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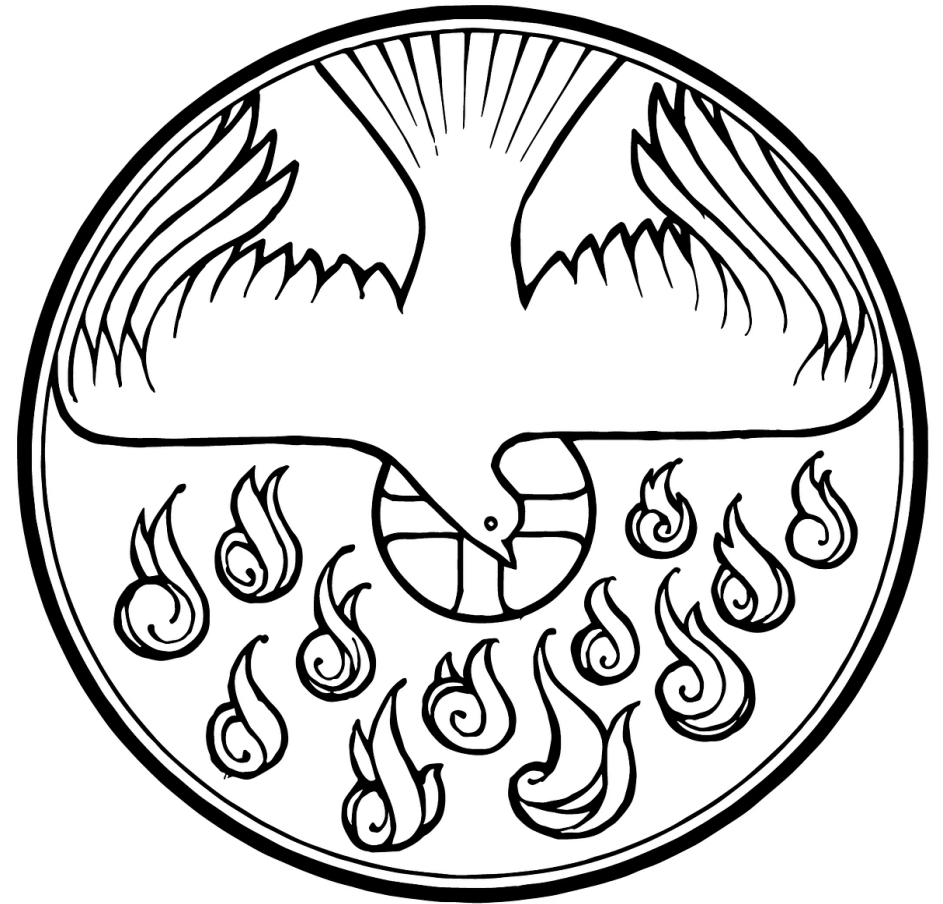
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REFLECTIONS

**Pentecost Sunday -
The Fifth Saturday After Pentecost
May 19 - June 29, 2024**



Pentecost Sunday - The Fifth Saturday After Pentecost

MAY 19 - JUNE 29

This season's Reflections were written by

*Rev. Jonathan Lackey, Pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in
Vine Grove, KY*

Rev. Harrison Goodman, Content Executive for Higher Things

*Vicar Justin Chester, Vicar at Shepherd of the City in
Fort Wayne, IN*

2024 Reflections Staff:

Karrie Jacoby, Reflections Editor

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St. Peter and St. Paul the Apostles

JUNE 29, 2024

Today's Reading: Matthew 16:13-19

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 4:1-24, Acts 9:23-43

*And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."
(Matthew 16:17)*

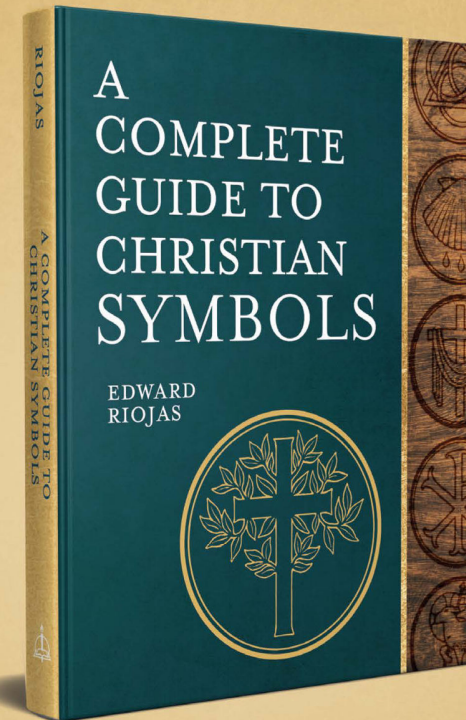
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Peter's confession, Paul's conversion and witness. Both serving as apostles proclaiming the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles according to their mandate from Jesus Himself. Simon, Son of Jonah, called Peter, did not have Jesus' true identity as the Christ, the Son of God, revealed to him by his earthly eyes. Rather, it was revealed to him by faith, and Peter understood that the Father sent Jesus, His Son, to do the work of being the Messiah. Peter, after his restoration following his denial, continued the painful, hard work of proclaiming Christ crucified for you even to the point of his own execution.

Paul, formerly called Saul, was a zealous enemy of the Gospel. Jesus had the last laugh, appearing to him on the road to Damascus. When Saul was blinded and following his conversion, he was baptized by Ananias. Paul, a servant of Christ, would travel and proclaim the Gospel as far as his legs would carry him. Paul, too, found himself imprisoned and facing execution for the word he proclaimed.

These two men, by their confession, witness, and boldness in preaching the Gospel to all, are to be remembered by us today. Not because either of them is the rock the church was built on, but rather that these men clung to the rock that is Christ Jesus. The firm foundation that the church clings to is built not on the works and merits of men but on the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, who purchased and redeemed us lost and condemned sinners, including Peter and Paul. These men confidently and shamelessly proclaimed God's Word to all people, proclaiming the joy of no longer living under the yoke of sin under the Law but free to love one another and live by the grace and life given to them in Christ Jesus.

This is not revealed by our own flesh and blood but by our heavenly Father who promised to redeem us by His Christ, His only Son Jesus, that we may be sons of God ourselves. Thanks be to God for His saints and martyrs of the faith and for preachers like Peter and Paul, who confessed boldly Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

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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.

The Fifth Friday After Pentecost

JUNE 28, 2024

Today’s Reading: Psalm 121:5-8; antiphon: Psalm 121:1-2

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 3:1-17, Acts 9:1-22

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore. (Psalm 121:8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When your enemies have surrounded you, where else could you look than to the hills? The psalmist presents this to open Psalm 121. Immediately acknowledging that although their enemies are upon them, although there is evil in the world, their help comes from the Lord (v. 2).

When all seems hopeless, when you feel like you just can’t win, or that failure has been the only consequence for you lately, call upon the Lord and look to Him for your help. God delivered His people from the hands of their enemies time and time again. Not only that, but God did not slumber or sleep on account of Israel’s unfaithfulness to Him. God promised to keep them from all evil and to redeem His people from sin and the evil one after the Fall.

The Old Testament has example after example of this, all pointing to the one the Lord the prophets foretold, Jesus. The Son of God, who made heaven and earth, who would keep you and all believers in the true faith from all evil. Jesus, by giving His life, keeps you in His crucified arms. Receiving the condemnation of the Law for sin and the ridicule of the world, He dies our death in our place. Jesus does not slumber or sleep until the work of redeeming you from sin is done.

It is in Jesus, the one who was promised, that the Lord is your help and your salvation. Jesus lays it all on the line for you. Where the Lord God, the maker of heaven and earth, sees you and proclaims you His beloved child. Just as comforting as these words were for the people of Israel as they went up to the temple, you sing and hear these words of the psalmist as already fulfilled and accomplished for you. God the Father has kept you as His own in His Son Jesus and continues through the work of His Holy Spirit, keeping your going out and coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

You have no need to look to the hills but look to Christ, and you will see your help and your salvation. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Then, gracious God, in years to come, We pray Your hand may guide us, And, onward through our journey home, Your mercy walk beside us Until at last our ransomed life Is safe from peril, toil, and strife When heav’n itself shall hide us. (LSB 899:5)

The Fifth Thursday After Pentecost

JUNE 27, 2024

Today's Reading: The Sacrament of Holy Baptism - 3

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 2:1-24, Acts 8:26-40

Certainly not just water, but the Word of God in and with the water does these things... (Dr. Luther, SC, Baptism 3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Dr. Luther lays it all out so plainly: "For without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism..." This is not just a washing or removal of dirt from the body (1 Pet. 3:21) but, as Luther says, "a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit."

Just as Christ instituted, the disciples, now apostles, should go out through all the world, baptizing and making disciples of all nations. He doesn't give specific step-by-step mandatory instructions or how one must perform a Baptism. He says you baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

This is so that, throughout your life here on earth, if the water and the Word of God were used at your Baptism, you could have the utmost confidence that the benefits of Baptism are yours. Do not let anyone trouble you otherwise with method if you were baptized with the means (the water and the Word) as Jesus Himself instituted them.

This is the Gospel for you, where you have had God's name put on you. God claims you in the waters of your Baptism as His child. What a beautiful blessing Baptism is. From it, we receive the Holy Spirit, faith, and the blessings and benefits of the Gospel in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Again, have no doubts of your salvation and place before God. You are His beloved child, marked in the waters of your Baptism where the water was administered and the word of God proclaimed, marking you as a member of the body of Christ, your crucified and risen Savior.

Baptism is not just plain water, but water and the Word for you, to give you what the words and promises of God declare. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

All who believe and are baptized Shall see the Lord's salvation; Baptized into the death of Christ, They are a new creation. Through Christ's redemption they shall stand Among the glorious, heav'nly band Of ev'ry tribe and nation. (LSB 601:1)

Pentecost Sunday

MAY 19, 2024

Today's Reading: John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 21:10-35, Luke 21:20-38

"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." (John 15:26-27)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Do I have to do this by myself? Do I have to do this all on my own? Am I strong enough? Have I done enough reading? Am I smart enough?

These are all questions that flew into my mind when I first learned the faith. Study church history, or read the Acts of the Apostles, and you will know that at some point, confession is required of Christians. Now, this is not always the huge affair, where you have a sword to your neck or lions licking their chops on the sand of the coliseum. It might even be completely innocent, and not malicious at all. It could be your friend who doesn't go to church at your lunch table asking, "Now what is it that you Christians believe about _____?" It could be your coworker at the water cooler asking why you even bother going to church every Sunday when you can read the Bible at home. Sooner or later, you must give an account. You must confess.

And this possibility makes some of us (me included) very nervous! Think back to the questions from the beginning. Do I have to do this all by myself? Am I able to do it? These questions were probably going through the Apostle's minds as Jesus was telling them what they must do. But there is a problem with those questions. They are all "I" questions. It's focusing on the wrong person. The Good News that Jesus gives the Apostles is the same Good News for you: You aren't doing it alone. You have a helper. And this helper gives you the words to say; He gives you the answers to the test.

And who is this helper? Is it some angel that only you can see holding up a sign with the words to say? No, but that might be pretty cool sometimes. But this helper is even better. This helper is the Holy Spirit. And that test, that moment of confession when words are required, won't be the first time that He has rolled onto the scene in your life.

Because this is the same Holy Spirit given at your Baptism. It's the same Holy Spirit that leads you to confess your sins every week. It's the same Holy Spirit that leads you to receive the Sacrament of the Altar in faith.

Are you able to do it on your own? No, but you don't have to. You have a helper. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Pentecost Monday

MAY 20, 2024

Today's Reading: John 3:16-21

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 22:1-20, Luke 22:1-23

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You may have heard the first of the two verses above described as “the Gospel in a nutshell.” It clearly states the “what” that God did to save the sinful fallen race of humanity, AKA you and me. But it doesn’t reveal the “why,” the reason that Jesus came and did what He did. And that second verse is critically important because it tells us not only what Jesus did, but what he came NOT to do. You see, Christianity is truly unique among world religions. In other religions, the “gods” don’t really like people. I’m not talking about in an “I don’t like people” way that you might joke about, where you like to stay on the couch and read a book rather than go out. I’m talking in more of a “we hate humanity” sense. In other religions, the gods either want to destroy humanity or enslave it, using us mortals to get food, or to play cruel games with us, or worse.

But dear Christians, that is not the kind of God we serve. The difference (aside from the obvious, that God is the one true God) is that God loves His creation. He looked upon it in the beginning and saw that His creation was good. And when humanity fell into sin, He loved it still. He promised right after to send a Messiah to save fallen creation from sin, death, and the lies of the devil. And here in John’s Gospel, we get the picture of this Messiah: Jesus. We see that God did not send Jesus just to preach condemnation, as Jonah wanted to with the Ninevites, but to save creation. Is there sin to be condemned? Absolutely there is. Sin is ugly and it is wrong. A huge part of the Christian life is repentance for the sin that we commit daily. But our lives as Christians do not end there. It does not end with us sitting in the wreckage of our sin with a sign around our necks that says “condemned.” Christ comes in, pays for the consequences of our sins by dying and rising again, and binds up your wounds with words through your pastor, straight from the mouth of Jesus himself. “I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” These words were spoken at your Baptism and are repeated in the Divine Service. We are truly loved by Jesus. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The Fifth Wednesday After Pentecost

JUNE 26, 2024

Today's Reading: Job 38:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 1:1-18, Acts 8:1-25

Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. (Job 38:3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Let’s face it: Job has been through a lot.

However, God has heard enough. God Himself comes on the scene, so all must be well. Job’s problems are over. Not quite.

While God allows the suffering and attacks to come upon Job and his family, God will assure Job that He is the one who will deliver Job from this. It’s easy for us to blame God when life doesn’t go our way. Job certainly has much to complain about, but God has come to remind Him, a simple man, not to peer into the knowledge of God.

Now God is hiding Himself? How can I trust Him?! Yet, it is exactly in the God who hides Himself, veils Himself, rather, so that we can stand before Him and cry out to Him as Job does.

Job encounters God, hidden, hearing His majesty and power displayed in all that He has done and proclaimed, but it’s this awe-inspired, humbling debate Job has with God that puts it all in perspective. Job cannot deliver himself from his afflictions.

God works through your suffering to turn you to where He is revealed to you. This is not God showing only His good side, but God fully revealed to you. See God and His love for you, despite the sin, despite the fallenness of the world, revealed to you in Job’s redeemer, your redeemer, Jesus.

When your suffering seems great, and the world around you feels like it is collapsing. When you feel like God is far from you or punishing you. Don’t look to the world or inside yourself. Go to the Word that comforted Job—the same God of His word who delivers and preserves you. No suffering, no crisis, no outcome is too much for your God to deliver you from. Just as God has fulfilled His promises to Job and His people of old, His promises are all for you.

Your God, the one who created all things, laid its boundaries, and established the limits of the universe, cares for you. His Son, Jesus, the crucified one, who has suffered in every respect of his humanity as we have, is interceding for you at His Father’s right hand. He has not forgotten you, and He will not forsake you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Fifth Tuesday After Pentecost

JUNE 25, 2024

Today's Reading: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 31:10-31, John 21:1-25

We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities... (2 Corinthians 6:3-4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The day of salvation is not far off, but now St. Paul tells us. Paul, as a servant of God, has told the Corinthians before that he is all things to all people for the sake of the Gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:22-23) This not only applies to Paul but to all Christians.

Now, Paul is not giving a license to sin, to be lazy, or to be slothful. What he is saying is that in whatever situation God has placed you in life and whoever God has placed in front of you, you are to love and serve them as we have been loved by God through His Son Jesus.

This is not on you. God will put people and these works at the proper time, and we pray that we would be faithful witnesses of the Gospel and love our neighbors. In all afflictions, hardships, and calamities that come our way, we may commend ourselves to God and endure these things to the end of our lives.

The Corinthians were a stubborn people, and our world is not so different. The Gospel is offensive to those who do not believe it. However, we do not shout at the world or run from its sinfulness and stubbornness. We also don't seek out trouble for ourselves, either. Rather, we live out our lives according to the roles God has given us. As students or workers. As parents or children. As husband and wife. We love one another and bear one another's burdens. We protect those who cannot protect themselves. Because, just as Paul says, the Christian is free to do these things. "Through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as imposters, and yet are true;" (v. 8)

Thanks be to God that He has delivered us from bondage to sin and united us to His Son and His life-giving resurrection, given not to serve the passions of our flesh but free to love one another and widen our hearts for the sake of the Gospel.

The sanctified life is the life of one justified before God in Christ Jesus. The daily life before your neighbor will follow. Remember your Baptism. The Holy Spirit is active and at work to keep you in the one true faith and move you where God desires you to be for your neighbor. This is the cruciform life of the Christian. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Pentecost Tuesday

MAY 21, 2024

Today's Reading: John 10:1-10

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 22:21-23:3, Luke 22:24-46

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." (John 10:1-4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The shepherd goes before the sheep. The sheep follow the shepherd. This has been the pattern of sheep for forever. The shepherd leads the sheep where they should go, and they follow him. What is the task of a shepherd? The shepherd, simply put, cares for the sheep. The sheep trust the shepherd. Sheep are, by nature, very dependent animals. Left to their own devices, they have a tendency to get hurt and die. Go on YouTube and just search "shepherd rescues sheep." One of my favorite of those results is the sheep stuck in a crack in the ground, only for the shepherd to yank it out, and it promptly gets stuck again. Sheep need care. Sheep need a shepherd. Sheep need the shepherd to find food for them, to rescue them from peril, and to drive off predators from the herd. They cannot do this on their own.

Scripture makes it very clear that we are sheep. Jesus isn't just giving a running commentary to the people on how shepherds work. The people already knew that. But rather, Jesus is telling them what God does for them. More specifically, what God incarnate (that's Jesus Himself, for those keeping score at home), does for them. The Good Shepherd literally dies for the sheep. This, dear saints, is good news for us too. Because we have not been turned loose in this world to wander. God's flock are not left to their own devices to get stuck in the ditches and cracks of sin and to die. We are not left to get preyed upon by Satan's wolves. Christ is the Good Shepherd, the best there is! He rescues His sheep and uses His undershepherds (pastors!) to bind up the wounds they sustain from life in this fallen world. Thanks be to God that we have a shepherd, the best there is, our savior Jesus. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Savior, like a shepherd lead us; Much we need Your tender care. In Your pleasant pastures feed us, For our use Your fold prepare. Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus, You have bought us; we are Yours. Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus, You have bought us; we are Yours. (LSB 711:1)

Pentecost Wednesday

MAY 22, 2024

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 23:4-28, Luke 22:47-71

Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD." (Ezekiel 37:11-14)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What an image we have been given in our reflection for today. Can you imagine? Being taken to a valley, a rip in the earth, that is full of nothing but bleached, white bones. The wind hits your face and it's hot and dry. This is a scene that should be absolutely foreign to humanity. Because this is a scene that could only occur after the Fall. People were not made to die. Man was made to live forever. It was only after the temptation and the fall into sin, when creation descended into bloodshed and murder, that such a scene was possible. And what a statement. What a scene to be confronted with as Ezekiel. So much death. So many bones you can't accurately count them.

God asks Ezekiel a question. "Son of man, can these bones live?" Ezekiel's answer is a stark confession. Ezekiel's answer is a reflection on the state of fallen humanity. Only God knows if these bones can live. Only God can make these bones live.

Only God can make our fallen selves live. Only God can open [our] graves and raise [us] from [our] graves. And we see, like the whole house of Israel, that we shall be raised from our graves. How is this accomplished? Paul writes in Romans, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6: 3-5)

Christ dies, so will we. But Christ rises, and so will we. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Nativity of St. John the Baptist

JUNE 24, 2024

Today's Reading: Luke 1:57-80

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 30:1-9, 18-33, John 20:19-31

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:76-77)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. John was special. I mean, being the cousin of the Messiah is pretty distinguishing. It was more than that, though. He was the one who his father Zechariah sang, "will go before the Lord to prepare His ways." (v. 76) We can certainly learn a lot from John the Baptist. Maybe not fashion, and I don't recommend switching to a wild honey and locust diet. However, he was the one who came crying out in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Luke 3:3)

We learn what it means to faithfully witness against sinful people like the religious leaders of John's day and even against political leaders like King Herod. What John did best was point people to the one who would come after him. John is the opener for Jesus. We could say this about all the prophets of old, really. They are preparing the people of God for the one who will save them from their sins. Who will rescue them from their enemies.

The disappointment for the people of John's day and in our own day is that this is not a guarantee of prosperity or political freedom in this life. John is sent to preach repentance to point people to their need for a savior. Jesus, our Savior, comes to rescue you from your enemies of sin, death, and the devil. While we sojourn here in our earthly lives, we will suffer much for the sake of the one John paved the way for.

We suffer knowing that we have a much greater reward than earthly treasures. We pray that God would give us all that we need to support this body and life and that, if the time comes, we are faithful witnesses of our Savior. We will struggle against sin and the enemies of this world, but we will not be overcome. You can be certain as John was that nothing in this life can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. John's birth foretells the Messiah's birth, His baptism, and the beginning of His earthly ministry. John, as the prophet Isaiah and Micah foretold, points you to Jesus, who would, from the start, be on His way to fulfilling God's plan of salvation to his people for the forgiveness of their sins. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

JUNE 23, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 4:35-41

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 27:1-24, Proverbs 28:1-29:27, John 20:1-18

And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus doesn't have a smile on His face, and the disciples don't seem like they have a handle on what just happened. After all, a storm of monumental proportions just occurred. They were goners, done for; the boat was filling with water. While the disciples are panicking, Jesus is...sleeping?

This storm is nothing to Jesus, so why should He be worried about this? His disciples could just call on Jesus to handle this. But they don't. In fact, the disciples fail, and their fear sinks their faith entirely. But He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (v. 38) Hold on a second; this is Jesus, the man who cleansed lepers, healed a paralytic, and restored a man's withered hand. He has clearly shown He is Lord over all creation.

Jesus does care, so He gets up and rebukes the wind and tells the sea, "Peace! Be still!" (v. 39) And to the disciples' astonishment, they realize there's more to this Jesus than just healing miracles and exorcisms.

This Jesus is the one who, despite their unbelief, saves them and ensures their safe passage. Hindsight is 20/20, and, looking back, the disciples had to have seen how foolish they were. We can feel quite comfortable in their shoes. The moment something goes wrong, a diagnosis from the doctor doesn't sit well, the car won't start, you bombed the test you prepared for all week, you said something you didn't mean to your sibling or parent. The whole world can seem like it's spinning out of control.

Let me tell you, friends. The Jesus who commands the winds and the sea has come into our human flesh for you. He's come to live under the Law and fulfill it perfectly for you. He's come to see your struggle against sin and take its yoke from you. He's come to die for you that you might not taste the sting of death. He rose for you and ascended for you, that you might know He is at your heavenly Father's right hand, ruling over all things for you. Jesus, the Lord over all creation, the manifestation of God's love and mercy, has come and will come again on the Last Day for you.

And until that day, you have your fellow brothers and sisters to bear the burdens of this life, as well as the Means of Grace that Christ has promised to be there for you as often as you run to receive them. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Pentecost Thursday

MAY 23, 2024

Today's Reading: The Lord's Prayer - Sixth Petition

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 24:1-25, Luke 23:1-25

And lead us not into temptation.

What does this mean? God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Let's be honest. You're no stranger to temptation. You go to school, you're tempted. Maybe you've seen other kids pass around something on their phones that, well, let's just say you hope your parents never see. Go on the internet lately? It's a temptation factory. Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, Facebook, all of them serve up hot and fresh temptation; ready rabbit holes for you to fall into. Maybe you've given up the internet. But your sinful flesh is able (and ready) to whip up some homegrown temptation. You can run, but you can't hide, it seems. Temptation is everywhere, and you've fallen into it. And you've fallen into it deep.

And so what to do? The old evil foe (that's Satan) wants you to isolate and try to tackle it yourself. He'll whisper to you that "you've got this, no need to drag anyone else into it. God doesn't need to know, you can do this." This, like anything else Satan says, is a lie. Satan loves for you to cut yourself off and descend into the "do it yourself" rabbit hole. It's great for your house, but not for your soul. Sinful man needs something better than to endlessly gaze inwards. That's how we wind up in despair, again and again.

Christ brings the medicine of immortality. This medicine is the antidote for temptation and the sin that is sure to follow. Do not turn in on yourself, dear Christian. Turn instead to the Great Physician. Temptation is everywhere, and make no mistake, you will fall into it. But Christ brings that forgiveness. This forgiveness is the medicine for temptation, and for sin. It's not just a theoretical forgiveness either. You can hear this forgiveness. Every Sunday, you hear the man who stands in the stead of Christ say "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Pentecost Friday

MAY 24, 2024

Today's Reading: Acts 2:1-21

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 27:12-23, Luke 23:26-56

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. (Acts 2:1-6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Can you understand what's going on in church? Maybe something is a little confusing to you, like how come we make the sign of the cross here or why do we say this prayer here (in this case, ask your pastor! He's always happy to answer questions.) But when I ask whether you can understand what's going on in church, I mean do the words going into your ears sound like words you can understand? Is the language the language you speak? Does your pastor preach so you can understand it? If so, thank the Holy Spirit.

You see, God is a fan of words. That's how He acts. He doesn't need anything else to accomplish His purposes. In Genesis, when God created the heavens and the earth, how does He do it? He doesn't do it like so many pagan gods do it: by defeating some enemy and making the world out of their corpse (yuck.) No, our God just speaks and it happens. Let there be light and.... There was light. Let the waters be separated.... And they were separated. This is not a power reserved for God the Father either. When Jesus rebukes demons, they must go. When Jesus commands Satan himself to depart from Him, Satan, as a creature, must bend to the will of his Creator. God's Word is living and active, and it is all God needs to work His will.

But that Word did not stop with the early church either. That Word is still living and active today. God's will is still done by means of the Word. By the preaching of His Word by pastors, God's people get to know Him better. By the proclaiming of the Words of Institution, Christ's Body and Blood are on the altar. By the words of Absolution, you are forgiven. God's Word is living and active, in a way you can understand. Thanks be to God. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Fourth Saturday After Pentecost

JUNE 22, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 107:29-32; antiphon: Psalm 107:28

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 25:1-22, Proverbs 26:1-28, John 19:23-42

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. (Psalm 107:28)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Truly, as the Psalmist says, "Oh give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever!" (Psalm 107:1) Although a man's faithfulness waxes and wanes, the love of the Lord certainly does endure forever. This introit points us to the scene of our Gospel reading for Sunday.

They cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. (v. 28) Jesus is awoken by His disciples and does exactly as the Psalmist says, "He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed." (v. 29) All leaving the disciples scratching their heads wondering, "And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'" (Mark 4:41)

Our Lord is over all the chaos and the calamity of our world. He calms the storms and quiets the seas of our suffering and hardships in this life. We may suffer and cry out, "My God, when will the storm end?" Your God is there for you. He will not leave you or forsake you to the storms of your daily life. Cry to the Lord in your trouble; call upon the one who commands all of creation in the heavens and the earth. The one who created all things has created all things new in Christ Jesus. God Himself came into our flesh and suffered as we have. He brings you through the pain and tough times to the other side of the sea, to your desired haven (v. 29) so that you would see the steadfast love of your God and give thanks and praise to the one who has delivered you.

No, Jesus is not calming seas and storms in front of you. However, He's still present for you, working the forgiveness of sins, comforting your doubts, and calming your despair. He's present for you where He's promised to be found in His word proclaimed by your pastor. He's present, giving you life and salvation in the words of the holy Absolution. For where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation.

Christ Jesus calms the storms of sin and death by uniting you to His death and resurrection in the waters of your Baptism. He's given for you to eat and to drink and strengthen you in your faith that you would weather the storm and know that the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Fourth Friday After Pentecost

JUNE 21, 2024

Today's Reading: John 19:1-22

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 24:1-22, John 19:1-22

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." (John 19:19)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The circumstances of this were cosmic and eternal. Jesus is at His coronation. It's not all the bells and whistles like you would see at Buckingham Palace. Jesus' coronation takes place as a criminal trial. Now Pilate does his best to get Jesus off. However, it's no use; the political situation and the religious leaders are stacked against Pilate.

Little did he know he would send the King of Kings to His throne to be unveiled for the world to see. Jesus is unlike any other king. Who, instead of a crown of jewels, wears a crown of thorns. The robe He wears is not meant to honor but to mock Him. What king would rule a people this way? What God would allow Himself to be treated this way by the ones He created? Your God does.

Jesus bears the scoffing, the mocking, and the pain of each hour of Good Friday. Then Pilate washes his hands of Jesus and delivers Him over to be crucified.

The time comes to deliver the King. Jesus, lead to the cross, like a lamb to the slaughter and uncomplaining forth He goes. Nailed to the cross lifted up high on a tree for all the world to see. Pilate's inscription, those provocative words that make the Jewish people turn up their noses, proclaim that Jesus, Mary's son from Nazareth, is crucified for being the King of the Jews. Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree (Gal. 3:13), yet by Jesus's crucifixion, His coronation is complete. Taking on your enemies of sin, death, and the devil; in death, He is victorious. The crucifixion of Jesus is not a gloomy wake but a glorious exaltation of the Lamb of God, who, by death, conquered death and rests in the tomb to rise again on Easter morning.

The circumstances were cosmic and eternal. Jesus goes to the cross for you so that you would cling to His cross as a source of light and life in the darkness of this sinful world. Risen and ascended at His Father's right hand until He will come again in glory to take us into the life of the world to come. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Pentecost Saturday

MAY 25, 2024

Today's Reading: Introit for Trinity Psalm 16:8-11; antiphon: Liturgical Text

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 32:1-6, 16-27; Luke 24:1-27

Blessèd be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to him because he has shown his mercy to us. I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Trinity is a hard doctrine to understand. It really hurts your head, doesn't it? How can God be "three in one" and "one in three?" Wouldn't it be easier to say that the Trinity is like an egg, or like the three states of water? While this might be tempting, it's easy to fall into error about the Trinity. Many of the common analogies for the Trinity fall into unhelpful ways of talking about it that lead people down the wrong path. But let's see what we do know about the Trinity.

First, there is God the Father. What do we know about God the Father? Well, the name God the Father gives us a pretty good jumping-off point. One, he is God. This is the God who created the Heavens and the Earth, and created you and me. Creation is definitely His department.

Secondly, there is God the Son. This is Jesus, and His work is super easy to spot. Jesus' work is redemptive. And this redemption happens on the cross. When Jesus took all the sins of the world on His shoulders (yes, even the ones you have never, ever told anyone about) He paid the debt with His blood. Jesus is still among us too, at altars around the world every single day in the Lord's Supper, the Shepherd dwelling with His sheep.

Third, there is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a behind-the-scenes actor. The work of the Holy Spirit, like the Fathers is creation and the Son's is redemption, is sanctification. That means making you holy. The Holy Spirit does this by giving you the faith you need to be saved. You received the Holy Spirit at your Baptism. The Spirit drives you to see that you need the Gifts of God, you need The Sacraments. He drives you to confess your sins and in faith receive the Absolution won by the Son. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Holy Trinity Sunday

MAY 26, 2024

Today's Reading: John 3:1-17

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 35:9-30, Acts 1:1-7:60, Luke 24:28-53

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. (John 3:14)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We can learn a lot by reading all of Holy Scripture. Now, you might be thinking, "Thanks, pastor, for the most obvious statement in the world," but what I say is true. When we read the Scriptures, it is great to read and link both the Old Testament and the New Testament. We get a nice link by Jesus here with the story of the bronze serpent.

If you are not familiar with the story of the bronze serpent, I'll recap it for you. The Israelites are wandering in the wilderness, and they are doing what the people of God do best, that is, unceasingly complain. They are leveling their typical charge against Moses (and thereby against God indirectly). They whine, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?" (Numbers 21:5) Not only do they accuse Moses (and again God) of trying to kill them, they then complain about what the LORD provides for them, calling that food "worthless." And for their ungratefulness and complaining, God sends them punishment in the form of "fiery serpents" to bite them. And bite them they do, and some die. While the others are sick, Moses intervenes, and God sends a way to be saved from their sins. He instructs Moses to build a bronze serpent and put it on a pole, and anyone who looks upon it would live.

Isn't it interesting that this is what Jesus uses to teach Nicodemus, the man who was so "wise?" Just like there was no venom in a serpent of bronze, there is no sin in Jesus, who would be lifted up, just like the serpent, so that all who looked on him in faith would live. The words given to Nicodemus are the same words we have today. On Good Friday, we saw the Son of Man lifted for the sins of the world so that all who looked upon Him in faith might live, not saved from a mere snake bite, but from the scourge of sin and death. In church, we physically receive the flesh and blood of Christ in our mouths to save us from eternal death. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever.

The Fourth Thursday After Pentecost

JUNE 20, 2024

Today's Reading: The Sacrament of Holy Baptism 2

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 22:22-23:12, John 18:15-40

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. (Dr. Luther, SC, Baptism 2, Question 1)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What benefits does Baptism give? Baptism now saves you... (1 Peter 3:21) and in it, you are united to Christ's life-giving death and resurrection. (Romans 6:3-4) If you ever need assurance of your salvation, that your sins are forgiven, that you are God's child, and the devil has no claim on you, then turn to the words from God Himself. It is in His words and promises that God reveals to you how much you mean to Him.

Baptism defines your life as a Christian. It is not a starting point but the daily reality of your Christian identity. In the waters of your Baptism, the death of your life to sin and your new life united to Christ are present. This paradox of being simultaneously sinner and saint begins. But the comfort of the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation with the words and promises of God joined to the water is the daily reminder as we get up each day and wrestle against our old Adam.

The words and promises of God in the last chapter of Mark are of great comfort, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16) This is not meant to cause you to speculate on your faith and worry about you and your place in your salvation. Rather, it is to drive you to Christ, your savior, the One who your forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are founded in. He has rescued you from death and the devil and gives to you His child eternal salvation as the words and promises of God declare.

Rejoice in your Baptism, and remember daily that you are a baptized child of God. There is no more peaceful, grander reality than this. 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)

The Fourth Wednesday After Pentecost

JUNE 19, 2024

Today's Reading: John 18:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 22:1-21, John 18:1-14

So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (John 18:1-14)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. They were afraid, yet he addressed them calmly. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" These men led by Judas to come and arrest Jesus of Nazareth came armed with torches, lanterns, and weapons. The disciples were afraid. Their beloved teacher, the One whom Peter confessed as the Christ, the Son of the living God, would soon be taken away from them, and they would be scattered, just as Jesus said they would.

So Peter goes down fighting, lopping off the ear of a servant, and then with all of his brother disciples, they high tail it off to where they can safely watch the Lamb of God be led to Golgotha to take away the sin of the world.

They were afraid. Yet the One who knew all that would happen to Him goes willingly. The sham of a trial, the mockery and beatings He would endure. The rejection and ridicule by His own people. Yet He endured it all for you. The cup that the Father had given Jesus would be consumed by Him. To Peter and Pilate's shock, it would not be kept away by force. Jesus would usher in the fullness of time and the kingdom of His Father. This is exactly what God had promised, yes, at the Garden of Eden after the Fall, but also from the beginning.

The Word that through all things were created would be put to death. Yet by His death, eternal life is secured for all who believe. Through the ugliness of the cross on Good Friday, the serpent's head is crushed, death is swallowed up forever, and you and I are met with the welcoming hands of our crucified and risen savior. Doubts and fears may discourage us in this life, but know that Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God, has come to put your fear at ease. He suffered for you, died for you, and rose for you so that you might take on all uncertainty in this life with the peace that He freely gives. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

He died that we might die to sin And live for righteousness; The earth is stained to make us clean And bring us into peace. For peace He came and met its cost; He gave Himself to save the lost; He loved us to the uttermost And paid for our release. (LSB 432, 2)

Holy Trinity Monday

MAY 27, 2024

Today's Reading: Isaiah 6:1-8

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 4:1-16, John 7:32-53

And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." (Isaiah 6:5-7)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Isaiah was a smart one. He knew what was going on around him. You see, for sinners, the presence of God is absolutely bad news. What happens to sinners in the presence of God? Death. Blown up. Toast. Zapped. Whatever fun phrase you use to describe it, the point is this: God is perfection, and perfection will not abide chaos and sin in its presence for very long. And so Isaiah is afraid. Isaiah is not only reflecting that the people he dwells with are unclean and say unclean things, but he is aware that he himself is a sinner. He thinks he is done for.

And so what happens? Is Isaiah zapped by God? Absolutely not. What Isaiah experiences is one of the most awesome absolutions anyone has ever experienced. He confesses his sins ("I am a man of unclean lips") and is then forgiven by God, which is the angel touching his lips with the coal. Notice that God does not say in response, "Yes, you are. Your lips are filthy" or "Yes, you are, and so you better get fixing it." God simply directs one of his ministers (in this case, an angel) to absolve Isaiah so he can continue his work on behalf of the LORD.

Believe it or not, you get the same thing. No, you don't quite have an angel touching your lips with a flaming coal, but you do still have one of the LORD's pastors ready and waiting to hear your confession and pronounce that your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for. In the Divine Service, you make the sign of the cross, remembering that you are a baptized child of God. Like Isaiah, you are given something on your lips: Jesus' Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper. This also delivers to you God's forgiveness. You are covered with Jesus and are now perfect before God; you get to continue in the work that God has placed before you as you love and care for your neighbors. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Holy Trinity Tuesday

MAY 28, 2024

Today's Reading: Acts 2:14a, 22-36

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 5:1-20, John 8:1-20

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (Acts 2:32-33)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. This sermon must have been absolutely terrifying to hear. Imagine sitting there, slowly having it dawn on you that the one that you delivered up to be killed was innocent. Not only was He innocent, but He was the very Son of God. And not only was He the very son of God who was innocent, but He is now risen from the dead. Uh oh. They are hearing Peter's sermon and they are absolutely crushed by the weight of the Law. They are at fault. They have sinned, gravely, in thought, since they hated Jesus. They have sinned in word, for they accused Him of many evil things of which He was innocent. They have sinned in deed, for they delivered Him up to be crucified. What is in store for them now?

When I was a kid, at my church growing up, we would do something a little different on good Friday. The pastor would have us read the account of the trial of Jesus. He would read the parts of Pilate, and the people would read the parts of the crowd. This was one of the hardest things to do. Because it really makes you think. You put yourself in the place of the crowd, and you connect something. Jesus was not crucified purely because a group of men two thousand years ago conspired against Him. Jesus was crucified because of my sins. Jesus had to die because I am a sinner. It sure hits different when you hear yourself call out, "We have no king but Caesar!" It crushes you to say, "Release for us Barabbas." You want to hang your head and mutter the words, "Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!" I sure knew what it was like to hear Peter's sermon.

But there is good news, beloved in the LORD. Jesus, risen from the dead, is not out for blood. He is not out with a vengeance to get even with those who caused His death. Jesus is eager to receive the broken in heart and the contrite in spirit. Jesus, out of love for God's creation, took on the sin of the entire world (yes, even your sin) and died. He did so willingly. He did so lovingly. Jesus invites those repentant sinners to His table to receive His Body and His Blood for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus invites you to receive the forgiveness of sins, physically, with your lips, and with your ears! In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The Fourth Tuesday After Pentecost

JUNE 18, 2024

Today's Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 20:5-25, Proverbs 21:1-31, John 17:1-26

For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. (2 Corinthians 5:4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We groan through the daily grind of our earthly lives. This tent that Paul speaks of, our bodies, gives us constant reminders of how fragile and temporal we are. The effects of sin on us and creation take its toll. If not like Paul through the bodily harm and threats from persecution, we see this long term through the aging and frailty of our own bodies.

We do not suffer this as those who are unprepared or found naked, as Paul says. We, the baptized, are united to Christ Himself and made new creations. As we grapple with the suffering and times of despair in our earthly lives, we remember that we are in this tent of our bodies for a time. That's not to say that we will leave our bodies for a spiritual reality, but that God Himself has prepared a body for you clothed in the glory and righteousness that is bestowed upon you in Christ Jesus.

Even though we may see pain, injury, and ultimately death, we do not despair as the world does. We have the daily reality of our Baptisms to fall back on. In your Baptism, you were united to Christ's death and resurrection. United to Jesus, you give thanks for the days here in our earthly tents, so to speak, but rejoice that all has been prepared, and when our mortal bodies meet death, they will be swallowed up with life.

On the Last Day, we and believers of every tribe and nation will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. As the Lamb ushers in the end of time and reigns from His throne, the old tent will pass away, and life in eternity with our God will be the reality. Come, Lord Jesus. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

All who believe and are baptized Shall see the Lord's salvation; Baptized into the death of Christ, They are a new creation. Through Christ's redemption they shall stand Among the glorious, heav'nly band Of ev'ry tribe and nation. (LSB 601, 1)

The Fourth Monday After Pentecost

JUNE 17, 2024

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 17:22-24

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 17:1-28, Proverbs 18:1-20:4, John 16:17-33

"And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it."
(Ezekiel 17:24)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The kingdom of Israel, by this time, has been hauled away to Assyria. The kingdom of Judah, which remains, is struggling to prop itself up. Corruption and idolatry are where God's chosen people have placed their trust. Yet the word of the Lord still comes to them through the prophet Ezekiel. These verses are taken from the ending of God's parable of the eagle and a vine. The line of David had continued just as God had promised, but those who had taken the scepter generation after generation looked after their own interests.

The Davidic line, by all measurements of success, had failed. Judah and her kings chased false gods rather than the God who preserved them. The God who stayed the Babylonian conquest for Hezekiah would no longer hold them back. The king and his princes, the people of Judah, will be hauled off to Babylon. This wicked generation will never see the land God gave to them again.

There is hope, though. While God certainly punishes sin and the wickedness of His people, He remembers those who hold on to His word and promises. We all struggle with sin and feel lost in a world that tosses us around with the winds of desire. When you feel lost, cling to the One who brings the high trees of the world, the Babylons and great empires, to take the low trees, the faithful remnant high. You have the assurance that the faithful in Judah had through Ezekiel, the one who proclaimed it to them. "I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it." (17:24)

God does conquer the sin, the anxiety, and the fear of this life for you, not through political wheeling and dealing, not through chasing idols to earn worldly security. God takes all the sin, fear, and anxiety of us who struggle against our sinful flesh- He takes it upon Himself in His Son Jesus. He doesn't take it and give you a list of how to make things right. Jesus takes your sin, covers it in His blood, and swallows it up in His death. Christ's life of His resurrection is your life. God has spoken by the prophets and done it through Jesus His Son. Fear not; cling to the words and promises of God as they are given to you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Holy Trinity Wednesday

MAY 29, 2024

Today's Reading: Ecclesiastes 6:1-7:10

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 6:1-7:10, John 8:21-38

All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind. (Ecclesiastes 6:7-9)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. How satisfied are you? Do you ever get that question, besides in emails about something you just bought? Do you ever think about how satisfied you are with life? Ecclesiastes can certainly paint a pretty grim picture of life. The first chapter of Ecclesiastes tells us that "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!" (Ecc. 1:2) The preacher (frequently cited as Solomon) goes on to say that all things in life are "striving after wind."

Have you ever felt that way? I know I sure have. Sometimes, you do something, and none of it seems to matter. Nothing you do seems to go anywhere; nobody appreciates it, and you might as well have done nothing. At least you could have slept in that day and felt a little less tired. It's all striving after the wind, right?

What Ecclesiastes paints for us is the unfortunate reality of life apart from God. Nothing matters apart from God. If the soul does not have God, it cannot be content. All someone can do is just toil and hope to fill their belly.

But the one who has God, the one who has their sins forgiven, can look forward. Rather than looking at life as being trapped on a rock hurtling through space, waiting your turn to die, you can view it as a blessed opportunity to serve and love your neighbor. And even death, that old foe, takes on a different tone. No longer is death simply the grisly end, but since the grave has lost its sting in Christ, the one who falls asleep in Jesus may look forward to the Resurrection of the Dead, to the new and perfect creation. Striving after the wind? No thanks; we are striving after something far better. We have been given something far better. We have been given the forgiveness of sins. We have been given The Sacraments. You've been covered with the water of Holy Baptism. You have been given peace with God. No need to strive at all. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Now through His Son doth shine The Father's grace divine. Death was reigning o'er us Through sin and vanity Till He opened for us A bright eternity. May we praise Him there! May we praise Him there! (LSB 386:3)

Holy Trinity Thursday

MAY 30, 2024

Today's Reading: The Lord's Prayer - Seventh Petition

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 7:11-29, John 8:39-59

But deliver us from evil.

What does this mean? We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (The 10th Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Evil is ugly. And evil is something we must contend with here on this fallen earth. Ever since the Fall into sin (Genesis 3), evil has been stalking humanity. And what is evil? Evil is not just a cartoonish phrase, as if evil is some man with an eyepatch and a twirly mustache plotting world domination. Evil is death. Evil is sin. Evil is what stalks us, tempting us. Evil is certainly manifested in the person and work of the devil and all his minions, but as sinners, we have evil within us, too. Concupiscence (now there is a fancy word) is the inborn desire that all humans have, that is, the inclination to evil. It is what St. Paul writes about when he says, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. (Romans 7:19)

Evil is something we must be rescued from, and fortunately, Jesus is in the business of rescuing. That is what we pray in this Petition of the Lord's Prayer. We pray that our Father would give us delivery and safety from all the things that a fallen world throws at us. But we Christians ultimately do not need to fear evil. Regardless of what this tired, evil world throws at us, our God delivers us from them all. Even the final plan of sin, that is death, is transformed in Jesus from everlasting torment to a blessed sleep awaiting the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Will evil come? Absolutely. But Christ will deliver you from it. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Though hordes of devils fill the land All threat'ning to devour us, We tremble not, unmoved we stand; They cannot overpow'r us. Let this world's tyrant rage; In battle we'll engage. His might is doomed to fail; God's judgment must prevail! One little word subdues him.

The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

JUNE 16, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 4:26-34

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 16:1-24, John 16:1-16

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground." (Mark 4:26)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus spoke to them in parables. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything. (4:34) Why did the crowd not get the full picture? What set the disciples apart? Let alone what does the kingdom of God have to do with scattering seeds or a tiny mustard seed?

Jesus spoke to them in parables. The crowd was missing the point because they weren't looking in the right place. Jesus was not telling them these parables because he wanted to make them think about the world or become the next great rabbi for them to follow. No, Jesus, even in the parables, cuts right to the image of the coming of the kingdom and the harvest at the end of the age.

The sower sows the seed of the Word of God. From that point on, the sower can care for that seed. How that word convicts or grabs a man's conscience is not his doing but God's. Jesus spoke to them in parables because it is through simple words that God is active.

Jesus spoke to them in parables so that those with even a mustard seed's size of faith would hear these words from the Word of God made flesh itself and believe. That those words would take root, that God would grow that seed, care for it, and guide that person through their daily life to the harvest.

God does this still today for those with great and little faith. God Himself is the worker and author of faith through the preaching of His Gospel and proclamation of forgiveness of sins. God desires not that man would stand far off trying to discern how to reach God, but that man would hear the words of life from Jesus, drown their sinful flesh, die in the life-giving waters of Baptism, and receive the life-giving meal of Jesus's Body and Blood under the simple means of bread and wine.

Jesus spoke to them in parables just as the Word itself was veiled in flesh so that those who believe would see God's salvation for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Third Saturday After Pentecost

JUNE 15, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 92:12-15; antiphon: Psalm 92:1

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 15:1-29, John 15:12-27

To declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. (Psalm 92:15)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We have this predicament where the people we feel most comfortable taking shelter with are the ones who can relate to our flaws, faults, and sins. We feel the least comfortable confessing to someone who doesn't struggle with the vices that are crushing us. It's easy to confess to people who sin like me. They're unrighteous like me. So they'll never judge me. They can't, or they'd be judging themselves. We take shelter with the sinners like us, but they can't save us. They can only commiserate.

It magnifies what the Psalmist sees in the LORD. A rock for himself, yet one who has no unrighteousness in Him. The LORD is shelter for sinners. Stability for sinners. But He is more. He calls the faithful "righteous." He knows them not according to their sins. He makes those His own, brings them to nothing on the cross for you, then rises free of them. You have no sins left. You are as righteous as He is now.

It changes the nature of confession. Confession is not built around commiserating together in a pit you can't escape. Your sins aren't too gross for God. They won't make Him turn away or pull back. Not even if it's the millionth time you've sinned. We confess to a God who isn't like us so that we might become like Him. We who are unrighteous bring our unrighteousness to God, and He calls us righteous. Forgiven. Over and over and over again. It actually happens in church. It's terrifying to confess your sins in front of your pastor. He's not there to commiserate and tell you he did the same thing. But he was sent by God to forgive you and remind you that you are not unrighteous. You are forgiven and loved. In this forgiveness, we flourish and grow, giving thanks to the LORD. His praises are worth singing because He is our rock, our shelter that has actually saved us. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

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

The Visitation

MAY 31, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 8:1-21

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 24:32-52, 61-67; Genesis 25:1-26:35

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:41-43)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Isn't it interesting that creation cannot help but acknowledge who Jesus is and what He has come to do for them? I think it's wild that the first person to acknowledge who Jesus was was a baby who wasn't born yet. The whole creation cries out for the birth of the King. The Visitation of St. Mary to St. Elizabeth is a prime example of this. John the Baptist knew this even before he was born. Isn't that amazing?

We can learn another thing from the story of the Visitation. We can learn that faith is entirely the work of God. John the Baptist had not even been born yet, and yet he knew who he was greeting when Mary came around with Jesus in her womb. Nobody could have taught him. This was not someone at the "age of reason." But this baby, still in the womb, was granted the Gift of faith by the Holy Spirit. In the same way, Elizabeth is given the same faith! Right as Mary rolls in, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (verse 41), exclaiming with "a loud cry, blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (verse 42). Elizabeth was given faith from the Holy Spirit to recognize Mary and Jesus in her. Thanks be to God for that same faith and that same Holy Spirit. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior For He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden. For behold, from this day all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things to me, and holy is His name; and His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. (Magnificat)

Holy Trinity Saturday

JUNE 01, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 69:14-16; antiphon: Psalm 69:9

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 27:1-29, Mark 8:22-38

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah (Psalm 62:5-8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Who can you trust? Perhaps the list is very long for you. Trust is not something one should give out very easily. This is especially true if you've been the victim of injury or wrong by other people. Maybe you've lived a life where you can trust people and give it out freely and easily, for better or for worse. Maybe someone who was supposed to be trustworthy hurt you. Maybe a parent. Maybe a boyfriend or girlfriend. Maybe a teacher. Maybe your friends at the lunch table aren't acting like friends should. Maybe someone told everyone something only they were supposed to know. The trust is broken, and it's harder to trust them in the future. Maybe you'll never trust them again. This is sin and its consequences. It poisons families, it destroys relationships, it shatters trust.

But who then can you trust? For sure, you should not adopt a hermit mindset, where you can trust nobody, and so you withdraw from society. That will make you go crazy (and you'll become depressed pretty quickly). But recognize that there is One who sits above the swampy bog of lies and sin. That One is God. The same God who saves you, the same God who knows you, the same God who called you by name; He is a rock and fortress, a mighty refuge from sin and death. When nobody else can be trusted, dear Christian, flee to God. Remember that He has called you in your Baptism and feeds you at His table. In Him can you trust. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Grant peace, we pray, in mercy, Lord; Peace in our time, O send us! For there is none on earth but You, None other to defend us. You only, Lord, can fight for us. Amen. (LSB 777:1)

The Third Friday After Pentecost

JUNE 14, 2024

Today's Reading: John 15:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 14:1-27, John 15:1-11

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. To abide means to make your home somewhere. Abide in Jesus. Ask what you wish, and it will be done for you. You will bear much fruit. You will be loved. You will have value. You will have Commandments to treasure that will guide you, and even when you fail to fulfill them, the love you abide in forgives you. Christianity isn't so complicated. Be near Jesus. When things are good, rejoice in Jesus. When things are bad, find shelter in Jesus. When you are guilty, be forgiven in Jesus.

It might be more comforting if Jesus didn't tell the disciples how He was going away, literally a paragraph above this one. Abide in me or you will wither and be thrown into the fire, but also, I'm leaving now, bye. Jesus is preparing the disciples for His passion. He is going away to die for them and for you. He is going away to make the vine worth abiding in, to pay for the forgiveness you receive in blood, and to earn your place in the resurrection, where you will be given all good things you ask for.

Jesus departs from the disciples. He dies. He rises. He ascends. And now we can share their frustration. The God-man doesn't tour towns in the Middle East where we can go visit when we need something.

It changes the word abide, not because we don't make our home in Jesus anymore, but because to abide with Jesus doesn't mean to visit Jerusalem. It means to go to church. The Holy Spirit is sent where His Word is preached, where His sacraments are administered. He doesn't insist you follow Him from town to town. He calls you to the font to be baptized into His death and resurrection. He calls you to abide in Him in your Baptism that gives you all that He promises. Love. Shelter. Comfort. Forgiveness. Worth.

Abiding in Jesus isn't limited to those who go on tour with Him or even those who copy His good deeds. He brings Himself to you in your church. Now you know where to find Him, and He is never far, so that when things are good, He is there to rejoice with. When things are bad, He is there to shelter you; when you are guilty, He is there to forgive. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Christ, holy Vine, Christ, living Tree, Be praised for this blest mystery: That Word and water thus revive And join us to Your Tree of Life. (LSB 595:5)

The Third Thursday After Pentecost

JUNE 13, 2024

Today's Reading: The Sacrament of Holy Baptism 1

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 13:1-25, John 14:18-31

What is Baptism? Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. In the beginning, God spoke, and stuff happened. Creation forms itself to His word. God said light. It was. And it was good. In Baptism, God joins that same powerful word to water. That's why Baptism is efficacious. There are major facets of Christianity today that view Baptism as "only a sign." They mean it doesn't do anything and still insist that it shouldn't do anything for babies. This is how we respond.

Does God's Word do something? Because without God's Word the water is plain water, but Baptism is not just plain water. It is the water included in God's command and combined with God's Word. God sticks His Word in the water, so the water becomes more. Enough to save you. Forgive you. Give you an identity not rooted in what you can do or become on your own. Not rooted in your promises to be better. Not rooted in how you feel about Jesus. Only rooted in what His Word promises for you. And His Word promises to unite you to Christ's death and resurrection. It promises to make you an heir of salvation, a member of God's family. Your Baptism matters because it contains God's Word, and that Word delivers everything it promises. Are you baptized? Then you have all that God has promised you.

It doesn't just matter to win arguments with Baptists. It matters when you struggle to believe God's Word, and doubt. It matters when you struggle to feel God's presence. It matters when you struggle to feel like you're of value. You are baptized. God gives that Gift to you, even you who struggle with doubt. God gives it to you who struggle daily with sin. To you who feel far from God. To you who feel worthless. And God gives it for you so that you would never have to measure those other things and can simply ask, am I baptized? And the answer is yes. You have all that God's Word promises you, today. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The gifts flow from the font Where He calls us His own; New life He gives that makes Us His and His alone. Here He forgives our sins With water and His Word; The triune God Himself Gives pow'r to call Him Lord. (LSB 602:2)

The Second Sunday After Pentecost

JUNE 02, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 2:23-28 (3:1-6)

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 10:1-20; John 10:1-21

And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Pharisees confront Jesus about the disciples eating on the Sabbath because they plucked the heads of grain themselves. That's too much work. Arguments about doing work on the Sabbath don't make sense to me. Not because of the New Covenant; but because the place I feel the least amount of rest is usually when I'm left with nothing to distract me from my own thoughts. Doing absolutely nothing on a day is a great way to make sure that I feel no rest at all.

Jesus won't bicker with them over how much work counts as rest. Instead, He points to starving David. To the man with the withered hand. Should they have rest, or should they be left alone with what's wrong and do nothing about it? Their answers don't matter. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The Sabbath is to give rest, not measure it. So Jesus feeds. Jesus heals. Jesus defends those confronted by the accusations of the law by standing and bearing the attacks Himself so that those found guilty might instead just be those who have been given rest.

It's good to do less work on the Sabbath, but only because it's very good to receive the true rest that is in Christ. Go to church. Find forgiveness for your sins in a Christ who defends you from the accusations of the Law. Find a meal that nourishes the soul, the Body and Blood of Him who died that you would live. And there, find healing, not just from the diseases of today, but from death forever. The Sabbath is rest because on it, we receive the Gospel. We hear it, we eat it, and in it, we live.

It will never satisfy those who want to live by the Law. They'll always want something else to measure, but on the Sabbath, Jesus only gives rest to the weary who can't be left alone. Leaving me alone with nothing to do but sit with my thoughts is no rest at all, so leave me with the words and promises of God. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Eternal God, Your Son Jesus Christ is our true Sabbath rest. Help us to keep each day holy by receiving His Word of comfort that we may find our rest in Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

The Second Monday After Pentecost

JUNE 03, 2024

Today's Reading: Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 11:1-10; John 10:22-42

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. (Deuteronomy 5:12)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The key word in the commandment is holy. God calls us to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy: clean, pure, holy as the LORD your God is holy. So it probably has to have more to do with what He does on it than what we do. You can't clean a table with a dirty rag. Unholy people who do unholy things can't sanctify a day. So on the Sabbath, God commands us to be near Him. Hear His word. Hold it sacred. Gladly learn it. Receive His sacraments. Rest in His promises that cleanse us from all that is unholy and make us clean ourselves.

It is not a day set apart for Christians to show God how much they praise Him. It is a day even commanded to be given to sojourners and servants. God does not dangle rest on the other side of work as a reward for the worthy. God wishes to be a God of the unclean, making them clean in Himself. He sends His Son to die on a cross to make you that way. Jesus died for you. In His blood, you are made clean. In your Baptism, you are washed and made holy.

That holiness is not just for us but for all of creation. Even the animals are called to the Sabbath. Jesus' love for you is such that He does not just redeem you, but all of creation for you. All creation groans with eager expectation of the life to come. But until then, we rest each week. We go to church, and even invite others who need rest, too. We hear His Word that gives even as it promises. We eat and drink His Body and Blood that forgive even as they tie us to the life where we will finally be free from all that makes us need such a blessed meal of rest. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Come unto Me, ye weary, And I will give you rest. O blessèd voice of Jesus, Which comes to hearts oppressed! It tells of benediction, Of pardon, grace, and peace, Of joy that hath no ending, Of love that cannot cease. (LSB 684:1)

The Third Wednesday After Pentecost

JUNE 12, 2024

Today's Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 10:1-23, Proverbs 11:1-12:28, John 14:1-17

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. (2 Corinthians 4:16)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Christians don't measure hurt differently than the world. Just time. Jesus is already raised from the dead and will bring us with Him into His presence. We are already tied to everlasting life. That doesn't make today hurt less, but it puts the word "today" in perspective. Which matters when things hurt. Pain shortens time into the moment. All of eternity shrinks into the toe I just stubbed. There is no path forward from the relationship imploding in the moment. Pain makes the now seem so much larger than it actually is. Christ's promise of resurrection stretches time back out.

Today is still allowed to hurt. Jesus never promises a today that hurts less. But He does promise to be a God who will not allow you to hurt alone. He'll hurt for you, too. He bore a cross that probably didn't just tickle. But He did it to save you from the todays that hurt too much. So we do not lose heart. Our outer self wastes away. Things break in this world, us included. But our inner self won't just renew after it's all too much and we die. You are renewed today in the midst of the pain. In the midst of the decay. In the midst of everything that is wrong, daily, you are renewed in your Baptism. New Man emerges and arises to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. You are tied to the victory that stretches time back out today. So we look to that. The things that are unseen in the font. Forgiveness, life, and salvation. You are baptized. Today's afflictions will disappear under the weight of the glory of the resurrection in the same way I can't remember what I had eight years ago for lunch. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, for our redemption You gave Your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross and by His glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of the enemy. Grant that all our sin may be drowned through daily repentance and that day by day we may arise to live before You in righteousness and purity forever; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

St. Barnabas the Apostle

JUNE 11, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 6:7-13

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 9:1-18, John 13:21-387

So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. (Mark 6:12)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. More is assumed about Barnabas than is actually known, which is probably ok. Jesus sends out the 12 to conquer disease and demons alike in His name and warns them that it won't get them rich, or even always a place to crash for the night, but don't bother preparing for it, which is somehow good, since it came from the God who sets the standard for goodness. Preach repentance and give all the good Gifts it brings. Preach Law and Gospel. Sinners need forgiveness. Jesus forgives sinners and gives them everlasting life in His death for them. It's missions in a way that is hard to codify with programs, checklists, and seminars. The results are hard to measure, but we'll see people who heard, believed, and even now live in Christ who conquered death when we join them in victory.

Still, mostly the Church is more concerned with what it doesn't have than what it does. Not enough money. Not enough programs. Not enough kids. All worldly advice is that it takes money to make money, and it takes an active youth group to attract more youth. To the one who has, more will be given and all that. But the 12 were sent without. Barnabas preached likely to martyrdom. And you know his name even though there were many who'd see him killed just to stop him from talking. It's refreshing to consider missions as Jesus sends the 12. The Church was never called to growth, just faithfulness. God handles the growth when and where He pleases. He doesn't tell the 12 how to grow the Church, fundraise, or do any of the things we're sure are needed. He tells them to go preach and watch as creation mends itself according to their faithful words.

You'll go out into a world and feel ill-equipped to confront it in your faith. That's fine, too. The Church was not founded on what we brought to the table. It stands on Christ, who forgives your sins and the sins of all believers. It stands on His Word, which you learn and hold dear. The 12 preached. Barnabas was used by God as God saw fit, even if nobody really knows much about it. You don't need to build something that will be remembered in history to support a faith you love. Pray for faithfulness, hear God's Word, and be unafraid, because the hope you cling to endures all things. What's miraculous is that it can even help others, too. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Second Tuesday After Pentecost

JUNE 04, 2024

Today's Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 12:1-14; John 11:1-16

Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. (2 Corinthians 4:10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You only have to escape the things that can beat you. Nobody runs from puppies. Unless they're allergic, I guess. It's hard to find something in this world that someone's not afraid of. I guess that's the point. There's lots of affliction. Lots of things that leave you at a loss for words. Persecution on a large and small scale. Too many struck down. Even puppies are scary to someone. Let alone cancer, calamity, and the plain old-fashioned evil we do to each other, with or without self-righteous excuses.

Paul tells us ours is a religion of endurance, not escape. We will be afflicted in every way, but not crushed. Perplexed but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down but not destroyed. Christianity will not help you escape those things. Anyone telling you otherwise is lying. But you only have to escape the things that can beat you. None of those can. You carry the death of Jesus in your body, so the life of Jesus is also being manifested in your body. You are baptized. You are united to Christ in His death, and so you are united to Him in His resurrection. Now. You're already safe from all you want to run from. Escape sounds better because of the lack of suffering. It isn't, though, because as long as the world's this sinful, and quite frankly, as long as you're this sinful too, you'll always be running in a religion of escape. Always afraid. But those things can't beat us anymore. We already wear the victory. So we don't run. We endure. Not by willing ourselves forward and talking about courage or effort. We endure by gathering everything that overwhelms us and taking it to our church where our pastor confronts it with the same promise Paul gives Corinth. We hear the Gospel. We receive the Sacraments. And there, we are united to what cannot but endure, and it drags us along as well. Death might be at work in us, but life is at work in Him. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Despised and scorned, they sojourned here; But now, how glorious they appear! Those martyrs stand, A priestly band, God's throne forever near. On earth they wept through bitter years; Now God has wiped away their tears, Transformed their strife To heav'nly life, And freed them from their fears. They now enjoy the Sabbath rest, The heav'nly banquet of the blest; The Lamb, their Lord, At festive board Himself is host and guest. (LSB 676:2)

The Second Wednesday After Pentecost

JUNE 05, 2024

Today's Reading: John 11:17-37

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 1:8-33; John 11:17-37

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. (John 11:21)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. I think John made sure to get this in the story, not to leave us with a bad impression of Martha marked on one of the hardest days of her life, but I think it's to give us the words to speak on our own. It's bitterness and genuine anger rolled up in a confession of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. It isn't just an accusation. It's a recognition. It doesn't ignore the problem because of Jesus. But it doesn't dismiss it either.

Something wrong happened. God could have stopped it. There will be a resurrection someday. But today, hope feels far off. Because we tend to root hope in the answer to prayers, not the God answering them. So, hope is a Lazarus who isn't dead. But that leaves hope very far away when he's four days in the tomb and rotting. Hope is an alternate reality or someday too far away. Out of reach.

Every time the followers of Jesus put their hope in something He can control but not in Him, it falls apart. Because hope is not found in God answering prayers. Hope is found in God. So Jesus answers, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."

It's not a call to see what God can do. It's a call to see who He is. Even Martha sees what can be done. It almost makes it more frustrating. "But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." But that Last Day isn't here yet.

It's a call to see where God is. Standing at the entrance to the tomb, weeping over the loss. Not far. And so where God is, there is hope. And Jesus draws near to dead Lazarus. Hope is not measured in anything other than the presence of Jesus. The story stops here, but you know how it ends. Today, it stops with Jesus being near. That's a good place to stop. Because if Jesus is near, there is hope. Jesus doesn't give resurrection. He is resurrection. If He is near, have hope.

Which may be why He gives us His Body and Blood in church. So that hope can be measured in more than "Did I get what I wanted?" or "Did I die and go to heaven and on the Last Day rise?" It's measured in "Is Jesus here for me?" and the answer is Yes. Amen. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Then is our comfort this alone That we may meet before Your throne; To You, O faithful God, we cry For rescue in our misery (LSB 615:2)

The Third Monday After Pentecost

JUNE 10, 2024

Today's Reading: Genesis 3:8-15

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 8:22-36, John 13:1-20

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Whenever the All-knowing asks a question, it's not because He's curious about the answer. It's not even because He needs us to figure it out. It's usually because we think we already did, but have confused Law and Gospel, and that needs to be sorted out.

The devil will have us confuse the two. The deceiver will have us look to the Gospel when what we need is the Law. Except a gospel with no law has nothing to forgive, so it just papers over what's wrong with the notion that things are fine. Fig leaves and bushes try to cover death. The idea that God loves everyone is easier to bear if He doesn't have to love sinners. So the devil points us away from the Law that convicts us of sin and tries to leave us content hiding from each other and God in the bushes.

And the accuser will have us look to the Law when what we really need is the Gospel. It will leave us slinging blame. Accusing each other of fault to make ourselves seem innocent, or at least less guilty. The woman, whom YOU gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate. This is her fault. Eve learns from her husband. Actually, it's Satan's fault I ate. He deceived me.

So when the All-knowing asks a question, it's often to correct the mix-up. He confronts Adam and Eve with a question of the Law that leaves them recognizing something terrible has happened. And when they need the Gospel but have confused it with heaping blame at others by the Law, He corrects that too. Convicted of their sin and desperate for hope, they hear a promise. God doesn't even wait for their apologies before promising to send the Son, born of the seed of woman, to crush the head of the serpent and redeem them forever.

The answer to the questions God asks is sort of like Sunday school. The answer is usually Jesus. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

What mercy God showed to our race, A plan of rescue by His grace: In sending One from woman's seed, The One to fill our greatest need - For on a tree uplifted high His only Son for sin would die, Would drink the cup of scorn and dread To crush the ancient serpent's head! (LSB 561:3)

The Third Sunday After Pentecost

JUNE 09, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 3:20-35

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 8:1-21, John 12:36b-50

...but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin. (Mark 3:29)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Only the wrong people worry about committing the unforgivable sin. The old saying goes, if you're worried about committing this sin, you haven't, because the sin against the Holy Spirit is unbelief, and if you're worried about it, it's because you care, which is a sign there's belief.

The problem isn't just that it gives people prone to worry the new worry that maybe they don't worry enough about their faith. It also leaves them to find comfort in the worry Jesus tells them not to have. Don't worry; your worry is a sign that nothing is wrong. But if you don't worry, is something wrong? Maybe we're overcomplicating things by trying to make them simple.

So Jesus attaches this worrisome verse to a parable about a strong man. The comfort doesn't come from how you feel about Him. The comfort comes from whether or not he's been bound. Jesus enters Satan's house, binds him, and then plunders the house. You were Satan's. But Christ has bound his accusing tongue. He has forgiven your sins. He has died so that you would not be owned by the devil anymore. You belong to Christ now. If you wonder whether or not you have committed the unforgivable sin, don't ask how worried you are about committing the unforgivable sin. Ask yourself, has Jesus overcome the devil? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? If Christ has conquered, and that's good, you have not committed the unforgivable sin. Breathe. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and eternal God, Your Son Jesus triumphed over the prince of demons and freed us from bondage to sin. Help us to stand firm against every assault of Satan, and enable us always to do Your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

The Second Thursday After Pentecost

JUNE 06, 2024

Today's Reading: The Lord's Prayer - The Conclusion

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 3:5-24; John 11:38-57

For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. What does this mean? This means that I should be certain that these petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven, and are heard by Him; for He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us. Amen, amen means yes, yes, it shall be so.*

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We've memorized what amen means. Yes, yes, it shall be so. We rarely contemplate how much it says. We know amen doesn't mean prayer is over now. But we rarely focus on the fact that amen doesn't mean "maybe this won't happen, even though deep down I don't know how to pray without that reservation." When we say amen, we're not just certain Jesus is our guest and all His gifts to us are blessed; we say we're certain our aunt's incurable cancer will be cured by God's merciful hand. We say we're certain there will be peace going forward, even though there's only been war going back as far as the Fall. We say the impossible isn't just possible. We say it's outright going to happen. Yes, yes, it shall be so. And that's insane.

Then again, it's insane that someone would die and then rise from death to live again. It's insane that He would face this suffering for the ones who sin against Him to save them from themselves. The cross is insane. The love that drives God to bear it willingly to save you is insane. And the hope that comes from it defies all reason, too. Christ is risen. All who trust in Him will rise. In Christ, cancer has claimed 0 lives. They'll just rise again. In the resurrection, we expect with all certainty there will be no more war or sin. The impossible isn't just possible. It's outright going to happen. So when we say amen, we tie it to the love that bore the cross and conquered death. It isn't trust in an event, but in the one who will work it. So it isn't a trust in the timing or method you're thinking of, but the one who works all things for good. Even if it isn't until after the resurrection, you'll get that Godly prayer. And if that seems too far, the same love will carry you to that day when you can't get there alone. So let your amen be insane. Let it defy your reason and strength. Let it defy your fear. It doesn't rest on anything other than God's love, which is greater and more certain than all those things anyway. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

No blinding sign we ask, No wonder from above. Lord, help us place our trust alone In Your unswerving love (LSB 424:3).

The Second Friday After Pentecost

JUNE 07, 2024

Today's Reading: John 12:1-19

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 4:1-27, John 12:1-19

For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.
(John 12:8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. This side of glory, the poor, you will always have with you. And for some reason, it's used as an excuse. Ironically enough, it seems to apply even though we don't have Jesus with us anymore the way He is in the text. But hey, why work on what you can't fix? Feigned helplessness is the best. Why work out if you'll always be overweight? Why struggle against sin if you'll fall back into it? Why donate to a charity that feeds the homeless if it won't feed all of them? Helplessness feels great to sinners because it's a chance to free ourselves from the burden of viewing love for neighbor as a sacrifice instead of just a wish for better. It will just be this way. So, let's go back to what feels good enough to distract us from it. Double points if it feels virtuous, like calls to action on social media or pointing out other people's problems.

Jesus stops Judas from taking the ointment from Mary and selling it. He says to save it for the day of His burial. But it didn't fix that either. He still rode into Jerusalem and died. Which was a good thing, remember? Maybe the ointment wasn't given to fix anything at all, only to point to what actually could. Christ's death for Mary and her devotion, for Judas and his sin, and even for the poor, who would still be poor after He breathed His last. The death and resurrection of Jesus is for you in your helplessness, not so you can shove aside the burden of addressing what's wrong in front of you, but for you to know that you don't hang hope on the other side of fixing it. Even the least of these can receive it.

It will be fixed in the resurrection, but until then, you still have the same Christ who saves you from yourself and from the world. You still have a life death cannot destroy, and treasure thieves cannot break in and steal. You have His love, manifest in Word and Sacrament, and you have the love of your neighbor too. And it frees us to love each other without the burden of solving every problem. Wishes for better sacrifice nothing and won't be satisfied until things are fixed, even though that won't happen on this side of glory. They leave nothing but angst. Love is a sacrifice, even if your sacrifice won't make things perfect. Christ already did that. Relax. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Second Saturday After Pentecost

JUNE 08, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 28:7-9; antiphon: Psalm 28:6

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 5:1-23; Proverbs 6:1-7:27; John 12:20-36a

The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped. (Psalm 28:7a)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The psalm starts with God's identity before it ever addresses what needs doing. It isn't just propriety that beckons Christians to pray "our Father, who art in heaven" before petitioning Him. The answers to the prayer are found in the identity of God, not the world around us.

I'm worried about today. But my comfort comes from who God is, not what's wrong or right with today. The LORD is my strength and my shield. That part doesn't change with today. It answers today. So I am helped because He is my shield. When my heart trusts in Him, it exults. The only thing that can change isn't His identity, just the focus of my heart. So I'm given this psalm to pray to remind me of who God is so that I can exult with David.

I'm worried about tomorrow. But my comfort comes from who God is then too, what might or might not come. The LORD is our Shepherd. He will carry us forever. We will be saved. It's not up for debate unless He stops being our Shepherd. And He won't. He bore the cross. That part is done. He rose from the grave, and in your Baptism, you are already united in the victory. The Shepherd can't stop being the Shepherd, so you can't stop being saved.

We start with God's identity before we list what's wrong. If we did the opposite, I guess we could convince ourselves we can find salvation without God as long as we're good problem solvers, but that won't last forever. There are problems we can't solve, and as long as they stay messed up, salvation looks out of reach. So, instead, we start with God, who has already died and risen, who is already victorious, and whose identity doesn't change. There's more comfort in a good God that won't change than wishing everything we don't like would. God's identity is the comfort that never yields, even if the things around us won't stop shifting. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, be our light when worldly darkness veils us; Lord, be our shield when earthly armor fails us; And in the day when hell itself assails us, Grant us Your peace, Lord (LSB 659:3)