



REFLECTIONS

**The Twenty First Sunday of Pentecost -
The Twenty Sixth Saturday of Pentecost
October 22 - December 2, 2023**



OCTOBER 22 - DECEMBER 2

This season's Reflections were written by

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

Rev. Harrison Goodman, Content Executive at Higher Things Inc.

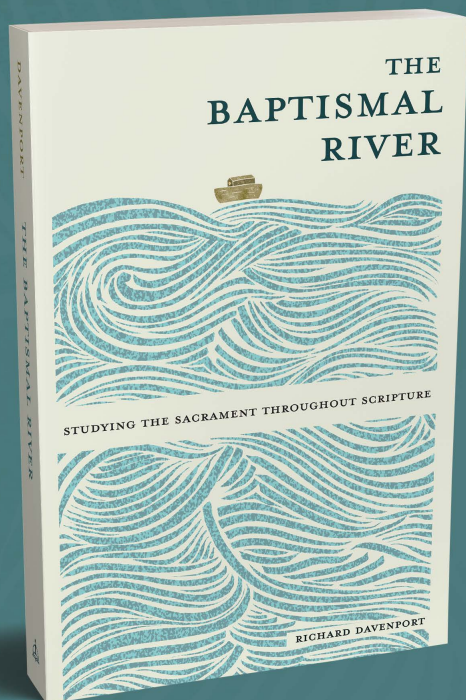
*Rev. Samuel Schuldheisz, Pastor at Beautiful Savior Lutheran
Church in Milton, WA*

2023 Reflections Staff:

Karrie Jacoby, Reflections Editor

©2023 Higher Things, Inc., Lisbon, IA

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE A BAPTIZED LIFE?



Baptism does more than just wash away our sins; it is a theme that weaves throughout the Old and New Testaments. This 8-unit study—adaptable for personal or group use—immerses you in God's life-giving promises.

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.

Sunday the Twenty First Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 22, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 22:15-22

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 4:21-40 Matthew 8:1-17

*And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"
(Matthew 22:20)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Pharisees today try to trap Jesus. They want to see if He would be for or against paying taxes to the Romans. Jesus famously uses the image of Caesar on the coin to show that He wasn't a revolutionary who refused to pay taxes or overthrow the Romans. He submitted to the governing authority yet knowing that the Romans or Herod would never have authority unless it had been given from on high. The image of Caesar meant it belonged to Caesar, but you are made in the image of God, which means that you belong to God. It is God who claims us, who made us in his own image. We do not belong to anything or to anyone else. We don't even belong to ourselves. We belong to God in all our being, with all our talents, interests, time, and wealth.

The consequences of belonging to God are really beautiful. First, it means that God will not forsake us. The Pharisees and the other religious leaders that Jesus denounces were notoriously bad at caring for the people. They neglected their responsibilities and the people God gave into their care. Second, it means that because we belong to God, we belong to the people of God, the body of Christ. We are baptized into this Body and no political or governing authority can take that away from you. Pay your taxes? Yes, as hard as it is to accept that. Pay your way to get back into God's good grace? No way! Jesus paid the price for you so that you now live with Him in His kingdom. The cross was the final trap of the Pharisees, but through that cross Jesus paid the price in full for the life of the whole world. You bear the image of Jesus in your Baptism, God has rendered to you His son so that you may be His forever. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, the protector of all who trust in You, have mercy on us that with You as our ruler and guide we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Saint James of Jerusalem

OCTOBER 23, 2023

Today's Reading: Acts 15:12-22

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 5:1-21, Matthew 8:18-34

After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. (Acts 15:13)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. You all probably know someone who does not believe in Jesus. I'd be surprised if anyone reading this doesn't have a dear loved one, who does not trust in Christ. It's the saddest thing in the world. Today we observe the Feast of St. James of Jerusalem, Brother of our Lord. James was Jesus' brother (Mark 6:3). Yet, we are told in Scripture that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5). In fact his family thought he was a downright cuckoo! (Mark 6:21)

How sad that James couldn't believe what Jesus had come to accomplish. However, all hope is not lost. We know that at some point James believed in Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15:7 that after his resurrection Jesus appeared to James after he appeared to his disciples. In Acts 1:14 Jesus' brothers, who didn't believe in him were in Jerusalem devoting themselves to prayer and waiting for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. James didn't only become a believer and a witness of the resurrection of Christ, but he is counted among the Apostles (1 Corinthians 9:5) and Paul even calls him a pillar of the church! (Galatians 1:18-19; 2:9). The Epistle of James also is believed to be written by the same James. We know that Jesus is able to sympathize with us in our weakness and was tempted like us in every way, except without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Yet, we also know that Jesus dealt with the pain of having his own flesh and blood reject him and not have saving faith. But our Lord continued to pray for his brother. He continued to preach and confess the truth. And those prayers and those words worked. James was baptized and led to confess Christ, and he died a Christian death.

So while you have loved ones who aren't Christian, Christ knows the same sadness and pain. He will not give up on them, just as He did not give up on James. You have the comfort that God hears your prayers for your loved one. And you have the encouragement to not give up confessing Christ. God's word has the power to create faith (Romans 10:17). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Heavenly Father, shepherd of Your people, You raised up James the Just, brother of our Lord, to lead and guide Your Church. Grant that we may follow his example of prayer and reconciliation and be strengthened by the witness of his death; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Tuesday the Twenty First Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 24, 2023

Today's Reading: Isaiah 45:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 5:22-6:9, Matthew 9:1-17

"This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of..." (Isaiah 45:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever seen God work in someone that you totally never expected? Maybe the person was a nominal Christian or maybe they were the furthest thing from a Christian. It can catch us off guard at times with how God can use evil people for His will to be done. In the events leading up to our Old Testament text today from Isaiah. Israel found themselves in exile from God. Another way of putting it is that they were "divorced" from God. However, God was still at work for their benefit. When Israel was sent into exile, God used both the Babylons and the Persians to do His will for the children of God.

Today we hear of the Persian King named Cyrus. Cyrus is not an Israelite, he never will be one of them. He is a pagan ruler who knows nothing about the remarkable history between Israel and God. However the God of Israel will use Cyrus for the deliverance of Israel. In the reading today, notice that in working with good or evil, God is the active agent in this story, no one else. Read the text again and you will see almost every sentence begins with "I", the "I" being God. "I will go before you," "I have grasped," "I will give," "I call you," "I name you," "I equip you," "I form" and "I make." They are all there. And why does God take action through this man named Cyrus; for the sake of his servant, Israel, His chosen people. All of God's actions are done for the sake of his people who he has not forgotten.

God could have raised one of Israel's own up to do what needed to be done, but instead he chose an outsider. By the way, notice in verse 1 what Isaiah says of Cyrus. Cyrus is the "anointed one". The word in Hebrew for "anointed one" means "Christ" in Greek. Not something you might have expected. God's work is in unusual and surprising ways. Simply look at the cross and see the dead Son of God bringing the Life of the World to you. In our sins we are divorced from God. However Jesus' unending love for you, His bride, placed him on the cross. He became the exiled one so that we could be brought back into the Kingdom of our Heavenly Father and the inheritance prepared for you in the life of the world to come. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, in Your mercy guide the course of this world so that Your Church may joyfully serve You in godly peace and quietness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Wednesday the Twenty First Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 25, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism: Baptism Part 3

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 6:10-25, Matthew 9:19-38

"Clearly it is not the water that does it, but the word of God that is in and with the water, and the faith that trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Water is the greatest earthly gift that God has given to us in this life. You are reminded of how important it is to drink your 8 glasses a day of water each day and that probably gets annoying. If you lose too much water you get dehydrated and can die. How many times have you seen a show where someone is in the desert parched and looking for just a simple bit of water. Even the rich man sitting in hell asked for Lazarus to simply dip his finger in some water to cool his tongue. Water is a big thing in Christianity too.

All Christians speak about Baptism in some way or another. Have you noticed that so many Christians today tend to focus on the water? Sprinkling, immersing, churchy bathtubs, rivers or the ocean. So much tends to be focused on how much water one needs to be baptized. If you think about it, water isn't exactly in huge abundance for all peoples and locations. In some areas water is a very precious commodity. People have to spend an immense amount of time, money and energy to have access to water. What water they do have is extremely precious and wisely used. If I am in an area where there is a severe drought and water is very precious, does God really require us to fill a large pool or tub to be immersed?

That's why as Lutherans we have always stated that God sets no standard for how much water we need or where it is to be found. To be blunt Luther today is really saying "To be sure, water is absolutely necessary for Baptism, but let's not lose focus of what Jesus is doing in Holy Baptism." In Baptism the focus is on the fact that God has attached His Word to water. It is His command and His promise attached to water that Jesus works through, whether it be a sprinkle or Niagara Falls. The Word of God that is in and with the water is the very hand of God, giving out all the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection for the life of all sinners. Thanks be to God for water, you need it for everything in this life that we live. Thanks be to God for attaching His Word to the waters of Holy Baptism where He gives you all that you the waters of everlasting life, never to evaporate or recede, for Jesus says to you; "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." John 7. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Father in heaven, at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River You proclaimed Him Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized in His name faithful in their calling as Your children and inheritors with Him of everlasting life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Thursday the Twenty First Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 26, 2023

Today's Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 7:1-19, Matthew 10:1-23

They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. (1 Thess. 1: 9-10)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It's hard to be hopeful today about many things. Finances, social statuses, our health, what kind of techy pads or phones we don't have, all the way down to loneliness, despair, depression and abandonment. It really stinks living in a world that is drenched in sin. If we had some hope, it might motivate us a bit more. We need hope, we would like to put something hopeful in our calendar or social media status. Anything to keep us from facing the daily pains of our sins.

However, most of our hope is based on us and how we can make things better. We say "well, things will get better if I just get through this day..." "things will get better when I'm married or get a raise..." But what if things don't get better? What if the pain and struggles continue for the foreseeable future? When we talk about hope as Christians we need more than just a temporary fix. Hope is more than making lemonades out of life's lemons because our problems are much bigger than we see. Sin is at the core of all that is broken, full of despair and hopeless. As Christians we see hope in Jesus' permanent fix for this life. Paul says today "[God] raised from the dead Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath of to come." Jesus gives you permanent hope. Believe it or not this hope actually cuts through the sharpest of pains in life all the way down to our trivial complaints. This hope forgives and heals you of your sins. That's why we rejoice - because faith, love and hope are for you in Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Hope of the world, God's gift from highest heaven, bringing to hungry souls the bread of life: still let your Spirit unto us be given to heal earth's wounds and end her bitter strife. (LSB 690:2)

Friday the Twenty First Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 27, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 10:24-42

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 8:1-20, Matthew 10:24-42

Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:39)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Life is full of so many unexpected twists and turns. There are always those things that we never anticipated happening, being dumped into your lap. We thought we knew what was going on and suddenly we had to re-evaluate our plans and future. As Christians it is very important that we realize this rather than shy away from it. Jesus was never one who promised a life full of ease and happiness. For us today who live in the shadow of Jesus' cross we have to constantly be brought to the realization that we really aren't in charge. In your sins you want to be in control, you want to be the author and sustainer of your life, but your sins also show you that is not the case.

Sometimes when God allows chaos, uncertainty or suffering to be dumped into our lap God may very well be stopping our selfish and sinful plans. However this is a daily battle we face each and every day. Luther says that our greatest enemies are sin, the devil and even ourselves in our sinful flesh. Yes, that means you are your own worst enemy. It's so hard to have God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, but even then Jesus has come to take on our mortal and sinful nature for us. His path seemed to have many unexpected twists and turns, it seems as if so many things he faced were unanticipated.

However in all things, He knew the path set before Him. His path had His eyes set on you, His joy and delight. He is the one who lost His life, so that you might gain eternal life. In the case of uncertainty and suffering we find comfort in the fact that Jesus Himself is acquainted with suffering and grief but even more He is the one who came for the sake of you, to endure the cross and its suffering and chaos to insure that you will live with Him never to be of concern about your plans or future. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Heavenly Father, though we do not deserve Your goodness, still You provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may acknowledge Your gifts, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Saint Simon and Saint Jude

OCTOBER 28, 2023

Today's Reading: John 15:12-21

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 9:1-22, Matthew 11:1-19

*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19
If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because
you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the
world hates you. (John 15: 18-19)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Happy St. Simon and St. Jude day! Simon is the patron saint of saw workers and St. Jude is the patron saint of desperate situations or lost causes. More on that in a bit. If you look up St. Simon and St. Jude you won't find much information other than they were the 10th and 11th disciples named among the 12 disciples. We don't set these saint days apart to pray to the saints or uphold them with some unnecessary esteem. However we do give thanks to God that He worked through men like this for the extension of His Kingdom throughout the world. It is kind of comical that St. Jude is the patron saint of "desperate situations and lost causes." It's comical that Christians would pray to St. Jude about desperate situations and lost causes. St. Jude was in need of a savior just like you and I are! Who did St. Jude pray to when he experienced desperate situations and lost causes? He prayed to Jesus! Jesus who today says that the world is a place full of desperate situations and lost causes.

Sin has caused all of our desperation, it has caused us to lose our own way. If that wasn't bad enough, Jesus tells us today that the world is going to hate you for being a follower of Him! Talk about desperation and losing out in the game of life! However, Jesus tells us this today not to bring fear, but to remind us that the world treated Him the same way. The world hated Jesus so much that they didn't want Him anywhere but on a cross. The world hates that Jesus loves you so much that He shed his precious blood to cover you of all your sins. Because of that glorious cross the world hates that Jesus promises you everlasting life by His death and resurrection.

In a world of desperation and lost causes remember what Jesus says to you today "I chose you out of the world." In your Baptism all desperation and loss is turned into hope and joy because Jesus has sought you out and found you. Thanks be to God Jesus preached the same message through St. Simon and St. Jude. Let the world think what it wants of you, they hated Jesus, they hated Simon and Jude and all the other saints, they will hate you because you are baptized. Let the world do its worst to us, they have no victory over Jesus or you as you walk as a redeemed saint who is precious in His sight. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You chose Your servants Simon and Jude to be numbered among the glorious company of the apostles. As they were faithful and zealous in their mission, so may we with ardent devotion make known the love and mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Sunday the Twenty Second Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 29, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 22:34-46

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 9:23-10:22 Matthew 11:20-30

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. (Matthew 22:35)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Pharisees were a lot of things, but stupid wasn't one of them. If the question seemed too easy on the surface, you're right. The core of the 10 commandments is love. Love the Lord. Love your neighbor. These are the two tables of the law. The real question is underneath it. If that's all it takes...what are you doing here?

The answers in your catechism show how much love demands in each commandment, but there's more. The Pharisees could only measure love in themselves and their actions. The things they did. The things they abstained from. The Lord ceased to be the provider of all good things worthy of love. Instead, He became the measuring stick who can only be appreciated by the worthy. The neighbor to be loved ceased to be a neighbor, the subject receiving love. Instead, they became objects, proof for each Pharisee that it was ok to love themselves. Jesus isn't content to leave us here, loving ourselves above all things. They ask about the law. He responds with the Gospel.

Who is the Christ? How can He be the Son of David if He is David's Lord? The answer is easy, too. Love. Not as a feeling or a measuring stick, but as a sacrifice. God, who is love, took on human flesh, born of David's line, yet David's Lord, to redeem sinners like him, like us, and like the Pharisees too. He not only fulfills the law, but forgives us for falling short. In this freedom we can finally stop looking at ourselves to provide all good things and look to God. Our neighbors can finally be the subject of mercy instead of an object to prove we're doing enough. We already have the victory in Jesus. Sin, death, the devil, and even our best efforts lie defeated under His feet. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, You have commanded us to love You above all things and our neighbors as ourselves. Grant us the Spirit to think and do what is pleasing in Your sight, that our faith in You may never waver and our love for one another may not falter; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Monday the Twenty Second Week of Pentecost

OCTOBER 30, 2023

Today's Reading: Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 11:1-25 Matthew 12:1-21

"Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. (Leviticus 19:2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. I've never had to go to court, so I guess I haven't done injustice there. Mostly because I've never gotten caught doing injustice outside of the court. I should probably definitely try to speak better of my neighbor. Or at least talk a little less trash. There's a commandment about that somewhere between 7 and 9. Realistically, I could probably do that better. I don't know how to carve the hate out of my heart though. It plants itself in past wrongs. It festers in old wounds. It carves away that which should be given to love and corrupts it, even darkening my reason. Ask me how I was right when it comes to those who have wronged me. Even my brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Law shows us our sin. Because it doesn't paint a picture of us. The Law paints a picture of Jesus. He is the one who actually fulfilled it. He is the one to imagine when we want to see what it looks like. The LORD is holy. But our text does not call us to try to be like God. That led to some problems in the past between Genesis 2 and 4. God speaks. Something happens. Think Genesis 1. Let there be light. And it was good. You shall be holy. And you are. Jesus, who fulfills the Law in your stead dies on the cross to forgive your sin. Your pastor pronounces absolution. Your sins are taken away. You are holy, even as holy as Jesus. He makes you that way. So when we read the Law and find all our shortcomings, we take them to Him who forgives us, and makes us new to love our neighbor free from having to measure. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O grant that nothing in my soul May dwell, but Thy pure love alone; Oh, may Thy love possess me whole, My joy, my treasure, and my crown! All coldness from my heart remove; My ev'ry act, word, thought be love. (LSB 683:2)

Reformation Day

OCTOBER 31, 2023

Today's Reading: Romans 3:19-29

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 11:26-12:12 Matthew 12:22-37

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it. (Romans 3:21)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Words of law are always the most optimistic. "This is what we should do. I have a plan." They bear witness to righteousness. They just can't give it. It would come from the Law if we could fulfill it. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Words of Law will leave you wanting to love Jesus but getting lost under hating yourself. Looking for an excuse for everything you do that He says not to, which usually just means finding someone else to hate instead. We can't help but see the worst intention in people because deep down we know our own.

We know what we did this week, and try to ignore the fact that God saw it too. We know what we're called, and what we can't unsee when we look in the mirror. We know how tiring it gets to balance our accomplishments against our failures on a lopsided hill. Every mouth is stopped sooner or later. But it's Reformation Day so let's just tell the story of Luther and a church door. Christianity has become a race to not actually needing Jesus anymore. And it doesn't work.

The Law bears witness to how things are supposed to be. It just can't get us there. So, God, in mercy, fulfills it for us. Then bears Himself the wrath we rightly deserve. The righteousness of God is manifested on the cross. It's called the Gospel. Jesus died for you. For all the things that you have done and been through that aren't the way they're supposed to be. And your sins are forgiven. You are holy. You are baptized. The righteousness of God is manifested in that font for you. You wear that righteousness. And in Christ, even the Law bears witness to you. It paints a picture of how God sees you. It paints a picture of good that you can freely live in, because it doesn't measure you. It was measured in Christ. It is finished. It is yours. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and gracious Lord, pour out Your Holy Spirit on Your faithful people. Keep us steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and deliver us in times of temptation, defend us against all enemies, and grant to Your Church Your saving peace; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

All Saints Day

NOVEMBER 1, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 12:13-32 Matthew 12:38-50

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Some folks feel awkward in church. They don't fit the decor. They know it. To them, the whole thing feels fake. It might be where the meek go, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are peacemakers. It might be where folks mourn, but unless they're burying someone they feel out of place. This is a place to be merciful, but it's a little too stuffy, and there are other options for that. But the thing that really cuts is that this is a place for the pure in heart. And God knows.

They probably have a better read on things than the rest of us. God is actually present here in a meaningful way. A different way than He's everywhere else. But the more time we spend here, the more we can be tricked into forgetting it. We lose sight of the magnificent in the liturgy we have memorized. The divine is here, and His standards don't change just because you're not impressed by the felt banners and bald pastor. If it's your job to fit in here, the house will stand empty. If it's a house for the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, that's not you. Because it's not your house. It's Christ's. Even when some swagger around like they own it. Even when some of us know full well we don't fit. He reminds us that above all the rest, this is a house for the poor in spirit. To the one utterly alienated from God. And that still isn't you. It's Christ, who though He was rich, became poor, who though He knew no sin, became sin. It would be tragic except for the fact that He did it for you. Which makes it beautiful.

Every beatitude is Jesus for you. He becomes all of those things and gives you every reward. He took your sins. He took everything about you that doesn't fit. And invites you to receive every good thing He has. It's never measured in you. It's always given by Him. On the good weeks where you got a little better. On the worst weeks where everything fell apart. It is only this: Are you in Christ Jesus? Are you baptized? If you're the kind of sinner that's scared to be here, or the kind of sinner that isn't anymore, that forgiveness is still yours. You are a saint now. A holy one of God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, You knit together Your faithful people of all times and places into one holy communion, the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Grant us so to follow Your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that, together with them, we may come to the unspeakable joys You have prepared for those who love You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Thursday the Twenty Second Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 2, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism: Baptism Part 4

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 13:1-18 Matthew 13:1-23

What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Baptism is supposed to make your life harder. Actually, it's supposed to end it. Kill you. That's the best thing it can offer. Death with Jesus. Life with Him too. But we only focus on the second part. Usually to our detriment. We imagine the baptized life as God's holy children to be cleaner. Better. Wholly devoted to Him and His service. Instead we lose a war with ourselves every day. Because the Old Adam wasn't drowned once. He has to die daily. Old Adam daily drowns. He must be a strong swimmer. Paul might say it better than Luther.

St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:4)." The Lord throws the dirt on you while you still claw at the coffin. Because He loves you. He loves you enough to bring to nothing the things that will kill you, and unite you to the death that actually saves you: Christ's. Old Adam's struggles are found in trying to live by chasing things that kill. And we won't stop, even after receiving His forgiveness, life, and salvation. So He nails us to the cross with Jesus in our Baptism. Throws us into the tomb with Him, and keeps throwing dirt on us every time we claw our way out. Because death with Jesus yields life with Jesus. Daily.

Daily you are made new. Holy. Daily you are tied to salvation. Your last mistake, the same one you made daily for as long as you can remember and wish you could forget? That's forgiven. Daily. Because you're baptized. Remember it. Daily. Make the sign of the cross. It doesn't forgive you. It reminds you of the forgiveness you can't escape in your Baptism. Because God won't stop pouring out mercy. Daily. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Christian, firmly hold this gift And give God thanks forever! It gives the power to uplift In all that you endeavor. When nothing else revives your soul, Your Baptism stands and makes you whole And then in death completes you. (LSB 596:5)

Friday the Twenty Second Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 3, 2023

Today's Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 14:1-2, 22-23, 14:18-15:15, Matthew 13:24-43

We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.
(1 Thessalonians 2:12)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Paul throws this verse in at the end of telling everyone how great a job he and his fellow pastors have done. I can hardly read it. I feel guilty. I am guilty. I have not worked as hard, walked as purely, or served as well. When I look at my works, I have not walked in a manner worthy of God. Lord have mercy. Not just on me, but on the people I've been charged with caring for.

It's so easy to mark our failures in the face of other's success. It's not even jealousy. It's shame. It's compounded when I read Paul's words. My sins didn't just hurt me and the people around me. They hurt the witness of Christ. You hear it everywhere. The world loves our hypocrisy. We believe in a Law we don't walk in. We love commandments we break daily. They imagine our sin proves our faith wrong because we are not by our works what God commands us to be. But we are what God commands us to be by His works. He forgives our hypocrisy. He forgives my sins and yours.

And this is a greater witness to the power of our religion than me being a good person. I really still wish I was. I really still wish I did better, and I really do want to do better. But the walk in a manner worthy of God isn't about your steps. It's you being carried home by the Good Shepherd who seeks those who have strayed. He daily seeks us in our rebellion. Daily gathers us and carries us home in mercy. That's actually the bigger miracle. That God would forgive me. I hope that's what I can be known as. I hope that's the witness. Jesus forgives sinners, of which I am numbered. God be praised.

When it comes to Christian witness, let it be the Law and the Gospel, and not just the Law. Let it be not our works, but Christ's mercy. None of us can by our own works be worthy of God. All of us, by our Baptism, are worthy already. We walk as we have been made to be. Redeemed. Faith in Jesus goes to Jesus. We seek the Lord in His mercy when we have failed to live up to the standards of the Law. It isn't just a place God covers your shame. It is a place He demonstrates the worthiness of our faith. The worthiness of His name. We have a God who forgives sinners, and invites more to receive the same. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, But yet in love He sought me And on His shoulder gently laid And home rejoicing brought me (LSB 709:3).

Saturday the Twenty Second Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 4, 2023

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 23: Psalm 149:1-4; antiphon Psalm 148:13

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

For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation. (Psalm 149:4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We treat it like it reads “pretend to be less than you are and God will be happy with you.” Really, it’s “when you are so humiliated the best you could hope for is pity, and it tastes so sour you’re not sure whether or not you’d just prefer to be abandoned, the Lord sees you the same way your dog does when you come home from school.”

Where I come from, humble just means “don’t be braggy”. Which means the Psalm reads something like give God praise for all the things you’re afraid to admit publicly to having because they sound too nice. It makes for a monotonous liturgy. But humble doesn’t mean pretending to be less than you are. It shares a root with humiliation. The thing where you actually are less and you know that everyone knows it. Humiliation is a word that somehow becomes a time machine to everyone’s terrible, horrible no good very bad days.

But it is the humiliated that God adorns with salvation. He wraps it around you like clothing, so that others may see it too. It looks like white robes. Baptism. The mark of the baptized isn’t a lack of humiliation. It’s an identity that cannot be marred by it. It brings about the genuine praise the Psalm calls for. He is the God who sees us in our humiliation and is exalted by joining us in it and conquering it for us. He leaves the angel choirs to be mocked by the crowds. He leaves the power of heaven to die at the hands of ignorant men, naked and ashamed. He is helpless as His mother looks on. And after dying to save the ones who did it to Him, us, He rises. He promises the same to you. You are not just God’s creation, but His children. The liturgy sings not of how you feel on your good days or your humiliated ones, but of God’s works, that we would have something to cling to when everything seems to slip away, and something to taste in His body and blood that aren’t sour. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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 (LSB 512:1).

Sunday the Twenty Third Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 5, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 23:1-12

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 17:1-20, Matthew 14:1-21

"And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven." (Matthew 23:9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. These verses either read like a threat to authority or an excuse to ignore it. Maybe because the whole "unity in Christ" bit would be a lot easier if we weren't told what to do by people who screw up. So we get vaguely punk rock about it and try to ignore the fact that the very voice that told Moses the 4th commandment was to honor your mother and father is now telling us to ignore all that.

Still, it sounds good. If nobody can tell anyone else what to do, nobody is above or below anyone else. Unity. After all, real unity always happens when everyone just does what they want on their own anyway. Understand what it all means. Best case scenario, this is just another chance to turn inward. You're all you've got and the best thing God would ever give you is an excuse to ignore what you don't like and be on your own. And when you look in the mirror and pretend never even a hint of doubt that you might be wrong, that you might be not good enough, that you might actually be a sinner like the one true Father says, then what? At least it's all equal in the pit?

But what if God actually loved us enough to want to help sinners? It sounds like a nice enough concept until you see who He sent to help you. Other sinners. Parents and teachers. The real miracle is that their sin won't stop God from working through them. Even in the mess their sin makes. Call no one father, but know your Father in Heaven loves you so much He would give you one anyway, then work through him, even if he's wrong sometimes. God is still stronger.

Real unity doesn't come at the expense of casting off anyone given to you who happens to be a sinner. Real unity comes from the cross where Christ does away with our Sin. Christ, who promises to work good through sinners who continue to sin. Real unity comes from Baptism. From a God who calls you His own child no matter who you are or what you've done, then gives you others to love and be loved by, then even promises to work through all of you. None of us will do it perfectly. All of us will receive forgiveness. This is where we speak in unity. Our Father who art in heaven. And He is. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful and gracious Lord, You cause Your Word to be proclaimed in every generation. Stir up our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that we may receive this proclamation with humility and finally be exalted at the coming of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday the Twenty Third Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 6, 2023

Today's Reading: Micah 3:5-12

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 18:1-22, Matthew 14:22-36

"Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry "Peace" when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths." (Micah 3:5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. People have been weaponizing religion ever since sinners realized there was power in it. It's not ok. Ever. From simple greed to much darker sins, it's hard to see how organized religion seems to function. I get why people would swear it off.

The LORD speaks through Micah and promises a retribution most seem to avoid today, even if Jerusalem was handed over into captivity back when. The people looking for vengeance are still a step behind the rest of the heartbroken who have sworn "never again". They want to see someone hurt. Maybe they have. Maybe not yet. But the rest ask the more important question. Why would God want there to be a church in the first place when this is what is done with it? It's probably the best question to ask.

Because The LORD is pretty unhappy with those who would make weapons out of the things that make for peace, too. That gives you the chance to consider something. God sees the evil done within His walls and still decides to keep His religion around. If you pack a box full of sinners, they're gonna sin, even if the box is called a church. That doesn't just mean you have to take the bad with the good. Decry it. Leave no room for sin to thrive. And grow from it what the evil one would only use for ruin by realizing that it can't stop God from working peace even when false prophets would try to wield it like a club. The peace that He gives is so potent that it thrives where evil would only destroy. It's so powerful that evil men would use it for selfish gain. But God is so good that He would let that power remain so that it can save us sinners. That truth grants grace not just to look at yourself, but to look at the religion and hope. Christ came to suffer at the hands of the same kind of men. He redeemed His church that it would be again a bringer of good news to men. His mercy is given even where evil would attack it, but His mercy endures and thrives to make a mockery of every terrible plot. There is bad in the church, but there is God working salvation too. If it is evil, cast it out. If it is of Jesus, cling to it. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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

Tuesday the Twenty Third Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 7, 2023

Today's Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 19:1-20, Matthew 15:1-20

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;" (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. For all the talk of sexual ethics in the church, it's easy to overlook the first and most important sentence. God wills you to be holy. So He makes you that way. He takes all that is unholy from you and bleeds for it. He cleanses you in the waters of Baptism and gives you a new identity. His child. Holy. Worthy of love. Holy people do holy things in the same way that apple trees make apples. That isn't to cast off the idea of good works as unimportant. It's to recognize they flow out of what we are.

Now we can talk about sexual sins. In Jesus, they are forgiven. In Jesus, you are forgiven. But sometimes even that's hard to hear. There's a reason. It isn't just that some sins pollute more than others. It's that some seem to grab hold of us in a way that they become our all. Our identity. That's the real issue with these sins. It isn't that they can't be forgiven. Christ died for all the world, even sinners who sin like that. Like us. It's that we wrestle with these sins on such a personal level that we can finally understand the nature of original sin. It isn't what we do. It's who we are. Corrupt. When we lean into that identity, we lean away from Christ. When we would rather be known by our sin than our Savior, it says more about us than it does about Him who died to forgive us these very sins.

You are not the sum of your lusts, your actions, your browser history, or the things you've endured. You are Christ's. Holy. Worthy of love. Not because you've abstained. Because Christ died. This is the will of God. That you be holy. So we lean into that. We try to serve our neighbor. We try to tame our lusts. And when we fail, we return to the source of holiness to be made new all over again in Baptism. It's war. You'll lose. A lot. But Christ still wills you to be holy so firmly that He makes you that way all over again. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, forsake me not! Take not Your Spirit from me; Do not permit the might Of sin to overcome me. Increase my feeble faith, Which You alone have wrought. O be my strength and pow'r—O God, forsake me not!
(LSB 731:2)

Wednesday the Twenty Third Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 8, 2023

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

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

Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God doesn't just want to forgive your sins. He wants you to firmly believe that your sins are forgiven. He wants to address your conscience. Because you're baptized, and that daily and richly forgives your sins. But sometimes it doesn't feel that way. Sometimes it just clings. Scratches. Tears apart from the inside out. That thing that you want to erase. God wants to speak to you about it. Tell you that it's gone. As far as the east is from the west.

Guilt festers. So God speaks. He uses your pastor to tell you. Your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. That sin is forgiven. Because I can walk past a group of people who start laughing and tell myself that it's definitely not at me. But sometimes it feels better to hear for sure. God speaks forgiveness from the outside in so that when guilt piles up, He would be able to remove it.

See, it isn't a question of whether you can be saved. Jesus died and rose. Your sins are forgiven. Paid for already. The real battle ground is over your conscience. The devil would have you look only at yourself in guilt. God wills that you have a pure conscience, and so He gives us confession. Go to your pastor. Hear about forgiveness. Don't stew in guilt. If you wait until Sunday, fine. Your sins are forgiven. But if it keeps you awake on a Tuesday night, know that you can go earlier. God doesn't only forgive sins an hour a week. Private confession exists to give you the same gifts whenever you need them. It isn't about talking more about a sin you want to think about less. It's about not having to let it hang over you until Sunday. Private confession exists so that forgiveness is given out each day as it is needed. In all of it, though, God simply wills you firmly to believe. You don't suffer from doubt. You don't suffer anguish. So confess, and hear absolution. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

And though it tarry through the night And till the morning waken, My heart shall never doubt His might Nor count itself forsaken. O Israel, trust in God your Lord. Born of the Spirit and the Word, Now wait for His appearing (LSB 607:4).

Thursday the Twenty Third Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 9, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 21:1-23, Matthew 16:1-12

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed." (Matthew 16:4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus tells the Pharisees that there will be no sign except the sign of Jonah, His death and Resurrection. Then He rebukes the disciples because they do not remember the signs given to them in the feeding of the 5000. One side gets yelled at for wanting more signs. The other gets yelled at for not expecting to see more. Thanks, Jesus.

The Pharisees and the disciples have the same problem. They take their eyes off of Jesus. The Pharisees only want signs, not what they point to, God made man to die for sinners. They want appetizers, but not dinner. The disciples don't expect signs, because they overlook the simple idea that God will care for them, even though He was made man to die for sinners. They sit at the table and are shocked there's actually food there. I shouldn't write reflections when I'm hungry. Or I'll just pretend to be like Jesus and insist I'm not actually talking about food, either.

In all reality, when it comes to miracles we usually set our hearts in the wrong places too. We want a vending machine God who only gives us the things we ask Him for, and could care less about what He actually wills. We seek miracles that prove He's real when the greatest miracle of all towers over us, not just as a sign, but as salvation. He dies and rises from the grave. The sign of Jonah is death and resurrection. It is a historically verifiable miracle, proof that Jesus is God, who has saved you.

The sign of Jonah is what we cling to in doubt and fear. It's what we cling to for forgiveness for seeking the leaven of the Pharisees and for not seeing the goodness God daily bestows upon us in ways we just overlook. Look to the cross, where Jesus died for you. It isn't just Him proving Himself right to those who are wrong. It's Him winning salvation for them, for us, for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Faithful cross, true sign of triumph, Be for all the noblest tree; None in foliage, none in blossom, None in fruit thine equal be; Symbol of the world's redemption, For the weight that hung on thee (LSB 454:4)

Friday the Twenty Third Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 10, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 24:10-25:10, Matthew 16:13-28

*Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
(Matthew 16:16)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Who do you say that the Son of Man is? We're still asking the same question. We're past the days where people haven't heard the name Jesus. Even today, He still gets a lot of press. The thing is, when you listen, we all seem to be talking about someone different. Most of them aren't real.

There's a good example of Jesus, who helps you be better until you don't wanna be so bad anymore. But most of the time he just ends up being the guy used to bash you over the head when you don't do what someone else wants you to. There's bigoted Jesus who calls people sinners in a hate filled book that does nothing but set the scene for hate crimes in the name of a higher power. Some just say he's a myth, because how could a loving God let the world look like this? If I were God I'd do things differently, and even though I need help using the dishwasher sometimes, I'm still pretty sure I'm smarter than any deity that created us.

Have you noticed a common theme yet? Grab hold of a select part of the Law, ignore the Gospel completely, then weaponize religion. It's what the people wanted from Elijah, who they wanted to be a weapon against a world set against them. It's what they wanted from John the Baptist and Jeremiah, who were both ridiculed and hated by the world and the religious alike, not because they were wrong, but because they called everyone to seek mercy in the Lord who not only calls sin wrong, but loves sinners enough to forgive them.

But who do you say the Son of Man is? This is 'not a what does Jesus mean to you' essay. That's where all of those other ones went wrong. Not one is a confession of who God is, just speeches about how we'd use Him. You can try to use the law, but you can only receive the gospel. And if Jesus is something to use, not receive, he only ends up being what we wish he was. Either to help us win, or to excuse us from having to listen to Him, it always ends up being law and no gospel. Those are answers from flesh and blood. They should sound ridiculous.

This is not a chance to come up with your own answer. Instead we're given a common confession. Peter's answer is not from flesh and blood, but from God. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. We answer the same. Because there's mercy there for sinners. For us. It will stand. Even against the gates of hell. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday the Twenty Third Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 11, 2023

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 24: Psalm 84:1, 9-12; antiphon Psalm 84:3

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 25:17-26:19, Matthew 17:1-13

*Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my
King I and my God. (Psalm 84:3)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God makes room for the worthless. It strikes a chord with my self hate that understands the Law better than I wish it did. I understand what I break. I understand what I fail to do. The sparrow costs a penny. Sometimes I'm pretty sure the sum of my time isn't worth that. But the sparrow finds a home at the LORD's altars. Not just to visit. To live.

Lots of people will put up with me for a time. But I'm pretty sure they'll leave. God calls me to live here. And there is a promise never to cast me out. He doesn't bicker with me about the best construction. He doesn't weigh the pros and cons of my time here. He just forgives. Daily. Renews. Daily. Grants worth, not based on what I can do, but based on what was paid for me. Daily. I'm worth the blood of Jesus. He feeds it to me here, at His altars. I want to live here. Free from the accusations of the Law. Where there's an answer to my self-talk as the Gospel is preached to me by my pastor, who won't argue either. He just forgives. I'd rather be a doorkeeper here than invited into the tents of wickedness. Not because I choose good. But because in those tents all I am is the sum of what I do. I know what that leaves me with, even if I manage to take a little more from others.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts. It is a shield against the torments of reality. Not because it's fake. But because it grants a new creation. A new reality. It changes what was wrong into what is forgiven. Here, there is favor and honor. I sit with brothers and sisters in Christ, all of us equal, all of us redeemed, and all of us loved. No good thing does the LORD withhold from us. Even in this veil of tears, when He safekeeps it for a time until the Resurrection. We'd only ruin it if we got it before then. He still gives us the foretaste in His supper. We participate in the Resurrection even now. This is why I go to church. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Abide with me, fast falls the eventide. The darkness deepens; Lord,
with me abide. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the
helpless, O abide with me (LSB 878:1)*

Sunday the Twenty Fourth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 12, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 25:1-13

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

The foolish ones said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out." Matthew 25:8

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Some read this parable and say "Do you have enough oil?" Or in other words, "Do you have enough faith?" That's the question so many want to ask today in Christianity. No way, that is not how Christianity works. Faith is a gift, given wholly and freely to you by God the Holy Spirit! You did not choose this, rather Christ has chosen you! And your faith is always kept for you by God! God in his unconditional love goes to great lengths to protect our faith. Faith can die, we can walk away.

However Jesus' desire, His plan, is to keep our lamps filled with oil so we can rejoice when He, the Bridegroom, arrives. He gives us lamps. He lights our lamps. He fills our lamps with oil. He keeps our lamps full of oil.

How does He do this? Our lamps are filled with Christ through His Word. We need the oil that Holy Scripture can bring. In hearing the Word, in preaching and teaching, oil is poured into our lamps so that we are prepared for whatever may come our way. At the font Christ filled you by washing you clean and warding off the attacks of Satan. At this Holy Table, where Christ enters your body and soul to forgive your sin, strengthen your faith in this difficult, fallen world. You are given faith, you are in Christ, you are His beloved who is seated at the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Zion hears the watchmen singing, And all her heart with joy is springing; She wakes, she rises from her gloom. For her Lord comes down all-glorious, The strong in grace, in truth victorious; Her star is ris'n, her light is come. Now come, Thou Blessed One, Lord Jesus, God's own Son, Hail! Hosanna! We enter all The wedding hall To eat the Supper at Thy call. (LSB 516:2)

Monday the Twenty Fourth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 13, 2023

Today's Reading: Amos 5:18-24

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 28:1-22 Matthew 18:1-20

But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! (Amos 5:24)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Justice is a big buzzword in our society today. Our world says we must have justice for whatever we are passionate about. Many Christians today emphasize the Christian faith needs to be all about justice for everybody else. Justice is why the church exists today. But what does that justice and righteousness look like?

Amos' message is harsh, it bites, it thrusts the Law of God's sword into our hearts. We do not love God, or our neighbor, as ourselves. We, like the people of Amos' time, have given God cheap lip service. We have felt that we have offered proper worship to Him and that we have done well in His sight. This leads us to ignore the needs of mercy and forgiveness that our neighbors desperately need from you.

Confess your sins, confess you don't know what you're doing before God, or that you can know true justice and righteousness on your own. But also give thanks to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. God's justice and His righteousness flow out of the pierced side of Jesus for your forgiveness. Strengthened and washed by the blood of Jesus, you now receive God's undeserved justice and righteousness. As Christ now lives in you, you know justice, you know true righteousness, you know, true love, and mercy for your neighbor, in need all because of Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Today Your mercy calls us To wash away our sin. However great our trespass, Whatever we have been, However long from mercy Our hearts have turned away, Your precious blood can wash us And make us clean today. (LSB 915:1)

Tuesday the Twenty Fourth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 14, 2023

Today's Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 29:1-29. Matthew 18:21-35

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Death is very confusing. It's really confusing for those outside of the church. For a non Christian, a funeral is pure grieving, pure loss, pure hopelessness, because death is only seen as permanent separation. And this is the approach the Thessalonians were drifting into when it came to death as well. Even as Christians we are not immune from the sting and confusion of death. Those of us who have had loved ones pass away do not hear from them anymore, do not see them anymore, do not find encouragement from them anymore. At death, they are removed from us and they seem to be completely gone. This was and is the assumption of those without the encouragement of God's promises.

But because of Jesus we do not lose hope or insight to the future. Death for Christians is not a permanent loss, it is nothing more than sleep! What a joy! We placed our loved ones in the cemetery, the place of sleeping. We have a great hope when it comes to facing the death of those who fall asleep in Christ! Indeed, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then in the same way we also believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. Jesus' death and resurrection have an intimate connection to the believer's life. Because Jesus paid for all of our sins and served as the first-fruits of the resurrection, we know that those who have fallen asleep in the Lord will be awakened from their death-slumber on the last day. God will bring those who have fallen asleep to himself. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Awake, my heart, with gladness— see what today is done! Now, after gloom and sadness, comes forth the glorious sun. My Savior there was laid where our bed must be made when to the realms of light our spirit wings its flight. (LSB 461:1)

Wednesday the Twenty Fourth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 15, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism: The Office of the Keys

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 30:1-20, Matthew 19:1-15

But before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When you go to a doctor, maybe you have a small issue that bothers you. Maybe it's a larger issue that you can't handle. You've tried to give yourself a remedy but nothing works. The doctor enters privately, examines you and gives you a path forward for healing. What is said and shown to the doctor remains with the doctor. This is how you should view your pastor with private confession. Luther calls the pastor the "soul physician".

In private confession Jesus is doing the forgiving when pastors forgive the sins of the people given into their spiritual care. Jesus says "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). Unlike a doctor, the pastor's medicine always works because Jesus is always the medicine you need. Go to your pastor just like you go to your doctor. Confess your sins as the self inflicted wounds that need help and healing. Just like others wound you and a doctor heals those wounds, absolution heals the wounds done against you. Jesus will take all sins away, even the ones done against you because by His cross, His death brings life and the medicine of immortality to you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

For your Son has suffered for me Giv'n Himself to rescue me Died to save and restore me Reconciled and set me free Jesus' cross alone can vanquish These dark fears and soothe this anguish (LSB 608:3)

Thursday the Twenty Fourth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 16, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 31:1-29, Matthew 19:16-30

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.
(Deuteronomy 31:8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. “The Lord be with you” is a statement you often hear your pastor say. This is not a simple greeting, it is a blessing and consolation, of the promised presence of the Lord Jesus with you.

Moses was 120 years old, he was told he would not be able to enter into the promised land. Now things are handed off to Joshua, to continue the Lord’s promise of the land they would inherit. Surely there was fear, confusion, and uncertainty. We face life each day with the same things before us. Each, and every time we gather for Divine Service we are constantly reminded of the great blessing that the Lord is with you. He is with you, as the prayer of the day is being prayed in the congregation. He promises to hear our prayers. He is with you as He prepares a table before you in the presence of your enemies in the Eucharist. He is with you as He sends you out the doors of the church with his heavenly benediction, and blessing for you. Be sure to catch that the next time you’re in the Divine Service where the pastor says the “Lord be with you.” It is key, it is intentional and it is Jesus’ promise said through your pastor. No matter what we face in life do not be discouraged, do not be afraid, Jesus is with you promising you the everlasting inheritance that is laid before you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

In these last days of sore distress grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness that pure we keep, till life is spent, your holy Word and sacrament. (LSB 585:2)

Friday the Twenty Fourth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 17, 2023

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 36:22-28

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 31:30-32:27, Matthew 20:1-16

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 37:27

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Sin loves to eat at us. Even if it's not bugging you all the time, you still find yourself bothered at times. You just can't get over it! If it wasn't bad enough looking at your sinful heart, we also hear that sin is a beast ready to pounce and consume you (Genesis 4:7). 6 The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it." Our sin and the devil are actively working to rule us and we have no problem with it.

It's all a matter of what your All-knowing and Almighty God says about it. It's the part we don't want to think about. While no one else may know except you, there is someone who always knows: your God. He sees no life, no color, no blood pulsing from your heart of stone. We are dead in our sins.

Ezekiel was not only consoling Israel who were brought into their own land, but he was foretelling of the new covenant God has given to us. The name of God, the Word of God is made flesh and dwelt among us. As the Word made flesh is crucified for you, blood and water burst forth from His side to cleanse you. That's why Ezekiel connects the name of God, with God washing us clean and giving us a new heart. Daily as we live out our Baptism we are reminded that we are part of the family of God. Stony hearts are ripped out and new hearts of flesh are given to us. And your hearts are alive, full of color and live, hearts that are now the temple of God. In Baptism your veins now pulse with the blood of Christ in you. 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)

Saturday the Twenty Fourth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 18, 2023

Today's Reading: Psalm 143:2, 5-6, 10-11; antiphon Psalm 143:1

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 32:28-52, Matthew 20:17-34

Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! Psalm 143:1

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. David was betrayed. There were those who ran after him to take his life. One of those who wanted him dead was his own son Absalom. David's very life was in danger, he felt crushed into the ground. We have betrayed ourselves in our sins. Not only have we betrayed ourselves but we are also being pursued by enemies of death, the devil, a fallen, wicked world. This is why we pray psalm 143 and our Lord answers your prayer with His mighty deliverance.

Rather than running away Jesus is betrayed in your place. He lets our sins hunt Him down for our sake. He is hunted, beaten down, crushed, crucified, and died for you! He is risen and now Jesus pursues you through the valley of the shadow of death. He does not pursue you with betrayal or death. He pursues you with goodness and mercy all the days of your life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

From depths of woe I cry to Thee, In trial and tribulation; Bend down Thy gracious ear to me, Lord, hear my supplication. If Thou rememb'rest ev'ry sin, Who then could heaven ever win Or stand before Thy presence? (LSB 607:q)

Sunday the Twenty Fifth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 19, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 34:1-12, Matthew 21:1-22

His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' (Matthew 25:21)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We can easily get bogged down by these parables to see who we are in the reading. These parables are all about what Jesus is doing for you! Let them be all about Jesus and His work for you! Jesus is the good and faithful servant. Christ Jesus was entrusted with God's Word. He is the only one who perfectly kept the Commandments of God. The Father entrusted the salvation of the world with a single life, His very own Son. Jesus lived that life without fault, in perfection, in true faithfulness to His heavenly Father, for you! In turn the Father says to Christ Jesus, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' You are forgiven in Jesus' righteousness because of that the Father likewise says to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

His faithfulness spills over to us in your love and generosity to others in need. Jesus does all the work, by faith you get all the credit, pray that the lord would work His love and generosity in and through you for the benefit of your neighbor. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and ever-living God, You have given exceedingly great and precious promises to those who trust in You. Dispel from us the works of darkness and grant us to live in the light of Your Son, Jesus Christ, that our faith may never be found wanting; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Prayer for Pentecost 25)

Monday the Twenty Fifth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 20, 2023

Today's Reading: Zephaniah 1:7-16

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 1:1-19, Matthew 21:23-46

*Be silent before the Sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near.
The Lord has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has
invited. (Zephaniah 1:7)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Imagine if your pastor started his sermon with "Be quiet!" It would get your attention. This is how Zephaniah speaks in today's reading. Zephaniah tells the people of God to be quiet, in other words, "Hush up, you're in the presence of the Lord." Thanks be to God?

What Zephaniah says is meant to strike fear in the hearts of God's people. The day of our Lord's return is nearer today than it was yesterday. We do not know when it will happen and this time of year we are shaken up by the reminder of his return. This shaking up is a reminder to repent, confess your sins.

Where is the Gospel in all of this? It's all about Jesus! Jesus, is the one who is returning to judge the living and dead. But remember Jesus is the one who takes the judgment promised by Zephaniah onto himself. He is judged with your sins in our place on Good Friday. The day of the Lord's return can be scary stuff! In Christ, however, it becomes good news for you and we pray for His return as soon as possible. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*The night will soon be ending; the dawn cannot be far. Let songs of
praise ascending now greet the Morning Star! All you whom darkness
frightens with guilt or grief or pain, God's radiant Star now brightens
and bids you sing again. (LSB 337:1)*

Tuesday the Twenty Fifth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 21, 2023

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

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 3:6-4:2, Matthew 22:1-22

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. (1 Thessalonians 5:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. During this time of year we are coming to the close of another church year. Between this time and the season of Advent, we hear an awful lot about the return of Jesus: the last day, the day of judgment. So many and Christianity want to know when that will happen. So many Christians are terrified by that day, and left in our sins we should be terrified! So many in Christianity today like to act like they know when it's going to happen because of signs and seasons all around us.

Paul's words today in 1 Thessalonians 5 show us how we should anticipate Jesus' return. Holy Scripture is silent, we don't know when it's gonna happen. Pray it happens, but don't fret about it. The Lord's final verdict for you in Jesus is "not guilty". In Christ you are perfect, and without blemish or stain of sin. That is who you are now in your Baptism, and that is who you are, when the Lord returns to judge the living and the dead. We don't know when this last day will happen, but we should fervently pray for it to happen sooner than later. On that day, the Lord will return to bring us to that place where there is no darkness, no sin, no death. In Christ, we will see him face-to-face, and live in the light of his glory forever and ever, come Lord Jesus come quickly! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The One whom angels tended comes near, a child, to serve; thus God, the judge offended, bears all our sins deserve. The guilty need not cower, for God has reconciled through his redemptive power all those who trust this child. (LSB 337:2)

Wednesday the Twenty Fifth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 22, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism: The Sacrament Part 1

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 5:1-19, Matthew 22:23-46

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Hungry? Sure, you've all been there. If you don't eat, you get "hangry", weak and will eventually die. God takes care of you daily by giving physical food and drink. In the same way He feeds you in this Christian faith. He gives you forgiveness, life, and salvation. Are you hungry for forgiveness because of your guilt? Are you weakened and troubled by your sins? Then come and eat!

Go to the altar and receive the gift of God's forgiveness. There you are filled with Christ's forgiveness that heals your soul and will bring wholeness to your body. Just like physical food strengthens you, so too the Eucharist is given to strengthen you in faith toward God and in fervent love toward one another. So come to the altar and be assured of God's love for you. He loved you so much that he gave his only Son for you, that you would not perish but have eternal life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, life-giving Bread, May I in grace possess You. Let me with holy food be fed, In hunger I address You. Prepare me well for You, O Lord, And, humbly by my prayer implored, Give me Your grace and mercy. (LSB 625:1)

Thursday the Twenty Fifth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 23, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 7:1-29, Matthew 23:1-12

And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!" (1 Kings 17:1-24)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Coloring books are all over the place these days. In Christianity those color books are about happy events in the Bible. I think we should have color pages for people like Elijah. We could have pages and pages that we could consider in the life of Elijah. How would you color Elijah's struggles? How would you struggle with the boy on his deathbed? What Elijah faced was a long, arduous journey through the valley of the shadow of death. It seems as if there was no room for light, color or beauty. Elijah's pictures might be at best gray, but mostly black and void.

We too walk in the valley of the shadow of death wearing the vale of tears we face. However, we trudge through the valley of the shadow of Jesus's death. We walk with the veil of tears with the promise. Even in the darkest moments of despair, pain, and loss there is beauty and even color. At the deathbed of a young boy, there is the beauty of prayers being heard and resurrection given. The cold, gray, pale shades of death, are colored back in with the reviving life and color on his face as the boy was alive again.

There is beauty and color for us in Jesus' death and resurrection. As we look at our own lives under the cross there really is beauty in the resurrection of all flesh, the color and vivid life of the new heavens and the new earth, the new creation. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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

Friday the Twenty Fifth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 24, 2023

Today's Reading: James 5:7-11

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 8:18-9:12, Matthew 23:13-39

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. (James 5:7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The church year is almost over and we are moving to where we hear about the end times. That's what James is reminding us today. I'm not a farmer, but I have grown plants. There can be a long time in between planting and the harvest when you don't see much of anything. There needs to be the right amount of rainfall, sun and time for the crop to mature for harvesting. The farmer needs to be patient. But in the end, he knows the harvest is coming.

James is telling us Christians that Jesus will return. Hold on. Hang on. Just be patient. Our Lord is coming. You have his word on it.

"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord." When the Lord comes He will judge the living and the dead. When the Judge comes in, what will he find? Will there be fruit or a dried up plant?

Take heart. Jesus is the sower of the seed who has planted His cross for the life of the world. His cross is the vine in which you are the branches and by His precious blood He bears all good and righteous fruit in you. The harvest is coming, be patient, the sower of the seed has cared for you His dear creation. In Him you have life, you have fruit, you are part of His good and gracious harvest. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Savior, rend the heavens wide; Come down, come down with mighty stride; Unlock the gates, the doors break down; Unbar the way to heaven's crown. (LSB 355:1)

Saturday the Twenty Fifth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 25, 2023

Today's Reading: Psalm 39:4-5, 7-8, 12a; antiphon 2 Peter 3:13

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 11:1-23, Matthew 24:1-28

In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:13)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The end of the world is going to happen and Christians and non-Christians believe it. We love to stream shows depicting a zombie apocalypse. The world hears warnings of financial collapse or global warming, - burning our world up. It seems that we can all agree that this world will come to an end. But how? Peter assures us that the Day of the Lord will Come; in the Lord's time, with destruction for the ungodly, but salvation for the faithful.

Do we have the same attitude toward the end as the rest of the world? No! Every week we get to say that Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead (Nicene Creed) – it could be any moment. The good news is that Peter says: "the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." In Jesus and His forgiveness you are ready, you are prepared, let us pray come Lord Jesus, come quickly. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Zion hears the watchmen singing, And all her heart with joy is springing; She wakes, she rises from her gloom. For her Lord comes down all-glorious, The strong in grace, in truth victorious; Her star is ris'n, her light is come. Now come, Thou Blessed One, Lord Jesus, God's own Son, Hail! Hosanna! We enter all The wedding hall To eat the Supper at Thy call. (LSB 516:2)

Sunday the Twenty Sixth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 26, 2023

Today's Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 20:1-18, Matthew 24:29-51

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (Matthew 25:34)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Some folks read Jesus' teaching on the Last Day in Matthew 25 like The Hunger Games: "Last one standing is a sheep, and may the odds be ever in your favor!" For many, it's a day of judgment, doom, and gloom; "everyone, save yourselves." But that's not what Jesus teaches about his second coming. When Jesus teaches about the Last Day, there is warning. But, Jesus also preaches good news at his coming.

The Son of Man comes, enthroned in glory. All the nations are gathered and he's separating people one from another. Sheep to the honorable right; goats to the dishonorable left.

This is the eternal Sorting Hat. Notice, works are mentioned after the separation. The sheep and goats are not separated on the basis of what they did or didn't do but who they are.

The sheep are the righteous. Jesus' righteousness was reckoned, imputed to them. Sin covered in the blood of the Lamb. They hear the words, "Come, you who are blessed by Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundations of the world." Pure gift. Jesus' inheritance is yours because He dies and leaves you with everything.

The sheep are astonished: "Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked or imprisoned?" "As you did these things for the least of these my brothers you did it to me." A blessed befuddlement: Jesus is hidden in the lowly losers. The sheep aren't busy counting good works because they know they have the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for them.

The goats are surprised too, but for different reasons. They're as ignorant of their sin as the sheep were of their good works. "Lord, when did we see you?" They're outraged. "If only we had known it was you, Jesus." Goats are busy counting their works, like a social media influencer counting followers. The goats are for the goats..

So, what are you? Sheep or goat? In Adam, we're all natural born goats. Naked, caught with our fig leaves down. Starving, thirsting, sick with sin and prisoners of death. The mirror of the Law only reveals a stinking, stubborn goat. But in Christ Crucified you are a righteous sheep, made woolly white by Jesus' blood. By water, word, and the Spirit, you are Jesus' little Lamb. Hear the Good Shepherd's voice: 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Monday the Twenty Sixth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 27, 2023

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 22:1-23 Matthew 25:1-13

For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. (Ezekiel 34:11)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Every now and then, you hear a song on the radio or Spotify and think to yourself, "This song sounds so familiar." There's a reason for that. Musicians call it sampling, when you take a bit of an old song and put it in a new song so it reminds you of that old song.

The same happens all over God's Word as well. It's no accident that Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, and looks at the crowds like sheep without a shepherd, and is identified by John as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is the New Testament's way of sampling the Old Testament promises of God. The new song of salvation sounds a lot like the old songs of salvation from the prophets.

Ezekiel 34 is one of those memorable chapters in the prophets, full of the promises of God to be the shepherd of his people Israel. God's people were lost in idolatry, God promised to seek them out and save them. God's people were scattered in exile, God promised to bring them home and rescue them. God's people were injured, weak, and hungry, and God promised to bind their wounds, give them his strength, and feed them in rich pastures. In the Old Testament, that's the refrain of God's song of salvation: God the Lord is the shepherd of Israel and he alone seeks them out, saves, and rescues them.

When we turn the pages of the Scriptures to the New Testament our Lord is playing the same old song but with something new. God the Shepherd has become one of his sheep in his incarnation and has become one with his sheep in our humanity. Jesus is the Good Shepherd of God in human flesh. He came to seek and save us in our lostness. He came to bind up our wounds by his wounds on the cross. He came to rescue us from sin, death, and the devil, by his redemption. He came to feed us with the rich pastures of his word and sacraments.

All the promises that the prophets foretold, all the songs of salvation they sang, find their fulfillment and joyful crescendo in Jesus crucified and risen. For Jesus is the Good Shepherd who seeks, saves, rescues, feeds, and forgives you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Tuesday the Twenty Sixth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 28, 2023

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 23:1-20, Matthew 25:14-30

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In Today's reading from 1 Corinthians 15, St. Paul tells us a tale of two Adams. The man Adam, formed by God from the dust of creation. And the God-man, Jesus, the second Adam, begotten of His Father before all worlds. The first Adam was formed by God into a man. The Second Adam is not only true man, but also true God.

In the Garden, Adam was tempted three times and overcome by Satan. In the wilderness, Jesus, the second Adam, was tempted three times and overcame Satan. The first Adam was tempted to become like God. Jesus, the second Adam is true God, and became man to be tempted for us as we are tempted, yet without sin. The first Adam was tempted to eat the food that God had not given him to eat. The second Adam knew that man lived not by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. The first Adam was tempted to forsake the word of God. The Second Adam is the very Word of God who also speaks God's living word.

The first Adam brought death out of life. Jesus, the second and perfect Adam brought life out of death. As Paul writes, "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead."

The first Adam failed. Fell in sin. Died. And in Adam, in our own sinful flesh, so do we. But not Jesus, the second Adam. Where the first Adam said "yes" to the devil's lie, Jesus says no, again, again, and again.

The first Adam was overcome by the tree serpent and the tree of the Garden. Jesus our Second Adam overcomes the devil by the tree of the cross for you.

The first Adam fell and brought us sin and death. Jesus our Second Adam dies and rises to raise us from the dust by His resurrection.

The first Adam cast us out of Paradise. Jesus our Second Adam brings us through the wilderness to a new creation: "today you are with me in Paradise."

The first Adam gave us food of the fall by sweat and labor. Jesus, our Second Adam, feeds us with his own life-giving food, the Bread of Life in his body and blood.

We confess with St. Paul, that "As in Adam we die, so in Christ, our Second Adam we live." And we rejoice with St. Paul that we are brothers and heirs of Christ, our Second Adam, who has destroyed the last enemy of death for us and for all creation. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday the Twenty Sixth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 29, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism: The Sacrament Part 2

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 23:21-40, Matthew 25:31-46

What is the benefit of this eating and drinking? These words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Lord God is the original Iron Chef. From beginning to end, and many places in between, when God serves up his blessings in Holy Scripture, course after course often involves food.

When God created the heavens and the earth he gave Adam and Eve access to a fruit and vegetable buffet line, until, of course, they sinfully chose to pick and eat something off the menu.

When the people of Israel were in bondage and slavery in Egypt, God provided a holy meal of bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and roasted lamb as the Passover meal. Central at that meal was the lamb who was sacrificed, whose blood covered their doorposts, and who's life was given to spare the life of Israel, that death would Passover them.

When the prophet Elijah was hiding in a cave the Lord sent ravens to feed and nourish and strengthen him for his prophetic task.

When the prophet Isaiah was called by God to preach and foretell the coming work of the Messiah, Isaiah dished up a plate of good news. When the Messiah came there would be a feast of rich foods and fine wine and a mountain top where he would destroy death (Isaiah 25).

From Genesis to Revelation, God often pairs his blessing and provision with his gifts of daily bread. So it's no surprise that when we come to the New Testament, God incarnate is also the Top Chef of Salvation, serving up his forgiveness, life, and salvation, alongside food and table.

Jesus is well known in the Gospels for eating and drinking with sinners, like Zaccheus the tax collector. In Divine Service, our Lord Jesus does the same for us. Today salvation has come to your house! Jesus feeds the crowds on more than one occasion, revealing that he is the Shepherd-Messiah who has come to feed his lost sheep in the abundance of his grace. Many of Jesus' parables result in or revolve around a feast.

All of these food and feast events are like appetizers, leading up to the main course in Matthew 26 on the night when Jesus is betrayed. When Jesus took the bread and said, "Take, eat; this is my body given for you. Take, drink; this is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday the Twenty Sixth Week of Pentecost

NOVEMBER 30, 2023

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

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 25:1-18, Matthew 26:1-19

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:35-36)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In one sentence, John tells us everything we need to know about Jesus....everything we need to know about our life in Christ as his church, as his children.

John's confession is what separates Christianity from all the world's religions. God is "beholdable." He is approachable, knowable, tangible. Men saw Jesus, heard him, touched him, ate with him. Jesus didn't live in "never-land" or "once upon a time" or "in a galaxy far, far away." He was born in the days of Caesar Augustus. Crucified Under Pontius Pilate.

John's confession is remarkable. When John stands in the wilderness and points to Jesus saying, "Behold, the Lamb!" he's pointing to God in human flesh. God with a human face. God who is truly bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh.

Behold, the Lamb of God. In the Scriptures, a Lamb means sacrifice. Sacrifice is God's way of covering our sin and guilt. Sacrifice is God's way of taking our death and giving us life in exchange. A substitute. A life for a life. The innocent for the guilty.

As John cries out, "Behold, the Lamb!" three OT events come to mind. After the fall, God clothed Adam and Eve's nakedness and shame. And God did this with animal skins. Seems ordinary enough, but where did those skins come from? That's right...sacrifice. A substitute. A life for a life. The innocent for the guilty.

Then there's Abraham and Isaac. "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." And as they hiked up the mountain, Isaac said to Abraham, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." And he did. The Lord provided.

Finally, we can't forget the Passover lamb. The Lamb would die. A sacrifice. Substitute. A life for a life. The innocent for the guilty. Guilt covered. Sins forgiven and atoned for. Blood covered the doorpost. And Israel ate the flesh of the Lamb who was slain for them.

All of Old Testament history – the tabernacle and temple – all of it is soaked in sacrificial blood. And it is all a blessed reminder of John's words that Jesus is the Lamb of God whose blood cleanses us from all sin. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Friday the Twenty Sixth Week of Pentecost

DECEMBER 1, 2023

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

“Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It's one thing to make a promise, that's easy. Plenty of people make promises. It's another thing to make a promise and keep it; that's the hard part. And yet that's exactly what God does over and over again in His Word. God makes promises and God keeps His promises.

Israel was hungry in the wilderness, God promised to feed them, and God sent manna and quail. God warned His people Israel that their sin of idolatry would lead to exile, and yet, He promised that they would return from exile in Babylon, and God kept his promise. God promised Adam and Eve that there would be a child born of the woman who would crush the devil, and He kept that promise by sending Jesus to live, die, and rise for us.

One of the ways God makes and keeps his promises is by making a covenant with his people. A covenant is God's promise to do what He says, to keep His word. When God establishes a covenant with His people He is the one who initiates it, sustains it, and fulfills it. Left on our own, we break promises all the time, just like Israel broke God's covenant of Sinai over and over again. This is why God makes his covenant with us and He keeps it.

This is the way it was for Noah and all creation when God made His covenant never again to flood the earth and put a bow in the sky. And for Abraham when God made His covenant with him that all nations on the earth would be blessed through him. And for David when God made a covenant with him that even though David would die, there would be a ruler who would come from his descendants who would reign forever.

Jesus comes as the promise maker and promise keeper all in one. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is proof that God keeps His promises. Jesus promised to die and rise on the third day, and He did for you. Jesus promises on the night when He was betrayed that the bread in Holy Communion is His body, and the cup of wine is the blood of His covenant, His promise poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. No wonder St. Paul says that all of God's promises are yes in Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Glory be to Jesus, Who in bitter pains. Poured for me His lifeblood From His sacred veins. Grace and life eternal in that blood I find; Blest be His compassion, Infinitely kind. (LSB 433:1-2)

Saturday the Twenty Sixth Week of Pentecost

DECEMBER 2, 2023

Today's Reading: Introit For Advent 1: Psalm 25:1-3; antiphon Zechariah 9:9b

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

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Tomorrow begins the season of Advent. A season of, preparation, repentance, and hope in Christ who came in the flesh, comes in His Word and Sacraments, and promises to come again. Tomorrow we hear how Jesus fulfills the words of his prophet Zechariah as He rides into Jerusalem amidst palms and praises. Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humbled and mounted on a donkey. Tomorrow we hear the Palm Sunday word ringing in the new church year as Advent begins the same Holy Week begins, with shouts of Hosanna!

Hosanna is the perfect word to sing as Advent begins. Hosanna means, "Lord, save us." Jesus came to do his Hosanna work, to seek and to save the lost.

This is what God has always done. He is the God of Hosanna. The God who saves. When the people of Israel cried out to God in the days of Moses for rescue from slavery in Egypt, God heard their cry of Hosanna, Lord, save us. And he did. God saved them from death by the blood of the Lamb. God saved them from Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea. God saved them by dwelling among them in the cloud and pillar of fire in the tabernacle.

In Zechariah's day, when the people of God, once again, cried out for rescue. They had spent seventy years in Babylon. They were returning from exile. The temple and walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. Would God save us as he promised? Would God make his advent as he said? Will God hear our Hosannas? Yes, foretold the prophet Zechariah. Behold, your king is coming to you.

Centuries later, the king Zechariah foretold finally arrived. God heard the Hosanna cries of his people. God made his Advent in the wood of the manger and the cross.. God became man to be present with and save his people, and to save you.

In Advent, Jesus brings his Hosanna to you. He came in the flesh to save you. He comes in His Word, water, body and blood to save you. He promises to come again on the Last Day and save you. In Advent we celebrate and remember Christ's first Advent in the flesh, confident that because He died and rose again, He will make His second advent in glory. And until that day, our King Jesus still saves you and promises to be with you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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.

