

REFLECTIONS

The Seventeenth Sunday of Pentecost -
The Twentieth Saturday of Pentecost

September 24 - October 21, 2023



This season's Reflections were written by

*Rev. Dustin Beck, Pastor at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in
Warda, TX*

*Rev. Preston Paul, Pastor at St. Matthew Lutheran Church in
Almena, WI*

*Rev. Kent Schaaf, Pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in
Little Rock, AR*

2023 Reflections Staff:

Karrie Jacoby, Reflections Editor

©2023 Higher Things, Inc., Lisbon, IA

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Morning and Evening Prayers by Lutheran Service Builder © 2023 Concordia Publishing House.

Higher Things Reflections are free, like the Gospel! They may be reproduced for congregational, personal, and other non-commercial use. Please use the following attribution: "Daily Reflections are provided by Higher Things. www.higherthings.org. Used with permission."

Higher Things exists and grows on the basis of donations and free-will offerings from congregations and individuals. All donations are tax-deductible. If you wish to contribute to the work of Higher Things, please send your donation to:

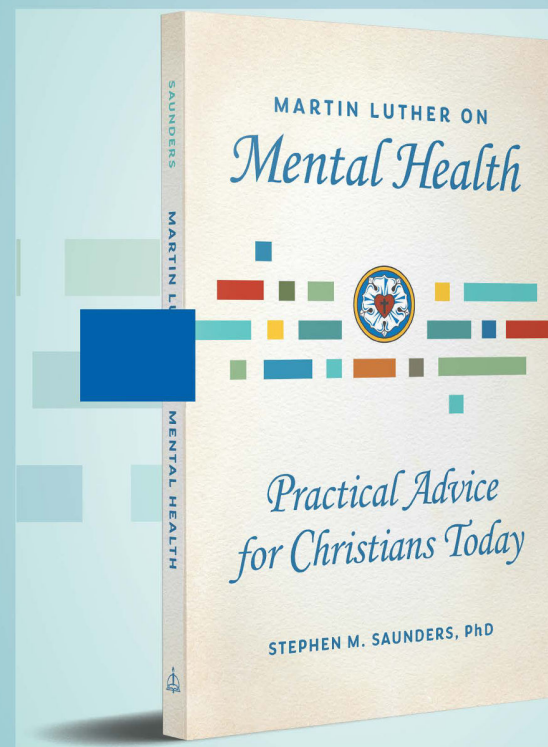
Higher Things, Inc.
P.O. Box 175
Lisbon, IA 52253

(Donations are also accepted at www.higherthings.org/giving via credit card or Venmo @HigherThings)

Visit our website at www.higherthings.org to read, listen to, or subscribe to Reflections each day.



*1 in 5 adults experience
mental illness in a given year.*



1.800.325.3040

Do you know how to help?

Discover how Martin Luther's timeless advice still applies to Christians today.



1.800.325.3040

Order at **cph.org**



1.800.325.3040

A Short Form for Daily Reflection

ADAPTED FROM LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK

Make the sign of the Holy Cross and say:

In the name of the Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit. 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 You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

In the morning go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, such as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest.

(In the Evening)

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me.

If it is evening, then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

Saturday the Twentieth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 21, 2023

Today's Reading: Introit to Pentecost 21: Psalm 121:1-4, 7-8; antiphon Psalm 121:5

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 4:1-20, Matthew 7:13-29

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Psalm 121 is a “song of ascent”. It was sung by the pilgrims who were making their journey to Jerusalem and the temple. Their journey was often met with intense heat, rocky terrain, dangerous roads and even people who would rob or kill them. This Psalm is the perfect Psalm to describe the beginning and end of your life as a Christian.

In the life of the church we typically use Psalm 121 in the rite of Holy Baptism and sometimes at funerals. Baptisms and funerals are the two events that are a part of every Christian's life. Baptisms and funerals go together perfectly. In Baptism you are connected to Jesus' death and resurrection, you are washed clean and walk in the newness of life. At a funeral the first thing we do is acknowledge that the deceased “IS” baptized, not was baptized. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection the deceased will rise again on the last day in resurrection of all flesh, never to die again. Likewise for us living today that means that in your Baptism you are clothed in Christ. Even as we journey in the treacherous paths of life, through danger, suffering, even in the valley of the shadow of death Jesus keeps you and guards you from all evil. Jesus has placed the sign of the cross on your forehead to mark you as one who is redeemed by His blood. By all these promises God who watches over our comings and goings now and forever more. . In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*There is nothing worth comparing to this lifelong comfort sure!
Open-eyed my grave is staring: Even there I'll sleep secure.
Though my flesh awaits its raising, still my soul continues praising:
I am baptized into Christ; I'm a child of paradise! (LSB 594:5)*

Sunday the Seventeenth Week of Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 24, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 20:1-16

Daily Lectionary: 2 Kings 4:8-22, 32-37, Ephesians 5:15-33

“So the last will be first, and the first last.” (Matthew 20:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. This parable of Jesus, sometimes called the “Laborers in the Vineyard,” can be misapplied in two ways. The first is addressed in the parable itself. For longtime Christians, the actions of the master attack our idea of fairness. How could this master be so cruel to the workers who labored throughout the heat of the day?! Wouldn't it have made sense for him to double their pay? If a day's wage was what they were going to receive for their day's work, shouldn't the ones who worked an hour receive a fraction of that? The master's kind words to the tired, grumbling servants are instructive for us: “Friend, I am doing you no wrong.” When we, like the disgruntled workers, look at the affairs of others, we play the comparison game: “What do they have that I don't?” “What opportunities have they been given that I haven't?” “Why them...and not me?” But the master comes into clear focus when he points back to his generosity toward the dissatisfied worker. “Didn't we agree you'd work for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, go!...do you begrudge my generosity?” It's as if he's saying, “This is enough for you.” The idea of daily wages reminds me of the Fourth Petition, concerning daily bread. Remember Israel, wandering through the wilderness for forty years? God gave them daily bread. If they were greedy and took more than they needed in a day, it rotted overnight. God supplies our needs.

The second misapplication of the parable is the temptation toward sloth, effectively saying, “If the reward is the same whether I'm there all day or just the final hour, why would I ever show up early?” Or, to put it another way, “Why should I spend a lifetime being a Christian, when I'll be just as saved with a deathbed conversion?” It's important to remember that none of us knows when our day will end—so we shouldn't plan for things that aren't promised...

But there's another dangerous omission in this flawed attitude: the workers don't decide when they start working—the master does. He goes out, seeks them, and calls them into His service. He goes out all day long, gathering more and more to work in his field, but also to enjoy His rich generosity! You didn't choose to work in the Lord's field, you were called! This parable invites us to see less of our own desires and jealous comparisons with others—and to fix our eyes on the generosity of the Master, our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord God, heavenly Father, since we cannot stand before you relying on anything we have done, help us trust in Your abiding grace and live according to Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday the Seventeenth Week of Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 25, 2023

Today's Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9

Daily Lectionary: 2 Kings 4:38-5:8 Ephesians 6:1-24

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD." (Isaiah 55:8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever sought a second opinion? Usually, that's something that happens in a medical context. A doctor might suspect a particular illness or recommend a course of treatment. If the patient doesn't like the doctor's diagnosis/recommendation, he or she may choose to seek a second opinion from another doctor. There are times when it makes good sense to get a second opinion on something. But whose opinion should you trust? In matters that are even greater than life and death—and by that, I mean matters of eternal life—you should go to the One whose opinion actually matters...God Himself.

In today's text, there's an invitation to "Seek the LORD while He may be found" and to "call upon Him while He is near." People are to seek the LORD in order that we might see His ways, how they are holy and upright (unlike ours), and so that we may repent of our wicked ways and thoughts. The LORD will have compassion; He will pardon! The problem is one of perspective. It's all too easy for us to lose perspective on what God has called good and evil. We tend to live in the moment; scratching every sinful "itch." We try to justify our own sins by pointing out that they aren't that bad...but what we're really demonstrating is that we see things differently than God. He has a perfect perspective. From His vantage point over all things in creation, He can truly say that, "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts." So the question boils down to this: whose opinion are you going to trust? There's an added urgency to these words...When should we seek the LORD? While He may be found! When should we call upon Him? While He is near!

As this was yesterday's Old Testament lesson in worship, it makes sense for us to think of it in light of the Gospel lesson from Matthew 20. There is a time when God is calling us into His field to labor...and a time when the laborers' wages will be doled out. There is a way in which God will generously give His laborers the fruits of their faith. But beware the temptation to grumble when God forgives the wicked and the unrighteous...and remember that God's thoughts and His ways are higher and better than ours—for it is in His ways and thoughts that YOU are saved! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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. Amen. (LSB 758:1)

Friday the Twentieth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 20, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 3:1-29, hew 7:1-12

"Do not judge others..". (Matthew 7:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. If you ever watch a courtroom trial on TV, you will always notice the trial takes time. Sometimes the trial is a few hours, sometimes it takes months. You will always notice that the judge doesn't immediately make a judgment at the start of a trial. Judges listen carefully to the facts, they read the laws and take all things into account before bringing in the verdict. Their duty is to make sure that the trial is fair to all sides with all the facts put on display. Today everyone loves to throw the Words of Jesus at us "Judge not!" It's probably the most memorized verse in and outside of the church today. However, in Matthew 7, Jesus is dealing with the Pharisees, who spent most of the time immediately criticizing the sins and shortcomings of everyone except themselves. Jesus eventually became so frustrated with the Pharisee's self-righteousness (viewing themselves as perfect) that He called them "whitewashed tombs" (Matthew 23:27).

"Judge not". Most of the people who quote this verse don't understand what Jesus said. They seem to think Jesus commanded a universal acceptance of any lifestyle or teaching. If we see what Jesus said in Matthew 7:15-16, He commands us to know people by the fruit of their life, and some sort of assessment is necessary for that. The Christian is called to unconditionally love. But the Christian is not called to unconditional approval. We really can love people who do things that should not be approved of. Instead, Jesus is speaking against being judgmental, that is, judging motives and the inner man, which only God can know. We can judge the fruit of a man, but we can rarely judge their motives with accuracy. Sin is an addiction and our neighbor cannot free themselves of their sinful condition. Most of our judgment in regard to others is wrong, we do not let all the facts be made known. Jesus will judge the living and the dead, but He will do so with a standard we cannot see in ourselves. His final verdict is given from the cross "forgive them for they know not what they do." That is your verdict in Jesus and it's our prayer, not judgment, that many more would be declared not guilty because the blood of Jesus covers a multitude of sins. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"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". (LSB 579:1)

Thursday the Twentieth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 19, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism, Baptism Part 2

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 2:16-37, Matthew 6:16-34

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.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Baptism today is practiced by so many Christians throughout the world today. It is a key to the teaching and practice of Christians since the great commission of Jesus to baptize all nations in Matthew 28. However, if you take a look at the majority of Christian views of Baptism you will find that they are all over the map in terms of teaching and practice. How much water is needed to baptize? Who is old enough to be baptized? Do you need to understand what Baptism is and do you need to give a testimony of faith? Does Baptism require something from you first? If you notice these questions, they center on one thing, you and me. Baptism has been twisted into something that is empty, symbolic and centered on us and how we meet Jesus where He is. However, Baptism is not something that you do. It's not about how much water, how old you are or if you even understand what is going on.

Baptism is all about what Jesus is doing for you, not vice versa. Jesus then drowns your old Adam in His water and blood that flow from His pierced side on the cross. He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3). It is critical that we as Lutherans hold strong to this simple yet profound teaching on Baptism: "It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation." Read the explanation again and again. Jesus is the one doing the work in Baptism, because apart from Him we stand guilty, death will consume us and the devil will lead us to hell. The entire message of the Gospel is Jesus at work for you and His church. In Baptism He does this in all places and times, with various amounts of water, various people of all ages and understandings. Rejoice! Jesus has washed you in His blood and declares you are now His beloved child. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Sin, disturb my soul no longer: I am baptized into Christ! I have comfort even stronger: Jesus' cleansing sacrifice. Should a guilty conscience seize me Since my Baptism did release me In a dear forgiving flood, Sprinkling me with Jesus' blood! (LSB 594:2)

Tuesday the Seventeenth Week of Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 26, 2023

Today's Reading: Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30

Daily Lectionary: 2 Kings 5:9-27, Philippians 1:1-20

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Paul's faith amazes me. I wish I could say that I'd have his attitude if I found myself in his circumstances in the book of Philippians, but I don't have that kind of confidence in myself. Paul was in prison when he wrote Philippians. Even so, the tone of Philippians is one of joy in every circumstance. The content of the letter is, at least in part, a thank you letter for their support of his ministry and for the Church at large. In our text today, he reports back to them that his imprisonment has actually served to advance the Gospel, even into the household of Caesar. And as Christians heard about Paul's boldness to preach to his persecutors, they themselves became more bold to preach! But even in the midst of his seemingly unwavering faith, Paul admits that he's torn. He knows that it is far better for him if he should be killed for the name of Jesus so that he could join his Lord in heaven...but there's still work to be done. He knew that Jesus had appointed him to the task of being His apostle to the Gentiles, and Jesus would preserve his life until his work was finished.

At the top, I know I made it sound like I don't have the same confidence "in myself" that Paul seemed to have. But if you really look at our text, you'll see that Paul's confidence was never in himself. In Philippians 3, Paul says that he has every reason to have confidence in the works of his flesh...but he counts them all as garbage when he compares them with the "surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus [his] Lord." (Philippians 3:8) The beautiful good news for you and for me is that we have the very same confidence that Paul did. It's not in our own faithfulness! It's not in our own righteousness! It's in Christ! You have been baptized in Christ's name; and you are united to Him. His perfect obedience is now yours. In His death, you died to sin. He is risen! So are you. The life you now live, you live it by faith in the Son of God Who loved you and gave Himself for you! (Galatians 2:20) So, right now, you can have bold confidence to say, "to live is Christ." And whenever your death should come, you'll know the joyful "gain" that is heaven! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, it belongs not to my care whether I die or live; to love and serve Thee is my share, and this Thy grace must give. If life be long, I will be glad that I may long obey; if short, yet why should I be sad to soar to endless day? Amen. (LSB 757:1-2)

Wednesday the Seventeenth Week of Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 27, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism, The Lord's Prayer: Seventh Petition
Daily Lectionary: 2 Kings 6:1-23, Philippians 1:21-2:11

The Lord will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore. (Psalm 121:7-8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. As we've walked together through the Lord's Prayer, it has become more and more clear to me that each petition of the prayer Jesus taught us could offer more instruction than we could hope to learn in a lifetime—and the final petition is no exception. "Deliver us from evil" is all-encompassing. It's praying "with a broad brush." It's bundling up everything that might afflict us in this life—sickness, temptation, persecution, doubt, plague, drought, hatred, flood, depression, death—maybe you're thinking of something I haven't listed...When God delivers us from evil, He delivers us from ALL of these. He rescues us from everything that can assault the body or soul.

Our Father delights to hear us offer up these words because this deliverance is found solely in the cross of Christ. At the cross, we see the epitome of what evil can do. In Adam and Eve's rebellion, they essentially told God that they wanted to be like Him—not in the image-bearing sense that He created them, but on their own terms. The full-blown rejection of God was complete when mankind nailed God's Son to the cross. As Jesus' hands and feet were nailed to the cross, it seemed as if God's Kingdom would never come. As they mocked and shamed Him where He hung, the evil will of man was done. Now, the Bread of Life Himself knew hunger and thirst, and instead of daily bread, His lips touched sponge and bitter wine. He cried out, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing," as He met God's righteous wrath and was Himself forsaken. On one side there hung another, not led into temptation—not mocking, not cursing. "Remember me," was his plea—a child of paradise Christ named him. When we look at the cross of Christ, we see evil outpoured. But He went willingly. He drank the cup of judgment that we might take the cup of Salvation. When Jesus said, "It is finished," He meant it. Evil is finished, you've been delivered from it. Believe it. Cling to it. Until your "last hour comes," when we ask God to "give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven." In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty, everlasting God, Your Son has assured forgiveness of sins and deliverance from eternal death. Strengthen us by Your Holy Spirit that our faith in Christ may increase daily and that we may hold fast to the hope that on the Last Day we shall be raised in glory to eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

St. Luke

OCTOBER 18, 2023

Today's Reading: Luke 10:1-9
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 1:37-2:15, Matthew 6:1-15

Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you. (Luke 10:9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In the Name of Jesus, Amen. Today's verses have certainly been used by so many to give a pep rally for us to go out and proclaim the Kingdom of God in all that we do. The 72 were sent and they were told not to worry about their earthly needs, so go out there and you can do the same thing! The problem is that the whole passage of the 72 isn't about you or me and how we can fulfill the harvest for the Lord. Jesus is the one doing all the work in, with and under the 72 He sends out.

Go back and look at the passage again and see who is doing all the work. In the first verse, Jesus appoints and sends. In the second verse, He centers the entire mission on God. God is the Lord of the harvest, and God sends laborers into His harvest. The sent ones do not need to worry about their earthly needs because God will see to it they are provided for. Some would accept them and the peace they bring, others would not, if they are turned away don't take it personally, for Christ bears the rejection Himself, and will do so ultimately on the cross. In all that they do they are simply sent to proclaim what has been told to them by Jesus "The Kingdom of God has come near to you." And when the seventy-two come back, they return with joy! But even then Jesus redirects their joy beyond their efforts and experiences to the gracious work of God, as the One who writes their names in Heaven.

That is the whole point of Jesus sending out the 72. In the same way He sent out St. Luke as well. They weren't sent to equip others for how they could somehow be faithful fulfillers of God's harvest announcement. They were sent out to proclaim what God in Christ has already done for the life of the whole world. They were sent to point people to Jesus and His greater work in the victory of eternal life. Your pastor and your church are sent for the same reason today. As you live out your holy vocations as God's baptized child He will work where and when He pleases in you because the Kingdom of God has come near to you. Rejoice that Jesus continues His work of the harvest by continuing to bring His kingdom to us through His Word and Sacraments in the church. In all of this the Lord of the harvest is at work not only bringing more to faith, but also reminding you that your name is written in heaven by the blood of Jesus Christ. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

For that belov'd physician All praise, whose Gospel show The Healer of the nations, The one who shares our woes. Your wine and oil, O Savior, Upon our spirits pour, And with true balm of Gilead Anoint us evermore. (LSB 518:26)

Tuesday the Twentieth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 17, 2023

Today's Reading: Philippians 14:4-13

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 1:19-36, Matthew 5:21-48

"The Lord is at hand..."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Lord is at hand..Rejoice in the Lord always...do not be anxious about anything". Yeah that seems like it's not gonna happen. When you look at everything around us today it seems like there is very little to rejoice over. If the struggles and fears of life weren't bad enough, Paul's words today have been severely misused with Christians. So much of Christianity today loves to beat people over the head with this passage from Philippians, as if this somehow a hand-book for being a happier and stress-free Christian. Paul's words today are not some sort of self-help to make you more happy and anxious-free as a Christian, the key to all of this passage today is "The Lord is at hand...". Life truly stinks.

The pressures we face each day and the sins we constantly love to swim in are drowning us. Living a life of rejoicing and not being anxious is something you can't accomplish on your own, it must be done by the Lord who is at hand. Our lives are lived under the cross of Jesus Christ who suffered and bore our sins, our shame, our guilt that have caused us despair and fear. We did our worst to Jesus at the cross and He rose from the dead victorious over death, not to give us some sort of example to follow but to give to us that same victory over sin and death. Your greatest fear and source of anxiety has been covered in the blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus says to you each and every day, "Do not be afraid".

If you aren't comforted by that, if you can't rejoice in that, if anxieties don't cease, then confess your sins to Jesus who forgives. Pray to Him who hears your prayers and cry out "Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief". He hears your prayers, He sees your suffering and fears and He promises that heaven and earth will pass away but His words will never pass away. This means that this world of suffering and fears is not permanent for you. He has overcome your death, He promises you that this veil of tears, anxiety, and negativity are not all that we have to look forward to. Whether we live or die, "the Lord is at hand" shepherding you to that place He has prepared for in the glory to be revealed in heaven. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Rely on God your Savior And find your life secure. Make His work your foundation That your work may endure. No anxious thought, no worry, No self-tormenting care Can win your Father's favor; His heart is moved by prayer. (LSB 754:2)

Thursday the Seventeenth Week of Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 28, 2023

Today's Reading: Revelation 12:7-12

Daily Lectionary: 2 Kings 9:1-13, 10:18-29, Philippians 2:12-30

And they conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. (Revelation 12:11)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When was the last time you read the book of Revelation? I teach Religion at a Lutheran High School, and this past Spring, our final unit was on Revelation. There were a few students who were nervous about that part of the class. I'll tell you what I told them. In Revelation, Jesus wins. In fact, by His death and resurrection, He already has. There are scary things that will happen between His ascension and return, but those will happen whether or not you read Revelation. And if you study Revelation, you'll see the beautiful comfort that Jesus revealed to John, so that he could share it with the church who faced persecution in the late first century.

That being said, look at today's text! There's a battle. All out warfare in which an angel named Michael commands an army of angels to fight against the dragon, that ancient serpent, called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the world. And the good guys win. But then, we're re-introduced to a theme that showed up near the beginning of Revelation: conquering. That was the title Jesus used to describe the faithful in chapters 2-3, the letters to the seven churches. In each letter, the "one who conquers" would receive some share in Jesus' life. But what is conquering? It doesn't necessarily mean living a successful, wealth-filled, happy life right here and now. Remember that Revelation was written to the church as she patiently endured persecution at the hands of the Romans. According to Revelation 12:11, conquering has very little to do with winning, at least in the way we usually think about winning. Instead, God's people conquer and overcome the devil by the blood of the Lamb—by Jesus' blood that covers every sin the devil could have hurled at them—and by the words of their testimony. That word, "testimony," is the same Greek word we translate "martyr." You and I are more than conquerors through Him Who loves us and gave Himself for us—even if we are called to testify of His love by the shedding of our blood. If suffering—or even death—is the worst that we may suffer, Christ is still risen, and our lives are in Him. Death (and the devil) have nothing over us! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Long on earth the battle rages, since the serpent's first deceit; twisted God's command to Adam, made forbidden fruit look sweet. Then the curse of God was spoken: "You'll lie crushed beneath His feet!" Jesus came, this word fulfilling, trampled Satan, death defied; bore the brunt of our temptations, on the wretched tree He died. Yet to life was raised victorious; by His life our life supplied. Amen (LSB 521:3-4)

St. Michael and All Angels

SEPTEMBER 29, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 18:1-11

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 29:1-24, Philippians 3:1-21

*"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven."
(Matthew 18:10)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When I was younger (like, during the 1900s), there was this movie that came out called Angels in the Outfield. I don't remember all of the details of the movie, but I do remember thinking, even as a kid, how unusual the premise was that there would be angels whose ministry was to help a Major League Baseball team win. (Also, I think that may technically be cheating.) Helping sports teams is NOT what God created angels to do. Angels show up here and there throughout scripture; sometimes, we see them singing praises to God; other times, they deliver God's messages (the Greek word for "angel" means "messenger"); in a few places, we hear about angel battles...and in Matthew 18, our text today, Jesus talks about little children and "their" angels who always see the face of Jesus' Father in heaven. "Their" angels? That's exactly what it says!

This is reminiscent of Psalm 91, when God promises to "command His angels, concerning YOU to guard you in all your ways." God's angels are certainly messengers; they delight in praising God day and night; they fight and do battle when called upon to do so; but they also protect you—likely, many times when you don't even know it! In the same way that our churches don't pray to saints, we don't pray to angels. But Luther, in his Small Catechism, suggests that angels should at least be on our mind. In his morning and evening prayers, Luther concludes with these words: "Let your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen." God has promised that His angels will be with us, working behind the scenes to frustrate the plans of the devil wherever he would snatch the certainty we have in Christ. As we said in yesterday's devotion on Revelation 12, Michael led God's angels in battle against the devil; casting him out of heaven. Christ, by His blood and death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, has conquered...and your angel who sees God's face, watches over you now and always! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Everlasting God, You have ordained and constituted the service of angels and men in a wonderful order. Mercifully grant that, as You holy angels always serve and worship You in heaven, so by Your appointment they may also help and defend us here on earth; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday the Twentieth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 16, 2023

Today's Reading: Isaiah 25:6-9

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 1:1-18, Matthew 5:1-20

And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever. (Isaiah 25:7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Many of us can probably remember a very special meal that we were a part of. It may have been a meal that we anticipated like a birthday party or a holiday meal. Eating with loved ones and friends is a very beautiful thing when you think about it. I would love to be able to sit down to a meal with my dad and grandparents and aunts and uncles who have passed on from this life. Our reading from Isaiah points to a meal that is prepared for you and all who are faithful in Christ. This meal is exquisite with the richest and most luxurious food and drink. However, the meal is more than just sitting down to a tasty meal.

The meal Isaiah speaks of today is the Feast of Victory of our God. Listen to what the Lord does with this meal: "And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever." Let those words sink in for a moment. "The Lord will swallow up death forever! Usually it is death that swallows us up. But the day is coming when the Lord will swallow up death itself. Forever. That is something to look forward to. For now death is like a veil, a shroud, a covering that is draped over all humanity. Death is not something our Lord ever planned for us, our sins brought it upon us and death's shadow has covered you your entire life. But the day is coming when that shroud will be lifted. Until then we do not hunger or thirst. Jesus continues to prepare a table here and now in the presence of our enemies of sin, death and the devil. As you partake of the Holy Eucharist, you receive the forgiveness of sins that banishes death. You are strengthened in the eternal promises of God are yours today and that a place is prepared for you at the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end.

The day is coming when "the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken." "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Joy, because the Lord has promised to swallow up death, forever and seat us at the feast of victory. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Now no more can death appall, Now no more the grave enthrall; You have opened paradise, And Your saints in You shall rise. Alleluia! (LSB 633:6)

Sunday the Twentieth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 15, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 22:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Malachi 3:6-4:6, Matthew 4:12-25

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. (Matthew 22:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When you sit down to eat with your family either at home or at a restaurant, you generally eat with the people you know and love. It would be rather odd to have some stranger sit down and start eating your food. They haven't been invited, they aren't part of the family, get lost, you don't belong at our table. Jesus speaks of the King's wedding feast today. The table is set. Who deserves to be at the table? No one! Not one single person born of Adam deserves a seat at the feast of our Lord! We only deserve present and eternal punishment. That's it. We deserve nothing from our God and Lord, which is why we cry out in repentant faith, "Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Not for my sake, but for the sake of the bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Forgive me all my sins." And you know what? He does exactly that! In fact, He doesn't just show us mercy. He bestows on us His grace. (Remember: Mercy is not getting what you deserve, and grace is getting what you don't deserve.)

Look to the font, the pulpit, and the altar. This is the feast of victory—His victory! You don't have to wait to get home to heaven to start feasting. I realize it will be inconceivably better in heaven, but the Divine Service is where the King has set up His now! He continues to send His faithful servant, Jesus Christ, to feed us and nourish us with His grace, His mercy, His love, His peace. Consider the gifts of life, grace, mercy, and peace given to you by God Himself in the waters of Holy Baptism. Consider how your Lord feeds and nourishes you each and every Sunday, at this earthly side of the Master's heavenly feast table. Each Sunday our Lord is bringing heaven to earth, to a bunch of sinful beggars and lowlifes like us! Consider the very words you hear, spoken directly to you precisely so that you can hear and trust, words spoken in the stead and by the command of the Master Himself. "You are forgiven. For the sake of Christ's bitter suffering and death, you are forgiven. Depart in peace." Recognized through the eyes and ears of faith, how could you want anything else? How could you even want to be anywhere else? Hold fast to this blessed, Christ-centered Truth. Fear not. Be at peace. Your sins are forgiven in Christ and because of Christ, have a seat at the Feast of Victory! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You invite us to trust in You for our salvation. Deal with us not in the severity of Your judgment but by the greatness of Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Saturday the Seventeenth Week of Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 30, 2023

Today's Reading: Introit to Pentecost 18: Psalm 147:1-5; antiphon Psalm 147:6

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 31:1-21, Philippians 4:1-23

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. (Psalm 147:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When we lived in Corpus Christi, one of our unique experiences was learning what happens when a category 5 hurricane blows through the area. Corpus Christi itself didn't receive as much water damage from Harvey as Houston or as much wind damage as a dozen towns that were just up the coast from us. But for the next two years, our congregation was a base camp for volunteers from all around the country—they came to help tear out water damage, repair sheetrock, install flooring—they even replaced a few roofs!

We had almost a thousand volunteers who came and stayed at our church. I led devotions each morning for the volunteers before they went to work. One of the verses that became a "theme verse" for us was Psalm 147:3, that God heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds. I came to love this verse because of all the broken-hearted folks I met along the way. Some folks had lost everything in the storm, and I certainly had no words on my own that would have fixed anything. But God did. I'll never forget the looks on some of the homeowners' faces when our teams showed up to help. When we got there, they looked hopeless, like the task in front of them was more than they'd ever be able to handle. But these folks who showed up to help...showed up. And when they came, they didn't expect any thanks or recognition.

One homeowner couldn't stop thanking a volunteer to the point that the volunteer was having a hard time getting his work done. He almost didn't know how to respond...You're welcome, don't mention it, it's my pleasure—he tried everything...until it dawned on him. This thanks shouldn't have been directed toward him at all. "Could I pray with you?" he asked. In his prayer, he asked God to draw near to his new friend. He thanked God that He had brought this group to this house on this day. And He asked God to continue to show the folks in that area His mercy through the work that was being done to rebuild what had been broken by the storm. Some of the acts of God described in Psalm 147 are incredible, like determining the number of the stars...others may seem less impressive, like lifting up the humble...but for the one who has been lifted up, it's the greatest thing they could ever ask of God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Voices raised to You we offer; tune them, God, for songs of praise. Hearts and hands we bring in tribute for Your gifts through all our days. Alleluia! Alleluia! Triune God, to You we sing! How can any praise we offer measure all the thanks we owe? Take our hearts and hands and voices—Gifts of love we can bestow. Alleluia! Alleluia! Triune God, to You we sing! Amen. (LSB 795:1)

Sunday the Eighteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 1, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 21:23-32

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 32:1-22, Colossians 1:1-23

For John came to you in the way of righteousness...the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. (Matthew 21:32a)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen. Authority is the right to do or say something within your vocations. Humans have no true authority unless it is given to them. All authority in heaven and earth belongs to God. God was not given dominion and power over heaven and earth; it is His by right as God and Creator. Authority is God's alone to give. Parents have authority to parent from God. Pastor's have authority from God through the Christian congregation.

The chief priests and elders of the people taught that all authority comes from God. So, they questioned Jesus, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" We cannot look into their hearts like Jesus, but their question was also motivated by pride and jealousy. The religious leaders often acted as if their authority was their own not from God.

John the Baptist's authority to say and do what he did, as the forerunner of Jesus, was from God. God's Word bestowed to John the divine right to preach and baptize. Jesus' question to the chief priests and elders was to call them to repentance and to search the scriptures about John and Himself. Sadly, instead of searching the authoritative scriptures they discussed Jesus' question among themselves. In themselves they would not discover the truth of John's baptism, that it was from God, nor see and believe that Jesus was God in the flesh.

The son who repented (changed his mind) is the one who did the father's will. The chief priests and the elders prided themselves in doing God's will in their words and works. However, they refused the work of faith, believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. Faith is God's work within us. Repentance is also God's work within us. Faith and repentance are the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God.

John preached the righteousness of Jesus; that Jesus would take our sins and give His life in our place. John called sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus. Sinners who gladly heard this preaching and were baptized were made sons of the kingdom of God!

Through the authority of God's Word and Baptism, faith and repentance have been worked in you. The kingdom of God is yours! You are the first son with Jesus. Through Him you have done the Father's will. In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen.

Create in me a clean heart, O God
and renew a right spirit within me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Psalm 51:10, 12)

Saturday the Nineteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 14, 2023

Daily Reading: Introit for Pentecost 20: Isaiah 61:10; antiphon Psalm 146:2

Daily Lectionary: Malachi 2:1-3:5, Matthew 4:1-11

*I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. (Psalm 146:2)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen. Hallelujah is Hebrew for "praise the Lord." The Greek word is alleluia. Alleluia is an invitation to praise God. That is why we sing it so much in our worship. We sing alleluia to ourselves and to each other. We are encouraging and inviting each other to the joyful work of praising God, speaking of all he is, said, says, did, does and will do. Let us do this together! We sing praise in the congregation for the mutual blessing of knowing and believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is good to sing praise to the Lord.

Praise is not done for God. He doesn't need it. We do. In praising God we bring to our minds and hearts what God has said and done for us men and for our salvation. God knows what He has done and said He doesn't need reminding. Sinners tend to forget. Through praise God does His work of saving among us. Preaching and hearing God's Word is praise that goes into our ears. The praise that comes out of our mouths is our joyful response. Within the congregation our praise also enters our ears and those nearest us. Hear what God has done for me! Daring to be Lutheran is praising God boldly and clearly in worship.

The liturgy is full of God's Word. The Psalms along with the readings, sermon and hymns guide us in our praise. Through God's Word, preaching and the sacraments we know that God is with us to distribute His gifts of life and salvation through the forgiveness of sins. We also know that God is present among us in our praise. The psalmist put it this way: "You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel (Psalm 22:3)." God reigns among His people in their praises! He distributes His kingly divine gifts to us.

Christians give way to joyful praise because through baptism they have been clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. Christian praise is to put our trust in God rather than men. Praise puts to death the old sinful man and raises up Christ, the New Man within you. The breath of men departs and they die. The breath of God that is poured out through our worship and praise brings forth life and eternal salvation. "I will praise Him as long as I live!" In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen.

*It is good to give thanks to the Lord,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night,
For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy. (Psalm 92:1,2,4)*

Friday the Nineteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 13, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Malachi 1:1-14, Matthew 3:1-17

John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "...The voice of one crying in the wilderness..." (Matthew 3:1,2,3b)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen. God wants you to be a happy hearer. Satan, on the other hand, wants you to despise preaching and to reluctantly listen to your pastor. Despising preaching is easy to do. The Pharisees and Sadducees didn't gladly hear John's preaching. They despised it because it called for them to confess their sins and believe in Jesus. Christians gladly hear preaching because it works repentance in them and delivers Jesus their Savior.

Pastors don't always appreciate the work of listening. They are busy preaching. The pastor's job, above all, is to preach boldly and clearly, God's Word. He owes this to the hearers. Pastors strive through God's Word and prayer to give the hearers something worth gladly hearing. The preaching task is done for the sake of the salvation of sinners. Your pastor is a preacher, a proclaimer of God's Word, His good news for sinners.

John the Baptist was ordained by God to prepare the way for Jesus through preaching. Preaching is a really big deal to God. The hearers of John's preaching knew that God promised to send a Savior. John's preaching prepared the hearers to receive Jesus gladly.

The primary purpose of your ears is to hear God through preaching and the scriptures. Having ears is a daily reminder that you are a hearer of God's Word. God gave them to you, your ears, that you may know Him more fully. It is a mystery that God does His work in this way: from the mouth of a human preacher into the ears of sinners.

We pray that "Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way." (Psalm 85:13). The righteousness that goes before Jesus is the preaching of John and all faithful pastors. Preaching prepares you for Jesus in you. The righteousness of preaching is the message of Christ crucified for sinners. When we pray, "Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way," we confess that preaching is for sinners and their salvation and ask that it would be so for me. Preaching makes a path for Jesus straight into your happy hearing ears. In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen.

Monday the Eighteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 2, 2023

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 33:1-25, Colossians 1:24-2:7

For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live. (Ezekiel 18:32)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen. It's not my fault! I didn't do anything wrong! Why do I have to pay the price for what someone else did? This is what the people of Israel meant when they quoted the proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?" It was passing the blame onto their ancestors for their suffering, playing the victim card.

The people of Israel suffered great affliction. Yes, the sins of their fathers didn't help. But neither did they in their own sin and unbelief. We too would cry out to God and complain, blaming others and God as they did. Christians daily do all of the above, cry out, complain and blame God. It is okay to cry out to God and complain, but not to blame him. Such prayer is very good when it is done in faith, love and trust in God. Our crying out and complaining get muddled with our sinful hearts and minds. And God sometimes, through His Word, speaks sternly and directly to us in our sin as a loving father, as He did for the people of Israel.

Our prayers often are self-centered. God sorts that all out, our sin and faith that is, through His Word and Holy Spirit. That is one purpose of prayer; getting things sorted and cleared-up in our hearts and minds. So, we pray "with all boldness and confidence...as dear children ask their dear father." God doesn't mind the "why me" prayers at all. Because he hears and answers according to His good, right and merciful will. It is good to ask God why and seek the answers in prayer and His Word.

All people, including those who have caused suffering in our lives, will be held accountable before God and judged. We cannot fully know now the reason for affliction that God permits. But we do know that He uses suffering for the purpose of saving sinners. God is always about giving life over death in Jesus. Through suffering, His Word, prayer and the Holy Spirit, God turns us from our human thinking and ignorance. He draws us to Himself so that we can see clearly that Jesus suffered and died in our place. We will stand fully alive before God on the last day as forgiven and cherished sons and daughters with Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen.

Turn to me and be gracious to me,

for I am lonely and afflicted.

The troubles of my heart are enlarged;

bring me out of my distresses.

Consider my affliction and my trouble,

and forgive all my sins. (Psalm 25:16-18)

Tuesday the Eighteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 3, 2023

Today's Reading: Philippians 2:1-18

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 34:1-4, 8-11, 14-33, Colossians 2:8-23

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus... (Philippians 2:4,5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen. There is only one God, the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is one with the Father and the Son. When you were baptized the Spirit of God was poured out upon you. The Holy Spirit dwells in you. By baptism you were made one with God; Christ in you, and you in Christ. Your life is in Him and He lives and reigns in you. What joyful oneness and unity you have with God who delights in YOU.

I am sure you know that your congregation is not perfect. Perhaps you have seen members argue or even yell at each other. Maybe your pastor lost his temper and said something that shouldn't have been said. The people of Israel and their leaders were much like our congregations. Now, as then, God's people sinfully grumble and argue in ways that are not right and God pleasing. This ought not be. Sinful pride and self-centeredness can tear congregations apart. The devil works hard to cause conceit and selfish ambition in God's people in order to destroy Christian fellowship and unity. Satan does not want peace and joy in Christ among and in God's people.

Do you have the mind of Christ? Do you think like Jesus? Do you desire what God desires? That is, do you love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself? Do you love Jesus? Do you believe He died for you? To have the mind of Christ is to love God and your neighbor, that is, especially and most importantly, your brothers and sisters in Christ in your congregation. This is not easy to do as sinners.

You are one with God in Christ. This is a great mystery. It is equally true that all your brothers and sisters in your congregation share the same oneness with Jesus as you do. Jesus is the perfect brother that put Himself last for you and for them. In Him was no selfish ambition or conceit. He loves you and them and considers us all of far more worth than His own life. He gave His life for you and them. What joy! The same Spirit of life dwells in all of God's people in your congregation. This is hard to remember and to put into practice. But through God's Word, prayer and the Holy Spirit we can live in great joy, peace and unity in our congregations! In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen.

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
"May they be secure who love you!
Peace be within your walls
and security within your towers!"
For my brothers and companions' sake,
I will say, "Peace be within you!"
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your good. (Psalm 122:6-9)*

Thursday the Nineteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 12, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 9:22-38, 1 Timothy 6:3-21

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. (1 Timothy 6:6-8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen. Your life should reflect who you are in Christ, all of your life. You are baptized and empowered to live life accordingly. This is what Paul means by godliness. Living a Christian life is far more than simply being a faithful Sunday morning worshiper. The strength and source of living a godly life is Jesus.

The Divine Service is where we are plugged-in, so to speak, to Him. Without Jesus there is no godly life. What does your life look like outside of the Divine Service? Is it God pleasing? Godliness is keeping God at the center. It is keeping His Word before our eyes, in our ears and upon our hearts daily. It is reflecting that Word in our words and works of love towards God and neighbor.

Why does Paul instruct Timothy to preach and teach about godliness with contentment? And to charge Christians to live a holy life fleeing from sinful desires and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness? For these reasons: for the sake of true joy, peace and contentment and that we may not lose what we already have been given freely in Christ nor cause others to stumble and fall away. We don't worship or live a godly life for compliments. Your godliness in no way atones for sins and gains salvation. However, Jesus' perfect life of godliness and death does... atone for your sins and saves.

God wants us to have good things, he "richly provides us with everything to enjoy." However, He doesn't want us to fall into faith destroying snares. The temptations of riches, power and worldly desires are always ready to entrap us. Satan uses such things to drive us away from Jesus. O Christian flee from those things!

Godliness that finds its joyful source in the righteousness of Jesus, freely given, provides a life of contentment. We give thanks for all that God has provided in this life, whether little or an abundance. And how much He has given! What the world considers good and needful is most often just the opposite, hurtful and detrimental to faith. There is only one thing needful for you and that is Jesus, your crucified and risen Savior. In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen.

Wednesday the Nineteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 11, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism, Baptism: Part 1

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 9:1-21, 1 Timothy 5:17-6:2

*"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."
(Matthew 28:19)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen. In the beginning was water. The Spirit of God hovered over the water, and the Word of God was spoken according to the will of God. All of creation had its origin out of the water. God, the Word of God, the Spirit of God and water are the ingredients of creation, The Holy Trinity and water.

God remakes His creation in the same way He made it, by means of water and Himself...the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. "It is He who made us and we are His" (Psalm 100). This makes you a disciple of Jesus, a hearer of His voice. It makes you...what you are. It gives you identity in God. He knows exactly who you are and lovingly reminds you daily of His love for His very own. The Lord loves the baptized. He made them. He made you.

In a perfect world we all would have been conceived within the marital union and love between a husband and wife. And wouldn't it be great if we all grew up surrounded by their perfect love, of those parents, in the same house. The brokenness in this world often causes us painful and confusing identity crises. Who am I and why am I here? The world that God created by means of water and His Word is horribly broken... it cannot simply be repaired. It can be remade. Jesus empowers His church to do the work of remaking... "go and make disciples..."

Despite the brokenness of life in this world into which you were born, God chose you to be His baptized, remade, child. Not only did He form you in the womb, but He remade and marked you for eternity in Baptism. The pastor may have administered the Baptism, but the words "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," show clearly that God is the one doing the "making." He makes disciples. He baptized you.

God's work of remaking you continues in His church. Baptism gave you ears to hear. The church teaches the baptized that they may learn who they are by listening. What does it mean that I am baptized? Who am I in Jesus? The answer is in the preaching and teaching that you hear from your pastor. In the Name of Jesus, Amen. *Help us in our community To serve each other willingly*" (LSB 766:6).

Wednesday the Eighteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 4, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism, The Lord's Prayer: Conclusion

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 35:1-7, 16-25, Colossians 3:1-25

*For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.
Amen.*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen. Thine means yours. Let's be clear. Thine doesn't mean "mine." Thine is a form of Thy before a word beginning with a vowel. Daring to be Lutheran is to boldly give all the glory to God in our praise, forever. We don't get any glory apart from Jesus. Without Jesus we have no power. Without His death and resurrection we have no kingdom to call ours. It is His kingdom to reign. It always has been. And will be forever... yes, yes...this is so.

We call Him our Father because He gave His Son into death for us. The only power to save is through the Son's death and resurrection. Without the Son's saving work there is no forever and ever for us. No glory, no kingdom, nothing good for you to call "mine."

It seems pretty obvious, doesn't it? That the kingdom, power and glory are all His? But not so obvious to the world...and our sinful nature. The world is not going to acknowledge that anything truly belongs to God. Our sinful nature wants it all for itself. All of it...the kingdom, the power and the glory. By our sin we claim it all as "mine," not "thine."

In this life we dwell in a kingdom fiercely opposed to God's kingdom. Satan is the prince of this world. This world is presently his kingdom. We pray in the Lord's Prayer that God would protect and guard us from the devil's evil reign which surrounds us. God's Word empowers us to live godly lives under this tyrannical rule. So, we pray... "Thy kingdom come!" Your kingdom, as an heir with Jesus, prepared for you.

God alone has the power to create and recreate. "The whole world lies under the power of the evil one... [but] we are from God" (1 John 5:19) The power of sin is death. Death has no power over us who have been baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. God's saving power, secured in Jesus crucified, is for you, your power over sin, death and the devil.

The glory of the Father, simply put, is Jesus. Jesus is the glory of the Father because He took on visible flesh and died on the cross. When you see Jesus, you see God's glory. Jesus is God in flesh forever and ever. He is your Savior Jesus, your glory for all eternity.

Because of Jesus, your Baptism into Him, the kingdom, the power and the glory of the Father are all yours. Fully and completely, all freely. Go ahead, call what is His, your very own. Now and forever. In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen.

*The LORD is great in Zion;
he is exalted over all the peoples.
Let them praise your great and awesome name!
Holy is he!* (Psalm 99:2-3)

Thursday the Eighteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 5, 2023

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 36:1-23, Colossians 4:1-18

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (Colossians 4:5-6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Are you a preacher or a hearer? If you are a preacher, as you well know, you must also count yourself a hearer. What does the preacher preach? The mystery of Christ, the Word of God (both Law and Gospel), repentance and Christ crucified for sinners, the forgiveness of sins. What does the hearer hear? All of the above, the clear Word that flows from the faithful preacher's open mouth...the splendid mystery of Christ revealed, the forgiveness of sins.

Who do the hearers receive from the preacher? They receive Jesus. All of Him. What great gift God has given to His Church for you. He opens heaven to you through the preaching of God's ordained ministers. This is a joyful mystery of God's working in us and among us. So, we give thanks and pray for the preachers that He would open doors for the Word to be declared in all its clarity and power.

Hearers (that's all of us) live as such...hearers of the Word, wherever you may find yourself. "Walk in wisdom" is another way to say the same thing. Hearers walk in and with Jesus. The baptized, who are the hearers of the Word, are baptized into Christ. Jesus is the wisdom of God who dwells in you, and you in Him. "Walk in wisdom" ... walk in Jesus.

Christian speech, by which I mean how we speak in all of life's situations, begins with preachers putting Jesus into our ears. How we speak to those within the household of God, fellow believers, and "outsiders" matters...it matters a lot. Gracious words are words that don't betray your hearing, and expose you to be a hypocrite...hearing one thing and speaking another.

Gracious words reveal Christ in you to those who hear you. Speech "seasoned with salt" is not laced with profanity, gossip and animosity. Christian speech is not argumentative. Gracious speech is seasoned with kindness, sincerity and truth. Gracious speech is a mark of hearers living under God's grace.

"Grace be with you," that you may be gracious. "Grace be with you," St. Paul's final word to you today, a good final word, for God's grace is His eternal kind and merciful favor towards you that you hear in the preaching of Christ crucified. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me,
O Lord God of hosts;
let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me.
O God of Israel.
My prayer is to you, O LORD.
In the abundance of your steadfast love
answer me in your saving faithfulness. (Psalm 69:6,13)*

Tuesday the Nineteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 10, 2023

Today's Reading: Philippians 3:4b-14

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 7:1-4, 8:1-18, 1 Timothy 5:1-16

I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. (Philippians 3:8)

It is personal. Faith is first about you and Jesus, just the two of you. That is how it began. Jesus chose you. Remember your Baptism. We Lutherans tend to get a little squeamish if we use words like, "I", "my" and "mine" too much. We should. Those first-person personal pronouns tend towards self-centeredness. They often leave little room for God and neighbor. Sinners are all about themselves, not Jesus or anybody else.

But when it comes to Jesus and you those pronouns are the way to go...use them. St. Paul did and so should you. Jesus knows you personally. He is your Lord and Savior to know and love. It can get a little emotional, and sometimes a lot, like any relationship. This one is the most important of all. Dare to be Lutheran... call Him "my Lord." The Psalms help us sort the emotions out by knowing the mind and heart of Jesus.

For Paul it was very personal. He lost everything, from a worldly perspective, when Jesus came thundering into His life. It blinded Him. He didn't see it coming. He met the Lord, the one he was persecuting. That One wanted to be Paul's Lord. He wished to call him "My" Paul...to save him. Jesus desired Paul to reciprocate and call Him "my Lord."

To have nothing but Jesus as your Lord is far better than having everything without Jesus. This is a hard perspective for us to have in such a self-centered and material society. It is difficult spiritual work. The only way is by prayer and God's Word. Other "lords" strive to push Him out of the center, His rightful place. These pushy and tyrannical "lords" manifest in countless ways. You know who and what they are... if you wonder, examine yourself according to the Ten Commandments. God's law flushes them out for you...keeping Jesus as your only Lord to love and trust for that which is good and beneficial in life and for your salvation.

Monday the Nineteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 9, 2023

Today's Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 5:1-16; 6:1-9, 15-16, 1 Timothy 4:1-16

What more was there to do for my vineyard...? (Isaiah 5:4a)

In the Name ✝ of Jesus, Amen. God is a gardener. He planted the first garden in Eden out of love. It was perfect; a garden that was destined to be forever green with blooming flowers and fruitful trees. God Himself watered the garden with a mist from the ground. This garden He made for man, for Adam and Eve and their offspring. The fruit of this garden that God desired, above all, was the love and joyful obedience of man. God had made it all for them to know His love and to love Him in return. But the garden's fruit began to rot.

God continued to garden. He planted a people, the house of Israel and the men of Judah, His chosen people. It was the Lord's vineyard. Like the first garden, God desired His loving care for this vineyard to produce fruit...love and obedience to His Word. God is a faithful vinedresser. He did everything He could for this vineyard to be fruitful. But the fruit it produced was worthless, rotten from loveless and disobedient hearts.

Out of love God destroyed this vineyard. He had its walls torn down and the vineyard trampled. By God's doing it became a waterless wasteland full of briars and thorns. He stopped the rain. He did so, not out of despair, He wasn't giving up. He was being the faithful vinedresser. He was gardening, caring for His pleasant planting.

In the dried-up desolate land where the vineyard was planted was a stump. It was left there by God. The stump blossomed. It was the line of David. Jesus was the fruit born of Mary. He came to His vineyard. The vineyard rejected Him like before. But this time He would bring forth fruit on its behalf. He would do so from a tree, the cross...the fruit of perfect love and obedience. What more could He do for His vineyard? He did it by dying.

We are God's pleasant planting, His church, His precious vineyard. This vineyard will never be destroyed but come to its fullness on the last day. He has joined us to Himself, the Tree of Life. In His church He does His gardening, pruning, planting, and watering. May we be fruitful in joyful love and obedience in and through Him. In the Name ✝ of Jesus, Amen.

Friday the Eighteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 6, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 1:1-2:10, 1 Timothy 1:1-20

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners... (1 Timothy 1:15)

In the Name ✝ of Jesus, Amen. In Jesus, God saves sinners. Jesus is God. All things were created through Him. Jesus is fully man. He became enfleshed in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Jesus became a sinner. He claimed your sins as His very own. They stuck to Jesus, the God Man. You hear the voice of Jesus, the sinner, in the Psalms calling your sins His. Jesus prayed, "I acknowledged my sin." The Psalms are the Lord's prayers given to the baptized, prayers by the sinless Son of God as sinner. God made Him who was sinless to be sin in your place. In Jesus, God saves sinners.

Jesus needed saving. He became the foremost of sinners. Only He as God could save Himself. Only He could die for the sins that had become fully His. In the ignorance of unbelief those surrounding the cross unwittingly suggested He do that very thing...save Himself. "Save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40). "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (Luke 23:3) And He did just that, save Himself and us. By dying in the flesh, made to be sin, as God, sin lost all its power. In Jesus sin died. By saving Himself as sinner in our place He fulfilled His Father's will to save sinners. In Jesus, God saves sinners.

Jesus wasn't about saving Himself, clearly. He was all about saving you. This was His Father's will. You can't save yourself from sin. Jesus did the saving by dying. He rescued you. It is a trustworthy confession that Jesus came into the flesh to save sinners. This is the theme of the entire Bible. He did not come as a lawgiver to beat you down into despair and submission. He came as Savior. He came for all sinners. And that includes you! In Jesus, God saves sinners.

It is a sin to doubt what God has said He has done and will do. It is sin to think in your heart that God can't forgive and save you. He forgives your doubts as well. Those doubts were on Him at the cross. They died. Faith, God given faith, firmly planted in you, believes, clings, trusts and accepts that Jesus is the Savior of sinners. You may not always feel that way, but it is true, nonetheless. God said so. In Jesus, God saves sinners. In the Name ✝ of Jesus, Amen.

*I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.
I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,
and I am saved from my enemies. (Psalm 32:5; 18:3)*

Saturday the Eighteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 7, 2023

Today's Reading: Introit to Pentecost 19: Psalm 118:22-24 antiphon Psalm 118:1

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 2:11-20, 4:1-6, 1 Timothy 2:1-15

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen. You are a child of the day. Day is for light; for seeing clearly. You are not a child of any ordinary day but of an extraordinary day; a day coming since the creation of the world. A day set by God. A day that has come. The psalmist speaks of this day...“that the Lord has made.” (Psalm 118:24)

We are talking about a specific day in history that God made. We have reason to rejoice and be glad every day because of this day, one far greater than any other. It is the day the rejected stone became the cornerstone. You are a child of that day. A day full of light and life.

The Temple was built with enormous stones. The cornerstone was selected to join two walls together. The psalmist is not speaking of an earthly building or stones. He is speaking of Jesus. He is the stone that was rejected by His own people according to God's will and design. Jesus came to build something far greater than the Temple. He came to build His church of which He is the cornerstone. The church which is the household of God filled with the children of the day. The day that stone was laid in place for His church is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day of which we speak. A day of resurrection and light.

Jesus was rejected. The religious leaders with the crowd cried, “crucify him.” He had done nothing deserving such rejection. Yet, He was not only rejected by His people but also by His Father. He was stricken, smitten, afflicted and forsaken by God. Rejected. Crucified. Buried.

But let us get to the day, to the light that scatters the darkness... Resurrection Day. The day the stone was rolled away. The day the crucified Jesus rose, laying an everlasting foundation for His Church. He who was laid stone cold dead in the tomb, sealed by a stone, is our resurrection cornerstone. The Cornerstone who joins all the children of the day to Himself and to each other.

We are children of that day, the day of resurrection. A day the Lord has made for rejoicing and gladness. You became a child of that day, your resurrection day, in Baptism. In Jesus, our resurrected Lord, we see clearly, as in the day, what God has done...it is marvelous in our eyes. In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen.

Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.
I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God; I will extol you. (Psalm 118:19, 21, 28)

Sunday the Nineteenth Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 8, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 21:33-46

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 4:7-23, 1 Timothy 3:1-16

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. (Matthew 21:38, 39)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen. The master of the house who planted the vineyard is God. The vineyard is Israel, God's people. The tenants of the vineyard are the religious leaders. The servants sent to gather the fruit of the vineyard are the prophets sent by God to preach and teach God's Word. The son sent by the master of house is Jesus, the only begotten Son of God.

The parable was a direct and clear condemnation of the elders of the people and the chief priests. Jesus was pointing a finger directly at them, “you have done this!” God's Word from the mouth of God Himself condemned them. There was no wiggle room for these leaders. They and all who heard knew what Jesus meant. They should have repented. But rather they bound themselves in their sin and hardness of heart and desired Jesus dead. Perhaps, some by God's mercy later, after Jesus' death and resurrection, saw clearly, repented and believed with Jesus' parable still burning on their hearts and minds.

Leaders of God's people, then and now, are always in grave danger of forgetting to whom the vineyard belongs. The church is always in need of faithful pastors, of tenants, to care for God's people according to His Word and will. Unfaithfulness in preaching and teaching mutes the voice of the Apostles, those sent by God, effectively killing them and throwing them out of the church.

Jesus' parable serves as a reminder to pray for faithful pastors who hold tightly to the Word of God. “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers...” (Matthew 9:38). Pray daily for your own pastor. Pray that pastors would always remember whose vineyard it is in which they work. They serve in the stead and by the command of Jesus for your salvation. Pray that the lay leaders of your congregation would support faithful ministers as they serve God's people. It is the Lord's vineyard, His people, for whom He sent His Son to die.

You, and all believers, are the fruit of God's vineyard. His fruit brought forth through Baptism and faithful preaching and nurtured in the Holy Communion. In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen.

*You brought a vine out of Egypt;
... and planted it.
Look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
the stock that your right hand planted...
Let your face shine, that we
may be saved! (Psalm 80:8,14b, 15a, 19b)*