you. In fact, in the watery grave of the font, you have already died and risen with Jesus. You daily die and rise with Him. And you will one day, by His grace, rise again from a death that will only seem but a moment’s sleep. For in Jesus, you are not dead; you are not even sleeping. You are alive in Jesus’ death and resurrection, now and forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Samuel Schulheisz

You pressed through crowds to reach the child Whose limbs with death grew cold.
“She is not dead; she only sleeps!” The weeping folk You told. And then You took her hand and called, “My child, I bid you rise!” She rose! And all stood round You, Lord,
With awed and wond’ring eyes! (O Christ, Who Shared Our Mortal Life, LSB 552:6)
Monday of the 24th Week after Trinity
November 4, 2019

Today's Reading: Isaiah 51:1-9
Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 5:1-19; Matthew 22:23-46

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness,
you who seek the Lord:
look to the rock from which you were hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were dug.
Look to Abraham your father
and to Sarah who bore you;
for he was but one when I called him,
that I might bless him and multiply him.” (Isaiah 51:1-2)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord gives us a little theology by geology. The Lord calls His people Israel a rock. Doesn't sound very flattering at first, but it is descriptive. Abraham was the foundation God laid for His people and His promise, but ultimately, it was the Lord Himself who was the bedrock, cornerstone, and terra firma beneath Israel’s feet.

Yes, Israel was a chip off the old rock of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not always in a good way. The Old Testament is layered with the stubborn, stiff-necked, rebellious, rock-hard sin of Israel. Our history is no different. Within each of us is a heart of stone. Our sinful flesh is black as obsidian and hard as granite.

Through His prophet Isaiah, the Lord calls to us, His new Israel, to look, but not to ourselves, or at our stubborn, sinful hearts of stone. We are to look instead to the Rock from which we are hewn: Christ our cornerstone. Jesus was born to walk the rocky, dusty soil of this fallen world for you. Jesus was crucified on top of the stony mountain top called Golgotha for you. Jesus rose from the dead and rolled away the boulder of His grave to bless you.

And now, you are God’s house of living stones. Built for His own habitation. Given the Holy Spirit, who takes our hearts of stone and replaces them with hearts of righteousness. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz

We are God’s house of living stones, Built for His own habitation. He through Baptismal grace us owns Heirs of His wondrous salvation. Were we but two His name to tell. Yet He would deign with us to dwell With all His grace and His favor. (Built on the Rock, LSB 645:3)
Tuesday of the 24th Week After Trinity
November 5, 2019

Today's Reading: Colossians 1:9-14
Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 7:1-29; Matthew 23:1-12

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13-14)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. If someone’s stuck in a ditch in a snowstorm, AAA comes with a tow truck. If someone’s injured on a crab fishing boat in the Bering Sea, the Coast Guard sends a chopper. If someone’s drowning at the city swimming pool, the lifeguard dives in to save him. At some point in life, we all need to be delivered, rescued, saved.

This is especially true when it comes to our life before God. Scripture teaches us that apart from God we’re lost in darkness, rebellious against God, dead in trespasses, and children of wrath who deserve only judgment. Think of it this way: If you’re drowning in the middle of the ocean, you don’t need a swim coach to say, “Just swim harder!” No. You need the big orange Coast Guard helicopter to save you.

Jesus provides and accomplishes the deliverance, rescue, and saving we need. This is why Paul calls Jesus the Beloved Son. For in Him we have deliverance, redemption, and the forgiveness of sins. In Him you are beloved. In Him you are delivered, redeemed, saved. Your transfer paperwork is in, signed and sealed in Christ’s blood.

Like Noah, we’ve been saved from judgment by being brought through the waters of Holy Baptism and placed safely in the Ark of Christ’s Body, the Church. Like Peter, we’ve been yanked out of the abyss and saved from drowning by Jesus, who entered the darkness of the grave and came out alive for you. Like Paul we cry out, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” And for you, Jesus cried out, “It is finished.” In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz

In a wat’ry grave are buried All our sins which Jesus carried; Christ, the Ark of Life, has ferried us across death’s raging flood. (Water, Blood, and Spirit Crying, LSB 597:2)
The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (The Small Catechism: Table of Duties - To Everyone)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Martin Luther once wrote, “The Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. The Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”

It’s not a contradiction. It’s a paradox, one of many paradoxes of the Christian faith and life. We are justified freely by God in Jesus crucified for us. It’s free. Grace. No conditions, strings attached, or small print. And, because we’re free from having to earn or merit our salvation, we are also free to love and serve our neighbor out of love. God doesn’t need our good works, but our neighbor does.

This is often called the second table of the Ten Commandments, Commandments 4-10. These Commandments deal with our life before our neighbor—Coram Hominibus in the Latin. On the one hand they teach us how treat our neighbor. God gives us His gifts for our life together: authority, our physical lives, sexuality and marriage, possessions, reputation, and contentment in God’s gifts.

On the other hand, these Commandments also reveal our need for a Savior. For we daily sin much and have broken every one of these Commandments in thought, word, and deed. When the mirror of the Law is held up before us, it shows us our sin, that we have failed to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In truth, there’s only one Man who has ever truly and perfectly loved His neighbor as Himself. Jesus became our neighbor, brother and redeemer by becoming man to save us. Jesus loves us by keeping the Law, all Ten Commandments, in our place, and by suffering the punishment we deserved on the cross. Such is Jesus’ love for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz

These are the holy Ten Commands God gave to us by Moses’ hands When high on Sinai’s mount he stood, Receiving them for our good. Have mercy, Lord. (These are the Holy Ten Commands, LSB 581:1)
Thursday of the 24th Week after Trinity
November 7, 2019


The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem." (Jeremiah 11:1-2)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What the Lord speaks, the prophet speaks. What the Lord delivers to His people, the prophet delivers to God’s people. What the Lord proclaims, the prophet proclaims. That’s the pattern for God’s prophets in the Old Testament and for His disciples and apostles in the New Testament. God speaks His Word. They hear and receive His Word. And they preach and proclaim His Word to the people.

The same is true for us. The Lord speaks to us—not in how we think, feel, think, or act—but in His Word, the same Word that came to Jeremiah and Israel to declare the covenant with them. The same Word that condemned their sin (and ours) and saved them from their sin (and ours). The same Word that came to Jeremiah was made flesh for us in the person of Jesus.

And this is of everlasting comfort for us. Our Lord doesn’t leave us wondering what He says or thinks about our sin and salvation. He calls it what it is, in His Word. The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. God doesn’t leave our assurance of salvation—or the holiness of our Christian life—to uncertainty, either. He boldly declares that you are saved in water, Word, bread and wine by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And even your good works are His Gift for you to walk in. It’s all there for you, in God’s Word!

Your life, like Jeremiah’s life, is daily and eternally found in Jesus’ Word, the Word made flesh for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz

God has spoken by His prophets, Spoken His unchanging word; Each from age to age proclaiming God, the one, the righteous Lord. In the world’s despair and turmoil, One firm anchor holds us fast; God is king, His throne eternal; God the first, and God the last. (God Has Spoken by His Prophets, LSB 583:1)
But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. (Jeremiah 20:11)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jeremiah is often called the weeping prophet. He saw how corrupt and wicked Israel, God’s chosen people, had become. He witnessed persecution for speaking the Lord’s Word to Israel. He foretold Israel’s coming judgment, defeat, and exile at the hands of the Babylonians.

Nevertheless, the Lord was with Jeremiah. Through Jeremiah the Lord promised that Israel would return from exile. The Lord would make a new covenant with His people Israel, and with all nations. The Lord would defeat their greatest enemies. Not the Babylonians, or later the Assyrians, but the ruler of this world, the powers of darkness, and the army our sinful flesh.

What Jeremiah did not expect, what no one could expect, was exactly how God would accomplish this mission. God entered this fallen world behind enemy lines. God made His beachhead in the womb of the Virgin Mary. In Bethlehem the rightful King of the world was born. Jesus stepped forth onto battlefield earth like no other warrior before Him, and no warrior after Him. God in human flesh. A dread warrior wrapped in humility and our humanity. A soldier swaddled in clothes and lying in a manger. A king who rides a donkey into Jerusalem. A fighter who lays down His arms on the cross, lets sin and death overwhelm Him, and battles to the death to win the victory for you.

The Lord is with you, as a dread warrior, just as He was for Jeremiah and Israel. He gives you the sword of His Word and truth. He shields you by water and the Word in Baptism. And He feeds and strengthens you for life in the breach with His own life-giving, death-conquering, battle-won Body and Blood. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz

With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected; But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected. Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is. Of Sabaoth Lord, and there’s none other God; He holds the field victorious. (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, LSB 656:2)
Deliver me in Your righteousness. Bow down Your ear to me; deliver me speedily. (From the Introit for the Third-Last Sunday)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Lord delivers. That’s what He does. That’s the sort of God that He is. When He delivers, He saves. He isn’t slow, at least, “not as some count slowness” (2 Peter 3:9). He’s patient and long-suffering in His delivering.

When the going gets tough, we think the Lord won’t deliver. We believe He’s forgotten us. We doubt that He’s even listening to us. The trouble we’re facing gets worse, or at least not better. Our sins pile up. Our hope fades.

But the Lord delivers on His promises. He delivers His Son, “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.” The Lord delivers, being delivered up for us all: “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.” By doing this the Lord delivers you. Delivers you from your doubt and impatience. Delivers you even from death.

Yes, the Lord delivers. He delivers to you. Delivers His salvation, His forgiveness, His life. He delivers His righteousness to you at the font. He delivers His forgiveness to you, into your ears, with your pastor’s Absolution. He delivers eternal deliverance to you in His Body and Blood that keep you, body and soul, to everlasting life.

The Lord delivers. He delivers on His promises. He delivers you by delivering His Son up FOR YOU. His salvation is delivered to you. Now no matter what happens to you, no matter what trouble, it can never truly keep you down. Not forever. You are delivered from sin, and you will be delivered from death and grave. Your Baptism says so, His Absolution says so, and His Body and Blood say so.

Yes, the Lord, who raises the dead, has “delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us” (2 Corinthians 1:10). He delivers. Jesus delivers, and Jesus has and will deliver you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Mark Buetow

Your soul in griefs unbounded, Your head with thorns surrounded, You died to ransom me. The cross for me enduring, The crown for me securing, You healed my wounds and set me free. (Upon the Cross Extended, LSB 453:5)
For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:24)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Welcome to the end of the Church Year, that wonderful season that plays out in some Christians’ minds like a Halloween horror movie fest. Days get darker, nights last longer. Doom, gloom, and judgment abound.

Can’t tell the real humans from the Pod People or true believers from hypocrites and hangers-on? Does every easy way out come with hidden traps? And how often is the seeming heroic leader revealed to be the main villain?

The attrition rate in your standard slasher film is horrendous but even worse is the loss of humanity to eternal death in the Last Judgment. We know that many are called and few chosen and we might worry that we would end up screaming in the outer darkness for all eternity.

Jesus’ own warnings might set us on edge. Yet amidst the terrible options, one certainty remains. Jesus counters the certainty of leading the elect astray, saying, “If possible.” With God, all things are possible, including averting sure disaster and damnation.

The devil and the world may try every trick, monger every fear, and pave every road to hell, but when we remain focused on Christ, their tactics cannot succeed. It isn’t possible to deceive those whose trust in Jesus remains. If possible? Impossible! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

Almighty God, we implore You, show Your mercy unto Your humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Your judgment, but according to Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
Monday of the Third-Last Week
November 11, 2019

Today's Reading: Exodus 32:1-20
Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 23:21-40; Matthew 25:31-46

“Let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.” (Exodus 32:10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Perhaps you’ve had to stand in the way of someone whose anger was leading them to attack another person. Or maybe you’re the one who needed to be held back by friends. You might even be the one who provoked the attack and welcomed another person’s intervention.

If anyone had sufficient provocation and the right of violent regress, it was the God of Israel. He’d called them to be His people, grew them into a nation, and led them out of slavery toward the Promised Land. Yet for all the Lord’s efforts, Israel too often responded with fear, distrust, and unbelief.

We don’t always realize that our own shallow faith, reluctant obedience, and desire to think more highly of ourselves and our efforts than we ought are a similar affront to the Lord. We may not construct gaudy statues of gold but we find other ways to establish idols in our lives.

And the God who called us to be His would be completely within His rights to wipe us out and start over. But wait! That’s exactly what He did in the waters of Holy Baptism. He drowned our old, sinful selves just as He did the Egyptians in the Red Sea. He remade us in the image of His Son as He drew us out of the flood.

He forgives our foolish sinfulness for the sake of Jesus, who holds back His Father’s wrath by the strength of His sacrificial love. Christ took the crushing blow that we deserved and gave us a second chance—and still gives chance after chance beyond that.

Instead of forcing our idols down our throats, Christ graciously gives us His own Body and Blood as food and drink. Instead of choking us on sin and judgment, He nourishes us with righteousness and forgiveness. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

Holy Spirit, all divine, Dwell within this heart of mine; Cast down ev’ry idol throne, Reign supreme, and reign alone. (Holy Spirit, Light Divine, LSB 496:5)
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Suffering and sadness are part of our lot in this fallen world. Particularly painful is the death of loved ones. And all too often, the very words of comfort from others ring hollow in our ears. We don’t care if Grandma is “in the arms of Jesus” after a long illness. It makes no difference that a close friend who died in an auto accident or from a drug overdose is “in a better place.”

We hurt and we want—we need—to let the pain out. Paul knew this and he knew that expressing our grief isn’t intrinsically sinful. Even Jesus mourned over Lazarus’s death and the pain of Mary and Martha.

Yet while we weep, we experience a different sorrow than do others “who have no hope.” Great love generates great pain when the object of our affection dies, but an even greater love comforts us. Christ’s resurrection isn’t only an historic fact. It’s a present hope and a future certainty for every believer.

Our beloved friends and family will likely sleep much longer than three days in their tombs but they will eventually hear Jesus’ voice calling them to rise to life everlasting. And whether alive or dead, we’ll also respond to His call and join them in the resurrection.

The sorrow of separation and the pain of love being ripped from our hearts will vanish. Our final union with Christ in glory includes reunion with believing family and friends. Nothing will sunder us either from them or from the One who gave Himself into death that we might have life without end. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

Almighty God, by the glorious resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ, You destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light. Grant that we who have been raised with Him may abide in His presence and rejoice in the hope of eternal glory; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Easter Wednesday)
Wednesday of the Third-Last Week  
November 13, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 26:1-19; Matthew 26:20-35

Baptism is not just plain water...(The Small Catechism: Baptism, Part 1)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “Baptism is not just plain water” but it is plain water—plus. Plus the command of God. Plus the Word of God. Plus the promises of God.

The Word commands Baptism. It also commends Baptism. The command is that we receive this gift and that we bestow this gift on others. The commendation is that in these waters we participate in Jesus’ death and resurrection and through this washing receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Our human nature often complicates the simplest things. Witness the fits and starts in our relationships with others or the mental and spiritual gymnastics we perform rather than simply confessing sins and receiving forgiveness from God and from others.

But in simple water’s application according to the pure Word of God, we receive simple, pure, and absolute reconciliation with the Lord. There are no complex plans or difficult deeds remaining. God already worked out the plan and Jesus executed its deeds to absolute perfection.

Why complicate the plain truth? Plain water and God’s plain Word translate plain old sinners into saints and heirs of eternal life. In our daily remembrance of our Baptisms, we confess our sins with plain, unvarnished honesty so that we may plainly hear God tell us His plain and simple truth: “I forgive you all your sins.”

Has this been plain enough? In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

Gracious Lord, I give thanks that in Holy Baptism I receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation. Bless me continually by Your Word and Spirit that I may faithfully keep the covenant into which I have been called, boldly confess my Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (Adapted from Collect for the Anniversary of a Baptism, LSB p. 310)
Thursday of the Third-Last Week
November 14, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 29:1-19; Matthew 26:36-56

“Remember Lot’s wife.” (Luke 17:32)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus begins today’s reading by cautioning the Pharisees that even as they looked for God’s kingdom, it was already being revealed in their midst. Sadly, their spiritual blindness prevented them from seeing Him as the embodiment of that kingdom.

As our Lord then spoke to His disciples about the Last Days, so He also speaks to us. Mixing the present with near- and far-future, He testified about His coming Passion and the End of Days with, perhaps, a nod to the upcoming destruction of the Jewish homeland by Rome.

The world—even we Christians—will receive no more notice of the imminence of the kingdom’s final coming than would these first century Pharisees. Godly and ungodly alike will live out their everyday lives until there are no more days in which to live.

“Special” preparation will remain the “ordinary” things of the Church. The Holy Spirit readies us by Word and Sacrament, keeping us active in faith and love, and leading us to receive the gifts and respond in prayer.

So why Lot’s wife? She embodies those who look back longingly on the things of the world. Unable to trust the unseen completion of the promise to save her and her family, she glanced back toward what she considered safe. But there is no safety in returning to worldly thoughts and earthly delights. In them comes only doom.

Instead, we journey forth with the faithful. Hearing the testimony of Scripture’s “cloud of witnesses,” we lay aside and look away from worldly entanglements, instead “looking to Jesus” as He guides us forth into life without end (Hebrews 12:1-2). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

Come, let us fix our sight on Christ who suffered, He faced the cross, His sinless life He offered; He scorned the shame, He died, our death enduring, Our hope securing. (Saints, See the Cloud of Witnesses, LSB 667:4)
“Look away from him and leave him alone, that he may enjoy, like a hired hand, his day.” (Job 14:6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Society stereotypes include “sullen teens” who come home, slam shut their bedroom doors, and ignore and avoid parents. Of course, while there’s some truth in many stereotypes, this one isn’t particularly restricted to youth. People of all ages find ways to pout, although they don’t necessarily recognize or admit it.

It doesn’t end with older siblings or parents. We may resent someone watching us work, imagining that they’re judging our every move, whether they are or not. We can shut out teachers and others if we imagine that they aren’t truly concerned with our best interests.

Unfortunately, when life frustrates us we often yell, slam doors, and pout at God. We forget that He’s the only one who can bring us release. However, He isn’t lurking over us, trying to spot the tiniest flaws in our behavior. He does watch over us, but only in love, looking to do what is best for our eternal salvation while also meeting our daily needs.

He may allow suffering in our lives. He may even send the afflictions. But if He does, it’s only because these troubles are what we need to keep us in the faith and focused on Jesus. Like Job, we don’t know what God knows. And we’re fools when we try second-guessing Him.

What we do know is that He loves us fools. He loves us enough to sacrifice His Son for us. He loves us enough to continue forgiving and forgetting our sins. He loves us enough to want to spend eternity with us. And when we start paying attention to Him, we realize the same thing that Job did: “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth” (Job 19:25). When He does, we’ll see Him with our own eyes, knowing that we’ll be with Him forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

-Rev. Walter Snyder

For as a tender father Has pity on His children here, God in His arms will gather All who are His in childlike fear. He knows how frail our powers, Who but from dust are made. We flourish like the flowers, And even so we fade; The wind but through them passes, And all their bloom is o’er. We wither like the grasses; Our place knows us no more. (Alleluia, Sing to Jesus, LSB820:3)
Saturday of the Third-Last Week
November 16, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 31:1-17, 23-34; Matthew 27:1-10

Into your hand commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God. (From the Introit for the Second-Last Sunday)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Throughout the Gospels, we hear Jesus quoting from relevant passages of the Old Testament. Two instances are recorded from His hours on the cross: today’s words from Psalm 31 and Psalm 22:1, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

In the midst of His Passion, Jesus first sounds as if He wonders whether the sorrow and suffering are all worthwhile. Yet He knew exactly why He was hanging in mortal pain, the object of abuse and scorn and abandoned by His supporters. Not because of punishment for of His own sins—rather, He stood in for us, crying out in the pain that should be ours as we face eternal banishment in the final judgment. His abandonment on the cross prevented our abandonment in hell.

At the end of His life, Jesus again quotes David, this time in absolute confidence, declaring that His suffering was worth it and that He was worthy of being in His Father’s presence. And again, He speaks also for us. When He said, “Receive my spirit,” He said those words for you and me. Because He faithfully completed His tasks, our Savior delivers us safely into our Father’s hand. No longer do we deserve wrath and rejection but, by Jesus’ merits, we deserve God’s presence and peace.

We don’t need to wait for death and resurrection to enter God’s hand. As the Son clings to us, so does the Father, and no one can snatch us from Their hands (John 10:28–29). God holds us tightly even when our grasp of Him is weak and slipping. He wants us to be close forever and continues working through Word and Spirit both to maintain His hold on us and to increase our grip of Him. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

My God desires the soul’s salvation; My soul He, too, desires to save. Therefore with Christian resignation All earthly troubles I will brave. His will be done eternally: What pleases God, that pleases me. (I Leave All Things to God’s Direction, LSB 719:3)
Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (Matthew 25:31)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Of the several images of the Last Day that Scripture presents, the judgment of the sheep and the goats is one of the best known. Yet for all its familiarity, its message is often misunderstood and misapplied. Even those who confess and believe salvation by grace through faith alone can start wondering whether they’ve done enough good to warrant standing among the sheep at the end of time.

After all, Jesus condemns those who didn’t demonstrate love for Him through love for neighbor. Not wanting to join the exiled goats, we might start wondering if we’ve fed, welcomed, clothed, and visited Him often enough and enthusiastically enough. “Do I see Jesus in that hungry family? In that imprisoned felon? In those homeless people living in packing boxes and shipping crates?”

But looking to see Jesus in others before deciding to help them is contrary to the surprise both sheep and goats express when Jesus mentions deeds done or not done. The goats didn’t see that they were refusing to help the Lord—nor did the sheep realize that they were.

The saints are astonished when told of their loving care for Jesus because they’re too busy loving to pay attention to who’s being loved. We sheep don’t love others to earn eternal credit in a heavenly bank. We love because we’re already loved. We can’t earn what we already own by gift. And we can’t bribe a shepherd who’s given us sheep His riches. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

O Lord, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Your just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with You forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Monday of the Second-Last Week
November 18, 2019

Today's Reading: Daniel 7:9-14
Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 37:1-21; Matthew 27:33-56

And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:14)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. These words from Daniel show the might and glory of the Son of Man enthroned with the Ancient of Days. He possesses infinite power, and is able to shatter worlds with a word, worthy of obedience and awe from all creatures in all of creation.

Yet in the midst of this mightiness, the Son reveals Himself also in the mundane. The all-creating Word was conceived of the Virgin. The Lord of life tasted human death. The ruler of an everlasting dominion of saints redeemed throughout all the world’s days cares about each of us individually. As He reigns in glory, hearing the songs of heaven, He also visits us in Word and Sacrament, rejoicing even in our poorest singing.

He wields world-crushing power, yet “a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench (Isaiah 42:3).” His everlasting rule isn’t just what He does, it’s who He is. In His mind, the everlasting dominion isn’t complete until you are part of it. He willingly walks away from ninety-nine safely pastured sheep in order to find the one that remains lost and alone.

Speaking of numbered hairs and fallen sparrows, He speaks as a King who values every one of His subjects and wants the best for each. He rules in power not to terrify His people but to subdue their enemies. You are precious in His sight, the apple of His eye. You are necessary for the completion of His kingdom and the fulfillment of His reign. And all that He has and all that He is are devoted to making you His, to dwell in safety and joy into life everlasting. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

O worship the King, all-glorious above. O gratefully sing His pow’r and His love; Our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days, Pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise.

Frail children of dust and feeble as frail, In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail. Thy mercies, how tender, how firm to the end, Our maker, defender, redeemer, and friend! (O Worship the King, LSB 804:1,5)
Scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. (2 Peter 3:3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Imagine that! Scoffers will come scoffing. In other news, dancers with come dancing, drummers will come drumming, and pipers will come piping.

However, these scoffers seem to have a point. Namely, if God is so serious about the end of the world, why hasn’t it already happened? Why aren’t there at least more of the signs of the End Times? If there is a God, why isn’t He at least remotely interested in the mess that we’re making out of this world?

Peter says that the scoffers overlook God’s absolute dominion over creation. He brought it into being, judged it with water, and will sustain it until a final, fiery cleansing. Furthermore, we’re cautioned not to overlook something else: Our perception of time and estimate of creation’s duration don’t match God’s. When time seems to rush by, the Lord may see its passing as slow and steady. And when the days seemingly drag on without end, He sees them pass in the blink of an eye.

But no matter whether hurrying by or playing out slowly, the days remain in order for the Lord to complete an important task. He delays the end in order to save as many as possible from the judgment that will come with Christ’s return.

This isn’t for the benefit of the believers praying, “Come, Lord Jesus (Revelation 22:20).” Rather, it’s so unbelievers may hear the Good News, believe, and be saved, joining us in the resurrection to life everlasting. Murdering murderers, cheating cheaters, and lying liars—even scoffing scoffers—remain who will reach repentance. So even as we ask Him to come quickly, we also ask Jesus to tarry, on behalf of the lost who need to be found. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

O Jesus Christ, do not delay, But hasten our salvation; We often tremble on our way In fear and tribulation. O hear and grant our fervent plea: Come, mighty judge, and set us free From death and ev’ry evil. (The Day is Surely Drawing Near, LSB 508:7)
Wednesday of the Second-Last Week

November 20, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Daniel 1:1-21; Matthew 28:1-20

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. (The Small Catechism: Baptism, Part 2)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Baptism works. It works forgiveness. It works life. It works salvation. The words and promises of God declaring this truth extend far beyond the single verse from Mark 16 that’s included in the catechism’s text. Their thread weaves throughout the Scriptures, first subtly hidden in Old Testament, then revealed in the New.

Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others testify that Baptism is no mere human rite of obedience to God’s command or a symbolic washing that concretely illustrates some abstract cleansing which we receive from the Holy Spirit.

Because it works forgiveness, life, and salvation, Baptism is more than a singular event from earlier days. Yes, you were baptized, whether you remember it or not. You probably received the sign of the cross on heart and head and most have a certificate stating that someone applied water to you by pouring, splashing, dripping, or dunking. There may have been a dinner or a party, even if you were too young to realize what was going on and to enjoy the food and appreciate the gifts.

But you also are baptized. You remain called by water and the Word. You are still the one marked and named by God as one of His own. And if you don’t remember your own baptismal day, He does. He gave you gifts that surpass anything that came from the party, gifts that you’ll never outgrow and that are always exactly what you need. He gave you a new life with eternal salvation and a new name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God’s promises are fulfilled in you as you cling to them. He renews them daily as He forgives your sins and strengthens your faith. He extends them as He leads you to love your neighbor as yourself. And He will complete them when He calls you to leave your grave and enter paradise with Him. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

Almighty, everlasting God, mercifully behold Your servant whom You have made Your child through Holy Baptism. According to Your grace, grant that Your promises may be fulfilled in me; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (Adapted from Collect at a Baptism)
Thursday of the Second-Last Week

November 21, 2019


“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.” (Revelation 18:2)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “Alas! Alas!” So the watchers cry as they see mighty Babylon toppled before their eyes—stripped of glory, wealth, and fame.

By the time John received this revelation, Babylon was a far-off memory. She who once carried off the wealth of nations had her own wealth stolen by Persia, which subsequently lost to Greece. In the first century AD, Rome was the Babylon du jour. She was the vicious tyrant subduing and carrying off what belonged to others. She was the sultry whore enticing her own people and the surrounding nations to indulge in idolatry and immorality.

John’s readers could make the connection between Babylon and Rome without possessing seditious writings that prophesied Rome’s coming judgment at the hands of the One True God. The great pagan empire dominating the Mediterranean basin and beyond would eventually crumble, joining Persia, Babylon, Nineveh, and their ilk in history’s refuse pile.

Like Babylon, Rome wasn’t the final empire to dominate huge portions of the world. Others have followed and we still see great nations vying for the world's attention and adulation. Whether by terror or enticement, they seek to gain hold of and profit from others.

Lest we follow lewd invitations or be driven by violent impulses to accept the headship of earthly empires, the Lord calls us to remember our heavenly citizenship. We belong to the new Israel. The Lord is our Rock and our Fortress and the new Jerusalem is our home. We cower before no tyrant nor do we race to wallow in spiritual harlotry. Our King conquered sin, death, and hell, and has brought us into His eternal kingdom. Though all else crumble and decay or perish in the final judgment, we stand secure on Christ our Rock. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

Built on the Rock the Church shall stand Even when steeples are falling.
Crumbled have spires in ev'ry land; Bells still are chiming and calling,
Calling the young and old to rest, But above all the souls distressed,
Longing for rest everlasting. (Built on the Rock, LSB 645:1)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Along with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Daniel was among the Israelites carried off to Babylon. These four faithful young men were specially blessed by the Lord and made good names for themselves among their pagan captors.

Now Daniel had opportunity to turn the tables on their enemies. They could pretend that there was no interpretation for Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and allow him to slaughter his advisors. Or they could use the interpretation to their own advantage, gaining favor with the king but still letting him kill many of their foe.

Daniel, however, shows the kind of mercy that we receive in Christ. Before entering the king’s presence, he first ensures the safety of the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and Chaldeans. While he knows that God will eventually judge Babylon, he refuses to join voice with those Israelites who say, “Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!” (Psalm 137:9)

Vengeance belongs to the God of Israel. Daniel won’t take part in bringing it about himself. Instead, he helps the king and protects the advisors. His delight isn’t in getting even but in using to the utmost the gifts he’s been given. In so doing, he keeps alive some who might learn of the Lord and come to faith.

We continue to live our lives, exercise our vocations, and use the gifts God gives. Christians don’t pass by needy unbelievers on the way to loving neighbors who believe as we do. If someone has a need we can meet, we try to meet it. Perhaps God will also allow us a part in the conversion of new Christians. But if not, He still allows us a part in bringing His sun to shine on the evil and the good, His rain to fall on the just and the unjust. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

Lord, let me win my foes With kindly words and actions, And let me find good friends For counsel and correction. Help me, as You have taught, To love both great and small And by Your Spirit’s might To live in peace with all. (O God, My Faithful God, LSB 696:4)
Saturday of the Second-Last Week

November 23, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Daniel 3:1-30; Revelation 20:1-15

O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! (From the Introit for the Last Sunday of the Church Year)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You’ve heard, “It’s not the size of the dog in the fight but the size of the fight in the dog.” So also, it’s not the days in our lives but the life in our days. Only God knows when our days will end but He will enliven every one of them with His presence and His peace. He fills them with opportunities for faithful service to Him and to neighbor.

When will the world end? When will my life cease? Why worry about questions you cannot answer? Instead, concern yourself with receiving God’s gifts and giving to those in need. The measure of your days isn’t how many you have but how you fulfill your vocation within them.

You know from the parable of the Good Samaritan who your neighbor is. Christ and Paul tell you to love your enemy as you love family and friends. You know just by looking around that you live in a world filled with people in need and you know through Scripture and by taking stock of yourself just how well God has equipped you to meet these needs because Christ, as the perfect Good Samaritan, has provided for all of our needs in abundance.

Few people save those sentenced to death know exactly when they’ll draw their final breath. Some terminally ill people have a pretty good idea, but even then the exact time is unsure until it’s upon them. Most aren’t forced to look at a target time and date but instead are called to be constantly ready. Jesus is the exception. He came knowing exactly when He would draw His final death. He departed knowing that He’d filled every day being about His Father’s business. When He said, “It is finished,” it meant that He’d accomplished everything necessary to our salvation.

We pray that when our time comes to say, “It is finished,” we’ll die knowing that we’ve lived and loved to our utmost and that whatever was incomplete in our days was already completed in the Lord’s life, suffering, and death. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Walter Snyder

No saint on earth lives life to self alone Or dies alone, for we with Christ are one. So if we live, for Christ alone we live, And if we die, to Christ our dying give. In living and in dying this confess: We are the Lord’s, safe in God’s faithfulness. (No Saint on Earth Lives Life to Self Alone, LSB 747:1)
Sunday of the Last Week of the Church Year

November 24, 2019

Today's Reading: Matthew 25:1-13

In the middle of the night there was a cry, “Look, the Bridegroom! Come out to meet Him!” (Matthew 25:6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Lord will come as He promised. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament He made that Promise, and the Lord keeps His promises. He was born. He died. He rose. All according to His Word of Promise. The Lord doesn’t just give His promises once or twice but pours them forth. Again and again He gives them. Always more keeping His promises. Always more delivering His Word. Whenever you’re about the Lord’s promises, receiving them, hearing them, believing them, rejoicing in them, praise the Lord! The Spirit has worked that as a gift for you! But when you’re about other things, well, that’s all you. And we are about our things and ourselves most of the time. When it comes to the Lord’s things, His Word and Promise, we’re all about calculation. Putting calculation and the Lord’s promises together is foolish. “I don’t have to hear more, don’t have to receive more. I’ve gotten enough Promise, enough Word, enough forgiveness, enough of His Body and Blood. I don’t need to go to church. I think my relationship with God is great, and so I’ve calculated that I’m good in the God department.”

In the middle of the night, unexpectedly, the cry will go out. Those who calculated will be out. Their works, schedule, calculation did it. The wise, those who had the Lord's oil, and His giving to them, are in. Their calculation: “I need more!” Enough was never enough.

The Lord does so give. More Word, more Promise. His Word “makes you wise unto salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15). Jesus died and rose. He will come again. In the meantime, more and more: water, preaching, Absolution, Body and Blood. Always more from Him for you, and He will come for you, too. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. –Rev. Aaron Fenker

O Lord, absolve Your people from their offenses that, from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon ourselves, we may be delivered by Your bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for the Last Sunday of the Church Year)
Monday of the Last Week
November 25, 2019

Today's Reading: Isaiah 65:17-25
Daily Lectionary: Daniel 5:1-30; Revelation 21:9-27

For behold, I am creating a new heaven and a new earth, and you will not remember the former things. It shall not even be upon your heart. Therefore rejoice and be glad forever and ever in what I am creating. For behold, I am creating Jerusalem to be a joy and My people to be a delight. (Isaiah 65:17-18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. People do bad things, evil things. They hurt others and you. You do bad things. Sure, you’re not as bad as you could be, but you’re certainly not as good as you should be. You sin against others and they sin against you. Besides all that, people get sick and die, even people you love. And what’s worse, someday you will, too!

Things right now aren’t good. We can sort of ignore the bad if we’ve got enough stuff, if we’re pretty good people, or we’re surrounded by good people. But if we stop to think about the world, what we do to each other, and how sickness, disease, and death are everywhere, well, there’s not much reason to rejoice, at all.

But the Lord Jesus will make all things new. He already has! He rose from the dead! He died for all our curses, all our hurts, all our sins, all our doubts, all our death! He bore all of that into Himself. He died that those things—all your enemies—would die in Him. He died in your place that you might live. He came back to bring life and eternal life to light. Jesus now lives and reigns forever and ever, and you’ll live forever, too.

You have to live forever. You’re in on what Jesus did for you. You’re baptized into His cross, death, and empty tomb. He puts His Word your ears, your heart, your mind. There His Spirit works within you both to desire and to do all that His Word gives. He delivers you His crucified and raised Body and Blood. He’ll resurrect you on the Last Day.

The pains of this life are great. There’s sin, and people get hurt, get sick, and die—you and those around you. But all that will be undone. In fact, it’s already undone because Jesus rose. What He did is yours now and will be forever. When that day comes, you won’t remember any of the hurt as you stand forever and ever, face to face with Jesus who was crucified and raised for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. –Rev. Aaron Fenker

City of God, Easter forever, Golden Jerusalem, Jesus the Lamb, River of life, saints and archangels, Sing with creation to God the I AM. Jesus is risen and we shall arise: Give God the glory! Alleluia! (Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen, LSB 474:5)
Tuesday of the Last Week
November 26, 2019

Today's Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

God didn’t appoint us to wrath but to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us so that we would live together with Him whether we wake or sleep. (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is coming again. He promised. He came the first time, too, just like He said He would. He keeps His promises. So, He’ll come again, like a thief. He will come not only when you don’t expect Him, but when you least expect it! And what will you be wanting, saying, or doing?

The world says, “Don’t worry about it! Peace and safety!” Your flesh believes it, too. You’re selfish—doing what feels right, putting you first. You’re for team “me.” You can party, live it up, ask for forgiveness later. Why? Usually because you’re not as bad as other people. Sure, you do basically the same things as others, and you get away with it. You’ll make up for it. You’ll go to church, be kind. It’ll all balance out.

Wrong. Dead wrong. Worthy of hell wrong. That’s the way of darkness. It’s not just the sinning or living-for-you part. It is darkness and blindness and death to live only looking out for what you want. But it’s even more darkness to think you make up for it. It’s the worst possible darkness—if there is something darker than dark, and deader than dead—to think you can just smile at your sin, not care, and move on sinning just like you did before. After all, “Peace and safety!”

You’re not darkness. You’re light because Jesus is Light. He’s your Light, and you’re a child of Light because you’re in Him, baptized into Him. He brought you out of your darkness, that is, your sin, your selfishness, and even your making up for it. Jesus went through Good-Friday darkness for you, and He rose to Easter-morning new life and light for you, too. He will enlighten you, He will enliven you, and He will sanctify you, too. All yours in Baptism.

God didn’t appoint wrath for you, but He’ll give you what you want—a forever without Him. Repent. He sent Jesus for you, to die and rise for you. He’s made you His in His Son. You’re really light, only in Jesus and His forgiveness. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. –Rev. Aaron Fenker

The God of peace sanctify you completely, and your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it. Amen. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)
Wednesday of the Last Week
November 27, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 1:1-28; 1 Peter 1:1-12

But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit. (The Small Catechism: Baptism, Part 3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God does what He says. What He says does what He says it does. God’s doing and saying go together. God’s doing is done through His saying! Word and promise and action, they are all one thing to the Lord. When God puts His Word somewhere, it’s going to do His doing, exactly what He said it would do.

We divide His Word from His doing. Where He puts His Word, we don’t want it. We want something else instead. (It’s our only free day of the week, after all.) We divide His Word from His Gift so that we can angle in on being God, so that we can make room for our doing.

This is the original sin. We come by it honestly, if you can call it that. We learned our doing, just like our saying, from our parents. They learned it from theirs, and they from theirs, and on and on all the way back to the Garden, to Adam and Eve.

The Lord gave from His doing, His creating. Trees for food. Tree of Life given for Life. Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil for worship, for not eating. Death would come with eating. The Word says so, and the Lord does what He says.

We separate them—Word and Gift divided. We eat. We die. Dead toward God, dead toward our neighbor, too. We don’t listen. We do our own doing. Selfish. Me first. Neighbor last. God last, too.

He still does for us. He dies for us. More Word to be given. Still more of Him doing for you. His saying does His doing. “I baptize you.”

His doing for us is rejected. We will do for Him. Make up for our failures. Point to our decisions, our being good, even our hearing His Word and our doing of His Gifts! We do anything to make room for our saying, our doing, but our saying and doing don’t last. They end in death.

The Lord’s doing and saying bring life, new life, new birth. God is your Father. Jesus’ death and empty tomb are yours, and so He’s your Brother. Even the Spirit’s yours!

Only in Baptism is all this true. That’s His doing and saying for you. From His Water (doing) and His Word (saying) you are what He says you are: His disciple, His child, His—someone on the receiving end of His saying and doing without any saying or doing of your own. There’s still yet more of His saying and doing for you: “My body and blood given and shed for you.” We eat. We live. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

—Rev. Aaron Fenker
Thursday of the Last Week
November 28, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 2:1-22; 1 Peter 1:13-25

You were ransomed from your empty way of life, not with corruptible things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb spotless and without blemish, who was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was revealed in the last times for your sake. (1 Peter 1:13-20)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We like corruptible things. We like things that won’t last. We like things that break. We like things that break us! Things that turn us against our neighbor. Things that turn us away from the Lord, keep us from Him, keep us from receiving Him, His Word, and His Body and Blood. Popularity. Being a better student than she is. Being a better friend than he is. Making and staying on the team. Playing on the team. Family. Work. Vacation. Party the night before. We chase after “once in a lifetime opportunities,” as if the Creator of the universe’s coming with His Word and His Body and Blood aren’t really all that important.

But there’s something we like even more than all those corruptible things, that fade and are forgotten. We like the most corruptible thing around: our own works. What we do for the Lord is important to us. It’s why we can get around skipping out on Him. “I’m really sorry.” “I’ll do better next time.” Talk about empty words! “I actually go to church, unlike those people.” Even emptier words.

Eyes on our doing, other’s doing, and how our doing compares to other’s doing. Broken, empty, stained, spotted—that’s you and me. That’s all the corruptible things we want, too. Not just what we do or want in this life, but the works and ways and feelings we use to get right with God. All empty, vain, broken, meaningless, hell-worthy.

You must be redeemed, bought back, saved. Only the Lord can do it. He already has. He planned for it from before the foundation of the world. Jesus was predestined for you, to save you, to shed His blood for you. The immortal, eternal God, the Son of God, becomes a mortal man and dies. He makes your sin, your brokenness, your emptiness His. He’s poured out, dead, abandoned, so that you would never be.

He reveals this to you, distributes it to you, gives you the most precious thing right now, in these last times. The Creator of the universe gives you His Body to eat and His Blood to drink. And only in that blood, you’re redeemed, now and forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. –Rev. Aaron Fenker

Lord may Thy body and Thy blood be for my soul the highest good! (I Come, O Savior, to Thy Table, LSB 618: Refrain)
Friday of the Last Week
November 29, 2019

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 5:1-25; 1 Peter 2:1-12

Whoever believes in Him won’t ever be ashamed. (1 Peter 2:6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Put away all anger and lying and hypocrisy and envy and slander (1 Peter 2:1). Actually be kind to those around you. Don’t just do it to their face, and later think and say what you like. Don’t lust after that boy or girl. Don’t go too far with your boyfriend or girlfriend. “Keep your conduct honorable” (1 Peter 2:12). Love everyone in word and deed, fervently, willingly, faithfully. These are your “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

If any sin like those or our many other sins were brought out into the light, we’d be ashamed. Would we have friends? A job? A family? A God? That’s the rub, isn’t it? We live a life of shame. We need to cover our shame, our sin, our guilt. We need to make ourselves feel better, look better, either to make up for our failures or at least to be better than someone else. We try to hide our sins from God. We keep on doing them, making up for them. And when our Lord says to stop doing the wrong thing, and start actually doing the loving thing, we come up with excuses, or we get angry. Shame lashes out at God and others.

Jesus is ashamed. Of you? No, not ever! He takes your sin and shame, and claims all as His own. What’s yours is His at Calvary. There He’s shamed, naked, crucified, killed. He’s abandoned by His Father in your place. Jesus is your curse, your sins. He’s the biggest hypocrite, envier, liar, slanderer, luster, hate-filled man ever. Not because He Himself did those things but because you and I did them, and He takes ownership of what you and I do daily and much and dies for it all.

He brings you into His light, His forgiveness, His love, and He mercies you (1 Peter 2:9-10). He gives what’s His, what He gave for you. What’s His is His love and “righteousness, innocence, blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead.” He clothes you in that in Baptism, making you a child of God (1 Peter 2:2). What He gave for you is His body and blood. He gives you that, too, at the Supper of His Body and Blood. “You have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:3).

Jesus was rejected for you. You could reject Him: keep living in your sins, keep on trying to fix them. Then Jesus remains “a stone of stumbling” and you keep “dis-trusting” His Word, and that ends in darkness and death (1 Peter 2:8). But that’s not you, in Jesus, is it? He enlivens you, enlightens you, fills you with His love for you and others (1 Peter 2:9). You’re baptized. You’re communed. You’re mercied. You trust Him and what He’s done for you, and “whoever believes in Him won’t ever be ashamed” (1 Peter 2:6). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. –Rev. Aaron Fenker
St. Andrew, Apostle
November 30, 2019

Today's Reading: John 1:35-42a

John and two of his disciples were standing, and he looked at Jesus walking by and
said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” … Andrew, Simon Peter’s brothers, was one of the
two. (John 1:35-36, 40)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is a man on a mission, God on a mission!
He's there to do one thing, to be one thing: the Lamb of God. John was there, just
another man on a mission. He was only there to point people to Jesus, the Lamb of
God. Andrew was there, too, was on a mission, too: to receive the Lord’s Word and
point others to it.

Andrew was being filled up with the Lord’s Word in John’s preaching and
teaching. He was baptized “for the forgiveness of sins.” (Luke 3:3) He was where the
Lord was at in the delivering of His Word. Then Andrew was hanging out with the Word
of God Himself, Jesus. He was filled up with the Lord’s Word, His Gifts, with seeing
Him risen from the dead on the Third Day. Filled up with the Lord’s “Go and make
disciples by baptizing and teaching” (Matthew 28:19-20), and that’s what he did.
Andrew preached and taught and baptized and forgave and gave out Jesus’ Body and
Blood for the forgiveness of sins, just as Jesus gave him to do.

You are filled up with the Lord’s Word, too. Nothing else will do for you, will it? No
other priorities except to hear Jesus, to be filled up with His Word and His Gifts, just
like Andrew was. Your only question is: “Where are you staying, Lord?” (John 1:38)
Where are you preaching, where are you teaching, where are you baptizing (John 4:2),
where are you giving out your Body and Blood? Wherever that’s going on is where you
want to be, where you go, where you are, because there Jesus is Lamb of God for you.

Jesus is your Lamb of God: crucified for you. Jesus is your Lamb of God:
delivered to you in His Word and Gifts through your own personal Andrew, your pastor.
That’s Jesus’ mission: for you and to you. Lamb of God at Calvary. Lamb of God at
your church. He’s your God and Savior. He’s your faithful Lamb and Shepherd, giving
up of Himself to you. Tomorrow He does it again. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.
—Rev. Aaron Fenker

O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sin of the world,
have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sin of the world, receive our prayer.
Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us. (Divine
Service, Setting Three: Gloria in Excelsis, LSB 188)
Martin Luther’s Morning and Evening Prayers taken from the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther

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