



REFLECTIONS

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost -
The Twenty-Second Saturday after Pentecost

September 22, 2024 - October 26, 2024



This season's Reflections were written by

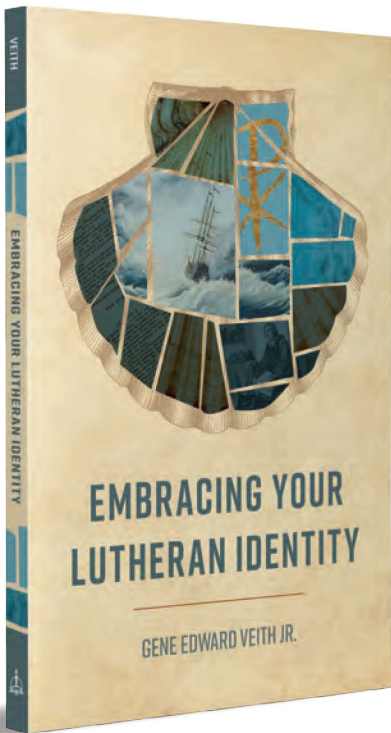
*Reverend Grant Knepper, Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in
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You're many things—a son or a daughter, a student, a musician, or a number of other identities. One identity in particular—one you received at the baptismal font—outranks the others. Gene Edward Veith Jr., author of *The Spirituality of the Cross*, tells the stories of the Lutherans in history with whom you share this identity. Explore *Embracing Your Lutheran Identity* by yourself or with a group.



“Few Lutherans today know the stories of their long history—the persecutions, the martyrdoms, the villains, the battles, the heroes—or the lore, such as why we worship as we do, why the Saxon immigrants came to America, and why confessional Lutheranism stands out in contemporary Christianity.”

—Author Gene Edward Veith Jr.



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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 Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 22

Today's Reading: Mark 9:30-37

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 7:1-4; 8:1-18; Ezra 1:1-10:19; 1 Timothy 5:1-16

[Jesus said,] "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." (Mark 9:35)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The disciples don't look very good in our reading. They don't ask the questions they should be asking, and they don't answer the questions that they are asked. Instead, they spend their time arguing about their status. All in all, the disciples are behaving in a childish way. It may even be easy to criticize them for their behavior. How could they have been distracted from the important teaching that was going on right in front of them? Think about this, though: if the events of the reading had happened in our time, the disciples would have been concerned with clicks, likes, and the number of followers they had on social media. In other words, the disciples' behavior is not all that different from those of us who are overly attached to our smartphones and our social media presence.

The disciples may have been distracted by thoughts about their status because they knew they were eventually headed for Jerusalem. They may have thought that Jesus was going to finally reveal Himself to be the Messiah. Sure, the language about being handed over, killed, and rising was confusing, but the Messiah was going to need people in high places when He began his rule. The disciples were the obvious choice to take those places. They may have thought that they were perfectly positioned to be influencers in the new world order. They had to protect their brands. This is why Jesus speaks of them being last and servants of all.

Put simply, Christianity is not lived out from the top down. It is not like being an influencer on social media, where people look for guidance on what to wear, what to eat, and what to think. Christianity is lived out in the world. It is lived out among the flesh and blood people that God has placed into your life. It is lived out in service to the neighbor. This is because your status as a Christian was founded on the greatest act of service ever. Your status as a Christian was founded on the crucifixion of Jesus. He served you by going to death in your place. He gave up His status to give you an identity as a child of God. He continues to serve you with His Gifts that make it possible for you to serve others. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, grant us humility and childlike faith that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Eighteenth Monday after Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 23

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 11:18-20

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

"But, O LORD of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause." (Jeremiah 11:20)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We are called to love our enemies, yet here is Jeremiah asking to see God's vengeance upon those who are persecuting him. It is a desire that has been repeated by many of God's people over the centuries. It is a desire that seems to come naturally to most people. Who doesn't want to see their enemies get what is coming to them? This would seem to set up a disconnect between our reading and our prayer. How can we love and do good to those that we want to see God take vengeance upon? We pray for people; can we also pray against people? The answer to this comes from what we confess about the nature of God Himself. God has been revealed to us primarily as a God of mercy, but not as a God of mercy only. Psalm 94 even refers to Him as, "O Lord, God of vengeance." God can and does take vengeance, but that is part of what is called His alien work. This means that God, who judges righteously and tests the heart and mind, is also the God who forgives sins and has made you one of His people.

Salvation is God's work alone, and vengeance is also His work alone. This is why Christians can pray against their enemies, as Jeremiah does in our reading. In doing so, we confess that vengeance properly belongs to God and not to us. We don't need to act in God's place to punish our enemies because those actions are His and His alone to take.

At the same time, we also know that our present enemies need not be our eternal enemies. The cross that covers our sins also covers theirs. The Jesus that is for you is also the Jesus that is for them. The waters of Baptism that washed you can also wash them; the supper that is yours can also feed them. At any point, our enemies could hear the gospel, repent, and join us in the one true faith to life everlasting. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty, everlasting God, You commanded us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, and to pray for those who persecute us. Therefore, we earnestly implore You that by Your gracious working, our enemies may be led to true repentance, may have the same love toward us as we have toward them, and may be of one accord and of one mind and heart with us and with Your whole Church; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Eighteenth Tuesday after Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 24

Today's Reading: James 3:13-4:10

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 9:22-38; Nehemiah 10:1-13:31; 1 Timothy 6:3-21

"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" (James 4:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Sin is not so much an act as it is a condition, and that condition manifests itself in many ways. What James is describing in our reading is sin manifesting itself in quarrels and fights among Christians. What is being described is not the fighting over doctrine or the debate that takes place between Christians in the arena of theology. Instead, it is Christians fighting amongst themselves over the things of this world. This is Christians being overly concerned with status, possessions, and wealth. In other words, this is Christians acting as if they are not even Christians. This is Christians acting like some of the characters in Mean Girls. James goes so far as to refer to them as adulterous and murderers. This is the reality of our fallen nature. Our passions are truly at war. They are at war within us, and they are at war among us. This has led some to observe that the biggest argument against Christianity is Christians themselves.

Of course, this is not a complete description of what it means to be a Christian. James also writes of the wisdom that comes from above. This wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, and full of mercy and good fruits. This wisdom comes from outside of us; it changes us. The wisdom from above changes the way that we live here in the below. This is the wisdom that allows us to humble ourselves and be exalted.

The truth is that both of these descriptions of Christians are true at the same time. We are simultaneously both sinner and saint. We have the wisdom that comes from above, and our passions are at war. Our sinful nature remains, but God's wisdom keeps coming from above. It comes in baptismal remembrance, it comes in the Absolution, it comes in the preached word, and it comes in the Body and Blood of Jesus in Communion. In fact, our passions from below are in a losing battle. God gives more grace. That which comes from above is always stronger than that which is below. You are now sinner and saint, but someday, the sinner will be overwhelmed by the wisdom that comes from above, the war will be over, and only the saint will remain. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The world seeks after wealth And all that mammon offers Yet never is content Though gold should fill its coffers. I have a higher good, Content with it I'll be: My Jesus is my wealth. What is the world to me? (LSB 730:4)

The Eighteenth Wednesday after Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 25

Today's Reading: Matthew 3:1-17

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

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.'" (Matthew 3:13-15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Baptism of Jesus is one of those events that most Christians know about but have not really spent a lot of time thinking about. In fact, many Holy Land tours offer a Baptism in the river Jordan so that you can do just what Jesus did. It's as if they believe that the water of that river is somehow more holy than all other water on earth. The Baptism of our Lord did not just occur so that tourists would have something to do when visiting the Holy Land.

John tries to stop Jesus from being baptized because what he was doing was meant for sinners. Jesus had no need to be baptized. Jesus should have been standing there, telling the people that if they were more like Him, then they would be dry. Jesus, in submitting to a Baptism meant for sinners, has taken the first steps toward bearing the sins of the whole world. He begins his public ministry standing in the place of sinners acting as a sinner. He will end his public ministry on the cross, submitting to a death meant for sinners. His journey to the cross really begins here at the river Jordan.

In the Baptism of Jesus, water now becomes the Gift of God for salvation. The Baptism of Jesus is the beginning of the death of death itself. In your Baptism, you entered into eternal life. In your Baptism, you got the whole death thing over with. It was not just the water from the river Jordan that is holy; because of Jesus, all water is holy, including the waters in which you were baptized. For Luther, Baptism was where he turned when things were at their darkest. In the face of sin, death, and even Hell itself, Luther's response was always, "But I am baptized." His cry can be your cry. In your Baptism, God made promises to you that nobody can take away. In fact, in your Baptism, you were recreated, and you became a child of God with whom he is pleased. Amen. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

This the baptism that our Savior Greatly longed to undergo; This crimson cleansing needed So the world God's love might know; This the mission of Messiah As He stepped from Jordan's stream, He the chosen and anointed Son of God, sent to redeem. (LSB 404:3)

The Eighteenth Thursday after Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 26

Today's Reading: Catechism - Table of duties: of citizens

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

"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good." (1 Peter 2:13-14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. What kind of relationship should a Christian have with civil authority? Most of the answers given to this question tend to fall into the categories of fight or flight. In other words, Christians are told to withdraw from the civil realm and not take part in the public life of their community, or they are told to fight for their rights against an encroaching civil authority. This turns out to be a very American approach, and history is filled with examples of both approaches. There has to be more to the Christian life than the false choice between monasticism or activism. We are not called to live hidden behind walls, nor are we called to live on the march with protest signs in our hands and chants on our lips.

In fact, you don't find a lot of either of these extremes in the Scriptures. Instead, we find the same advice given over and over again in the passages that make up this section of the Table of Duties about submitting to civil authority and acting as good citizens. This advice does not change when the civil authority is hostile. Peter directly addresses Christians who lived under a government that believed they were bad citizens. Despite this, he tells them to be subject to the human institutions. This is similar to what Jeremiah tells the exiles in Babylon, "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:7)

Ultimately, this is because no matter what kind of civil authority we live under, we are in exile from our true home. Each and every Christian, no matter where they live in this world, are actually citizens of the Jerusalem come down from heaven. Whether you live under the authority of an emperor, a governor, or a president, you are actually subjects of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. You don't have to hide from civil authority, nor do you have to fight civil authority because, in the end, your true citizenship is elsewhere. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, keep this nation under Your care. Bless the leaders of our land that we may be a people at peace among ourselves and a blessing to the other nations of the earth. Grant that we may choose trustworthy leaders, contribute to wise decisions for the general welfare, and serve you faithfully in our generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Eighteenth Friday after Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 27

Today's Reading: Matthew 4:12-25

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

“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”” (Matthew 4:17)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The beginning of Jesus' public ministry probably went unnoticed by most. In the wake of John the Baptist's arrest, Jesus withdraws from Judea, heads to Galilee, and talks a few local fishermen into leaving their jobs to follow him instead. To those who knew Simon and Andrew and to Zebedee, the father of James and John, it may have seemed like a bad career move. Certainly, their families were all inconvenienced by their sudden vocational change. In the big picture, however, these events would have been insignificant to the rest of Capernaum and unknown to those in Jerusalem. What is happening here, though, is a game changer as long-prophesied events begin to unfold just as Isaiah had said they would.

Jesus beginning His public ministry in Galilee is part of the fulfillment of God's plan to save His people. The area where Jesus calls His first disciples and begins to preach about the kingdom of heaven being at hand is the first area of the old Northern Kingdom of Israel that had fallen to the Assyrian Empire. Now, the first area to fall is the first area to hear the preaching of the gospel. The first area to go into darkness is now the first area where the light begins to dawn.

The light that began to dawn in Galilee continues to shine in our own time. The first followers Jesus called to Himself heard His preaching of the kingdom of heaven and, in time, began to preach the same kingdom to others. Over the centuries, that preaching has continued, and you hear it in every sermon at your own congregation. What began in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali has spread throughout the world, and the kingdom of God continues to be at hand wherever you may live. The message of repentance that was for them is for you. The kingdom that was promised to them has been promised to you. The Jesus that called them is the Jesus that has called you. What began in Galilee did not stay in Galilee, and what God has begun in you will go beyond you as the light continues to dawn in the darkness. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Christ, who taught the Twelve The truth for ages sealed, Whose words and works awakened faith, The ways of God revealed: Instruct us how we pray, By Your empowering Word. True teacher be for all who seek Their light, their life, their Lord. (LSB 856:2)

The Eighteenth Saturday after Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 28

Today's Reading: Psalm 135:1-3, 13-14; antiphon: Psalm 135:13

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

"Your name, O LORD, endures forever, your renown, O LORD, throughout all ages. For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants." (Psalm 135:13-14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The things of this world that call out for our attention and praise are often not worthy or lasting. Celebrity is fleeting, and influencers come and go. Today's pop sensation is tomorrow's "Where are they now?" What was trendy and popular last season is in the blowout bin this season. They cry out, "Watch me, listen to me, pay attention to me," but it is all one-sided. Nothing lasts; nothing is eternal, and nothing can expect to be praised forever. What is true for the things of this world is also true for the things that claim to be spiritual. The psalm from which our introit is taken will go on to point out that the idols of the nations do not speak, see, hear, or have life in them. They have no way to give what they promise. They are not worthy of praise.

In all of existence, there is only one that is worthy of eternal praise; there is only one whose significance does not wane. In all existence, there is only one Lord, and His name endures forever. He alone is due eternal praise. He alone will vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants. Nothing else can or will do that, and here is the best part: "Praise the Lord" is not an order or command. Praise does not have its genesis in the Law. The only ones who can praise the Lord are the ones that He has enabled to do so. The praise He receives is the response of His people to what He has done for His people.

The Lord has had compassion on you; the Lord has vindicated you. He has added you to His people, and you can answer the call to praise His name. This is the entire theology of Lutheran worship at work. God has compassion on us and vindicates us, and our response is praise. His compassion and vindication came in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son Jesus, which was for you. You have been moved from death to life. Your eyes, ears, and mouths have been opened. You are now a part of the people of God who can praise His name. The praise offered Him is eternal because He has made His people eternal. He is worthy of eternal praise, and He has made you eternally able to praise Him. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Father, we praise Thee, now that night is over, Active and watchful, stand we all before Thee; Singing, we offer prayer and meditation: Thus we adore Thee. (LSB 875:1)

St. Michael and All Angels

SEPTEMBER 29

Today's Reading: Matthew 18:1-11 or Luke 10:17-20

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

"Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:19-20)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Did you know that as believers, you have nothing to fear from Satan and his army of fallen angels? That is what Satan and, indeed, all demons are: fallen angels. Did you know that when you were clothed with Christ in Baptism, Satan lost any power or claim that he had on you? Did you know that because you have been marked as a child of God, demons actually fear you? This is not a matter of Christians being especially intimidating in a manly or warrior-like fashion. Indeed, Satan and his minions retain a special fear of women, for it was through a woman that God promised to bring forth the savior.

Power and authority over demons— that is a pretty exciting thing, and it's a reality for Christians. This needs to be kept in mind in the face of popular Christian fiction that depicts believers as helpless pawns in some ongoing cosmic battle between God's angels and Satan's angels. Not to spoil anyone's reading for entertainment, but the battle is over. It's not ongoing. As Revelation 12 reminds us, war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. This does not describe some future battle that we need to pick sides for but speaks of a past battle, one that is already over. Satan and God should never be seen as equals caught up in a struggle that we somehow can tip one way or the other. Satan needs to be seen for what he is defeated and cast down from heaven and trying to take anyone down with him that he can.

As exciting as this is, power over Satan and his fallen angels isn't even the main thing. This is not why we gather for worship on a Sunday. We do not gather to celebrate our authority over Satan and his demons; we do not gather to impress each other with new and painful wrestling holds with which to torture them, although that might make for a popular youth activity. We gather, as always, to receive the forgiveness of sins that Christ won for us on the cross. We gather to receive God's Gifts. We gather for the strengthening of faith. We gather because Jesus has called us. We gather because our names have been written in heaven. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Nineteenth Monday after Pentecost

SEPTEMBER 30

Today's Reading: Mark 9:38-50

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 1:37-2:15; Matthew 6:1-15

"Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." (Mark 9:50)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The church is always bigger than you think it is. It is bigger than the congregation you attend, and it is bigger than the church body that that congregation is part of as well. In other words, there is no true visible church on earth. We confess the church, but we do not get to see it. This is why Jesus tells His disciples not to stop people from outside their circle from casting out demons in His name. The distinctions between people that used to define who was in the community and who was outside the community are erased in the shadow of the cross. Good works, even mighty works, can be done in Jesus' name by people who are not part of your circle.

Jesus goes on to teach His disciples that if good can be found outside their circle, then evil can also be found inside of it. This is what lies behind the language of cutting off the hand, foot, or eye if they cause you to sin. This is not language exhorting individuals to get elective surgery to cure their sin problem. There is no such thing as a sin-ectomy. You do not have to cripple yourself to be part of the kingdom. Amputation is not a mighty work done in Jesus' name. What this means is that some who are in the community may not be part of the community.

This is where the importance of the salt language comes in. What makes you one of the people of God is having that salt within you that can only be given to you by God. This is the salt that comes with the Gift of faith: the belief that the mightiest work of all, Jesus' death on the cross, was a death that was for you. This salt makes you part of the church that cannot be seen but only confessed. This is the salt found in the waters of Baptism and the salt that flavors the Lord's Supper. This is the salt that is the taste of eternal life. This is the salt that makes even the most ordinary act of giving a fellow believer a drink of water a mighty work done in Jesus' name. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Everlasting Father, source of every blessing, mercifully direct and govern us by Your Holy Spirit that we may complete the works You have prepared for us to do; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Nineteenth Tuesday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 1

Today's Reading: Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

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

"And a young man ran and told Moses, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.' And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, 'My lord Moses, stop them.' But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!'"(Numbers 11:27-29)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. You don't have to be around Lutheranism very long before you start to hear arguments about who can do what in the church. You might even hear references to the fourteenth article of the Augsburg Confession. We even speak about it in shorthand, saying simply, "AC XIV." We even say it in such a way that you can hear the Roman numerals. The Confessions are clear in this matter: no one is to preach or teach in the church without a proper call. Unfortunately, this has become overinterpreted to mean that only the pastor can speak the gospel or that only the pastor can speak in a theological way. This is simply not what the article says. While there are things that are reserved only for the office of the ministry, there is plenty of theological speaking that any Christian can do. The Spirit is not given only to pastors.

You can see this in our reading from Numbers. Moses refuses to punish Eldad and Medad for prophesying in the camp when they were supposed to be with the rest of the elders. Instead, he says, "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them." Other Old Testament passages will speak about the Spirit being poured out on all flesh (Joel 2:28). In fact, the Spirit being poured out on all people was one of the signs that would signal the arrival of the Messianic Age. This is the pouring out of the Spirit that took place on the first Pentecost that resulted in a large number of people hearing the mighty works of God in their own language.

This is the same Spirit that is given to all Christians. This is the same Spirit that you received in your Baptism. This is the same Spirit that allows you to hear His Word, receive His Gifts, and proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. This is the same Spirit that allows you to speak the gospel to your friends, family, and anyone that God has placed into your life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Christ, our true and only light, Enlighten those who sit in night; Let those afar now hear Your voice And in Your fold with us rejoice. (LSB 839:1)

The Nineteenth Wednesday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 2

Today's Reading: James 5:1-12, 13-208

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 3:1-29; Matthew 7:1-12

"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." (James 5:13-15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Christianity is often presented as the way to a trouble-free life. All you have to do is give your heart to Jesus, and all life's problems will simply disappear. If any problems remain after a person converts, then that is their fault. Their conversion was not real, and their faith was feigned. Real Christians, according to these people, do not have problems. This kind of teaching simply does not hold up to any kind of scrutiny. Plenty of Christians have suffered real problems and suffered them with real, genuine faith. God never promised His people a carefree life. Look again at our passage from James.

Luther is known for calling the Epistle of James a "book of straw," but it is almost like he read the passage quoted above when, in the Large Catechism, he asks the question: "What is God? A 'god' is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need." James says much the same thing when those who are suffering are told to pray, and the cheerful are told to sing praise. This shows that God is present with you in both good times and bad. Christians can suffer and rejoice. Christians can, in any of life's circumstances, turn to God.

Ultimately, this is because the circumstances of this life, whether good or bad, do not change the promises that He has made to His people. None of the circumstances of this life change the reality of your resurrection. The language about saving the sick doesn't mean that if you get sick and pray, you will be healed. The prayer of faith cannot diagnose, treat, or cure any disease. Instead, the prayer of faith clings to the promise of God that in the resurrection of Jesus is the resurrection of all believers. Your sins have been forgiven, you are saved, and even should you die, the Lord will raise you up. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Still Your children wander homeless; Still the hungry cry for bread; Still the captives long for freedom; Still in grief we mourn our dead. As, O Lord, Your deep compassion Healed the sick and freed the soul, Use the love Your Spirit kindles Still to save and make us whole. (LSB 848:2)

The Nineteenth Thursday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 3

Today's Reading: Catechism - Table of duties: To Husband

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

“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.” (1 Peter 3:7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Table of duties: To Husbands may seem like a strange topic for a devotion where almost no one in the intended audience is a husband yet, and half of the intended audience will never be one. Despite this, there is more than enough here for everybody, regardless of sex or marital status. Young men need to learn how to treat their future wives, and young women need to learn that they are indeed worthy of respect and honor. In fact, the words of Peter deal with more than the relationship between husband and wife and instead point to the relationship between men and women.

This is where the language of ‘weaker vessel’ comes in. The Roman Empire had clearly defined roles and social spheres that men and women were supposed to occupy. Men were by nature believed to be better at defending the home, while women were thought to be better at keeping watch over it. Men were made for the outdoor tasks and women for the indoor ones. Men and women were mutually dependent on one another, but men were thought to be superior and had more social status and opportunity in the empire than women did. This is one area where the culture of the Roman Empire ran into friction with the theology of the church.

The salvation won for all by Jesus on the cross does not recognize any difference in social status between men and women. They are equally saved and have the same status before God. All Christians are heirs of the grace of life. This is what lies behind Peter’s words about living in an understanding way and showing honor to women as the weaker vessel. Their status as fellow believers is what determines how they are to be treated, not their status according to the culture. The words here are addressed to the husbands because they are the ones who held the authority in Roman culture. The gospel is not limited by social norms. Men, you can treat women with honor because of what Jesus has done for you, and women, you are worthy to be treated with honor because of what Jesus has done for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Nineteenth Friday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 4

Today's Reading: Matthew 8:1-17

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

"That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.'" (Matthew 8:16-17)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. What if your health was an indication of your spiritual status? This was the general belief in the time of Jesus. If you were sick, it was most likely the direct result of a particular sin. Certain illnesses were even believed to put you outside the realm of salvation entirely. Leprosy was that kind of illness. Lepers could not be part of public society in any way. They were supposed to stay away from healers, and no one could touch a leper. Jesus not only heals the leper, but He touches him. Anyone witnessing this event would have been left with questions about the identity of Jesus.

What about ethnic identity? The Jews were God's people, and the Gentiles were not. Next, Jesus meets with a Roman Centurion. This, too, was a person considered to be outside the realm of salvation. Again, Jesus does the unexpected and agrees to come to the centurion's house and heal his servant. Jews simply did not go into Gentile dwellings. The Centurion lets Jesus know that His word is sufficient, and Jesus praises him for his faith. Again, this leaves those who were there with questions about the identity of Jesus. Jesus then heals Simon's mother-in-law, a normal Jewish woman. He goes from the surprising, even shocking, to the mundane. Again, Jesus' actions naturally lead to questions about His identity.

Then, that evening, He casts out demons from many who were oppressed and heals all who were sick, and we finally are given the context to understand what Jesus has been doing and who He is. Jesus is the suffering servant mentioned by Isaiah. What Jesus is doing here is tied to the salvation of Israel and the ingathering of the Gentiles. What Jesus is doing here has to do with His mission as Messiah. In healing illness and casting out demons, He is showing that in Him, the redemption of Israel has arrived. In Him is the forgiveness of sins. In Him is the salvation of the whole world. There is nothing that lies outside of the realm of the salvation that Jesus brings. You are in the realm of Jesus' salvation. No illness or ethnic identity is a barrier to the cross. Jesus has taken your illnesses and bore your diseases. You are free to rise up and serve Him. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God loved the world so that He gave His only Son the lost to save, That all who would in Him believe Should everlasting life receive. (LSB 571:1)

The Nineteenth Saturday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 5

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 20 - Psalm 127:3-5; antiphon: Psalm 127:1a
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 5:1-21; Matthew 8:18-34

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame” (Psalm 127:3-5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Every year, someone releases a list of words and phrases that should be banished. One phrase that has not yet appeared on that list, but probably should, is, “Children should be seen and not heard.” That little gem of a saying makes children seem like some kind of burden that society must endure. It is difficult enough to be young; the last thing needed is for the young not to be valued. Even parenthood suffers in our time. Pregnancy is treated like an illness or disability, motherhood is looked down upon, and fathers are depicted as inept in popular culture. At times, it seems that family life in general is under attack.

This is nothing new. Children were not universally valued in the ancient world. They were not even considered people unless their father accepted them. In fact, infant exposure was common, and unwanted children were left outside to die. In contrast, the ancient Israelites highly valued their children. Having children meant that God’s covenant still stood. Children mean that God was going to fulfill His promises. Children meant that the future of God’s people was assured. Motherhood was something to aspire to, and fatherhood was to be respected. So great was the desire for children that to not have children was considered a punishment. Neither the Israelites nor the early Christians practiced infant exposure. God’s people have always had a different approach to children and family life than whatever culture they found themselves living in.

This means that you are already a blessing just by existing. You are not a burden, a bother, or something that is in the way. You are a heritage from the Lord; you are a reward. You are an arrow in your parents’ quiver. You are the fulfillment of a promise. Your future as one of God’s people is assured. The promises that are for your parents are also for you. The death of Jesus on the cross was for your parents, and it was for you. Now, you are an arrow, but in the future, you may have your own quiver full of arrows, and the promises of God that are for you will be for your children. Now, you are a blessing, and in the future, you will be blessed. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 6

Today's Reading: Mark 10:2-16

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

Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. (Mark 10:15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Children, especially the littlest children, are completely dependent. Adam and Eve were created perfect... and the gift of children that came by Holy Matrimony was not just a promise of a future for all mankind but was given as a joy and a gift that revealed to man just how God graciously takes care of us in all our dependency.

Adam and Eve needed God to provide everything... and they loved their dependence. This didn't mean they just sat around and did nothing, though... there was plenty for them to do for each other. Adam cared for Eve, taught her, and was overjoyed to love his wife. Eve was served by Adam, and she loved to serve her husband... and that's what's wonderful about what Jesus teaches the Pharisees and us in our text. The Pharisees weren't arguing about who was the greatest just to be seen as the best... they sought to 'be served' by those who were not as great as them. Jesus teaches us and them that they're not the greatest because of their high stature, their law-abiding, or anything that they do at all. The greatest is like a little itty bitty baby who's dependent on mom and dad for EVERYTHING! The greatest is the servant, as Jesus makes clear in Matthew 23:11. The One who receives the Kingdom of God is like Adam and Eve before the Fall—totally dependent on God for all things.

The person who will enter heaven is the person who is given the kingdom like a little needy child. That's the person Jesus says "receives the kingdom of God..." That's who Jesus (who, though He was God, became the servant of all) says enters heaven... the needy children who've been given everything. Receiving the Kingdom of God, receiving Jesus is simply this... He does everything for us... gives all that is His to us, forgives us, and He does so by means of water, bread, wine, body, blood, and the word in the Divine Service, and the Holy Spirit brings us there and gives us the faith of a little child... faith that says, "Amen, amen it is so!" Christ my Lord abides with me. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful Father, Your patience and loving-kindness toward us have no end. Grant that by Your Holy Spirit we may always think and do those things that are pleasing in Your sight; through Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord, Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Twentieth Monday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 7

Today's Reading: Genesis 2:18-25

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 6:10-25; Matthew 9:18-38

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." (Genesis 2:23)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Dominion, according to the dictionary, is supremacy or dominance, but our text from Genesis tells another story. God created man in His image, in His likeness, and in verse 19 of our text, we see God sitting back as He brought all of creation to Adam to see what he'd name the stuff... it must have been quite a sight. It was to Man... to Adam, the crown jewel of creation, that God brought all the creation and heard that Adam called them Aardvarks, Platypi, and Zebras. God created and waited to see what the crown jewel, Adam, would call them. We humans are God's favorites! The dominion God gives to Adam to name stuff isn't about control or power, though; it's the same joy that a mother or father has in seeing what their little ones will call one of the things they created out of paper and crayons, mud, stones or macaroni noodles... there is joy, not because of power, supremacy or superiority, but because something has been created and has been given a NAME!

We see it in what Adam calls the creature taken from his own body. She's different from him... and yet she's wonderful. So wonderful, in fact, that Adam says, "At last... there's the helper, taken from my own flesh... she's me, and I'm her... but we're different... beautifully different." Woman is what she is: 'from man.' That's the name Adam gives her, and yet she has another name: Eve...

Eve... like Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve... meaning that from her will come other wonderful and blessed humans, little girls and boys... our greatest of grandparents all the way up to us. The man will leave His parents and cleave (hold fast) to his wife... sure, they'll still be two distinct people, different in many ways, but in Holy Matrimony, they're one... complete with all the differences, and, by the grace of God, of one mind, of one direction. Regardless of whether a man or woman gets married, there still remains the truth that man and woman are the two genders God created... we are different but complementary. We don't always think the same way, but that's part of the beauty and wonder... that our Heavenly Father sent Jesus 'the Man' to buy back His wayward bride. He is the greater Adam who has given us His Name, 'Christian,' for all we have has been taken from and given to us from His precious blood and pierced side. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Twentieth Tuesday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 8

Today's Reading: Hebrews 2:1-13, 14-18

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

For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Hebrews 2:18)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Isaiah the prophet told us: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Isaiah 7:14). That's good news to we who live in a suffering and sinful world. It is wonderful news to we who suffer to know that there is One who was made lowly to suffer for us that we would be comforted in sorrow and sadness and forgiven of our sins which lead to death... AND having been thus forgiven, we wouldn't fear death!

That's a tall task! Who doesn't fear death!? We can handle the fear of public speaking, the fear of flying, the fear of snakes or spiders... but death... that's another deal altogether. Just how is this done? Think back to Holy Week... Jesus entering into Jerusalem to shouts of Hosanna... He wasn't under allusions that the people in Jerusalem liked Him or even liked how He was going to save them. Jesus knew well what was required of Him; sin deserves death, and Jesus had become sin for us... not that He was sinful but that He carried ALL our sins in His body, for us. Death was necessary, and Jesus goes to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday willingly and joyously because what He was doing was all for you. So, Jesus wins salvation on the Cross and gives salvation by His resurrection through the church. He did it as God... but more importantly for us, He was a Man like us.

That means that He knew temptation, pain, suffering, and tears... that's part of how He helps us when we're tempted... that's how He helps us in pain and sorrow and tears... not just that He knew them once back in the day... but because He's with us now. He attends to us, cries with us, holds us to Himself in the church, and wipes our tears away while comforting us with His Word. He's with us in our cradles, in the good and tough days of school and work. He's with us when we're old, and He's with us in the hour of our death; He who has known death abides with us. He who has been risen from the dead provides comfort that though we die, Christ, Who was raised from the dead, will raise us on the Last Day. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, grant us your unworthy servants Your grace, that in the hour of death, the adversary may not prevail against us but that we may be found worthy of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Twentieth Wednesday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 9

Today's Reading: Matthew 10:24-42

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

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. (Matthew 10:34)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus has come to forgive sins... as much is mentioned earlier in Matthew's Gospel (1:21). So our text for today tells us not why Jesus came but the result of Jesus coming among us. This means we are to think of the text in this way... “Do not think that I came only to bring peace upon the earth, I came not only to bring peace but even more a sword.” (Gibbs; Concordia Commentary Matthew 1:1-11:1 pgs 536, 538).

Jesus came to bring peace (Luke 2:14) through His innocent and bloody death, and that forgiveness of sins will be preached to all people in the church and by the people Christ has died to save... but many reject this teaching of peace given in forgiveness. Many say, “I don't need what you say your Jesus has come to give.” It can be frustrating for sure, especially if we take that rejection personally... but why would we take it personally? Are those who reject Christ's innocent suffering and death, His free forgiveness, and the bestowal of life and salvation rejecting us or our works? We might think so... missionaries are sent far and wide— sometimes they're heard, and other times they are not... Pastors sometimes preach to closed ears and hardened hearts; Jeremiah the prophet himself was told that the people of Jerusalem would not hear him (Jeremiah 7:27), and it may be that as you proclaim the truth of Christ's victory over sin and death, as you proclaim salvation won by Christ alone, that parents, siblings, or others close to you will not listen.

It is the Gospel, the truth of life and salvation given and bestowed freely, that is the stumbling block and the rock of offense... this Gospel stands in opposition to our inborn temptations to believe that we, of ourselves, by our good works, by our merits can save ourselves... such is not so. We are saved by grace, through faith in Christ alone. He has bestowed unimaginable peace to us... peace between God and us, us and our neighbor through the forgiveness of sins. It is the peace that passes understanding— and it is yours by Baptism, by the graciousness of Christ your Lord. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and most gracious God and Father, we implore you to turn the hearts of all who have forsaken the faith once delivered to Your Church, especially those who have wandered from it or are in doubt through the corruption of Your Truth. Mercifully visit and restore them that in gladness of heart, they may take pleasure in Your Word and be made wise to salvation through faith in Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

The Twentieth Thursday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 10

Today's Reading: Catechism - Table of duties: To wives

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

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We hear Paul's text with modern ears and are, at best, surprised. We hear 'submit' and begin to wonder: "My goodness, if we were to return to this way of thinking, then all the progress we've made for women and little girls will be undone!" Submission is a dirty word... a word that sounds like something we'd say to a subject or slave of a King. It makes sense in our sin... in a world that we've been tempted to believe is run and ruled by power. So regardless... in our sinful minds, it's not that we don't like the word submit... we're more concerned with who will submit to whom.

That's where the second part of the text comes in... submission is to be 'as to the Lord.' So submission has less to do with power and everything to do with what Jesus has done for us. "Submit to your husband" is, of course, a directive, a command, but Paul also tells us why wives submit... they submit to husbands as to the Lord because the whole bride of Christ, the Christian church, submits— gives herself over to the care of Jesus. Jesus isn't interested in ruling over us as a tyrant king... He's not looking for us to do things for Him. He's true God and true man. As God, He has need of nothing... and as a man willingly became sin for us, to carry sin, put it to death in order to buy back His precious bride from sin, death, and the Devil. He's the perfect Husband, the Perfect Man, and willingly becomes the least, the weakest, the servant of all in order to redeem His bride.

Submission isn't ceding power, and it isn't a matter of who'll be the boss... God alone is the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier— everything necessary for this body and life and the life to come is taken care of... submission is a deference... a deferring and a trust that the man will lay aside everything, bear the burdens and sins of his family, his wife, die unto himself, and perhaps even physically die for the sake of wife and children. It's a trust that husbands will be the heads of households, take responsibility for the instruction of the family, take them to the house of God to receive what the Good Shepherd freely gives, and to give of himself as Christ gave Himself for His Bride the church. Submission isn't about power or even losing power... it is about true trust that the Lord of us all takes care of us by the church: in families and in husbands and wives who by grace have children... who in turn become husbands and wives themselves... and so creation and the Church continues from generation to generation. Submit to, as you do to the Lord, who has died and risen FOR YOU. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Twentieth Friday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 11

Today's Reading: Matthew 11:20-30

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

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. (Matthew 11:25-26)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. What a strange statement... "I thank you that You've kept things hidden." Isn't the 'job' of the Christian church and of Jesus' ministry to reveal all the good stuff that Jesus does and accomplishes for us? Don't we as Christians want to know that the church we're a part of is 'making a difference' in the world around us?

What are the things that the Father has kept hidden? From whom has He kept them hidden? He's kept hidden the reality that Jesus is the Messiah, come to save people from their sins... and He's kept it hidden from the Galileans (specifically) who refuse to repent of their sins and hear that Jesus is the One who's come to forgive them. It's a case of the Father giving the 'wise and understanding' over to their own devices and their own sin. It's not as if Jesus has hidden anything from the Galileans; John the Baptist had also proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ... it's just that the Galileans had thoughts of their own... ways that they said and thought things should go.

But to the little children... that is, to the desperate, despairing, and penitent sinner who had seen their great lack, their great need of forgiveness— it's to these that Jesus gave forgiveness.

We've been taught much about what being a Christian ought to look like, and unfortunately, it usually revolves around what we do to clean our acts up, do all the right things, and be seen as the shining light and example to those around us... but here in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells another story; it is to the penitent sinner... the one crushed by the law, the one who is sorrowful over their sin, the one who wonders just how they can be redeemed and saved... it's to these little ones, these little children (babies, teenagers, moms and dads and grandmas and grandpas) who are little children not because of age... but because we are completely and fully dependent on Jesus, who forgives their sin and bestows life now and unto eternity. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Twentieth Saturday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 12

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 21 - Psalm 112:3-6; antiphon: Psalm 112:1

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

Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments (Psalm 112:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Blessed is the one who fears? Yes! And not only that, but the Psalmist says that we praise the Lord because of this fear.

Isn't it a sin to fear, though? It is a sin to disbelieve, distrust, and to trust other words than the word of God. So the blessedness the Psalmist speaks of is the same fear Martin Luther writes of and that we have proclaimed for years in our Catechism studies... we are to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Our Lord says in Matthew 10:28, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." And yet, this fear of the Lord isn't terror... it isn't even a quaking or trembling before Him because of uneasiness... there is no uneasiness at all. Jesus our Lord tells us exactly Who He is, what He's done, and that He's doing it for us. Jesus became sin for us... and St. John records in 16:33, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart (FEAR NOT); I have overcome the world."

Don't fear the world... there's nothing left to fear. Don't fear death... it's been overcome. We believe, teach, and confess that Christ has justified us and saved us by His blood... but the Psalmist writes that we are blessed: not just in temporal ways, not just eternally, but the God who saved us is pleased to go with us on our way... what a blessing that is.

We're blessed that God's stern law causes us to despair of our own righteousness and be brought to our knees in humble repentance before the Lord Who has died to save us. We are blessed that we are redeemed, bought back, reclaimed, washed, renewed, and given a new name in Baptism... He's saved us from evil, from the Evil One, and proclaims that we should cease to do evil. We're blessed because Jesus not only increases our hunger and thirst for righteousness but provides the very feast of forgiveness and righteousness to His church.

Luther puts it this way: "God here praises us for our good life and are promised eternal comfort against all trouble. We are blessed because we are given to a sincere confidence in God's grace." (Reading the Psalms with Luther: 271) In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 13

Today's Reading: Mark 10:17-22

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

"Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. (Mark 10:18)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Law questions get law answers. The rich man has two things on his mind as he approaches Jesus. First, Jesus is one of the Good Guys... a man wise in teaching about the things of God. Second, the rich man wants to know how eternal life is inherited. What should become apparent to us is the strange nature of the man's second thought. Inheritances aren't earned... Inheritances are bestowed.

The problem for the rich young man is often our problem; we understand that Eternal Life is the greatest thing of all, but unfortunately, we're often tempted to think that it's something we earn by what we do. Being "good" is necessary for salvation, but we don't ask often enough, "What does 'good' mean?" While we often place a lot of emphasis on doing good... we often fail to ask WHO is doing the good and for Whom is the good one doing it. Jesus asks, though... "Why do you call me good?" Do you say I'm good because of what I'm teaching or how you've seen me acting? He calls Jesus a teacher... Jesus is certainly that, but why does the man call Him good? The answer to this is that the rich man sees Jesus as a teacher, which He is, and that He sees Jesus as just one good teacher among many.

Jesus is so much more than a teacher, though; as He says to the rich man... "No one is good except God alone." These words are both true and comforting. They're comforting in the sense that God has come into our midst. Jesus is Goodness in the midst of sinners who aren't good, and He's come not just to teach, not to give new laws, new paths, or to provide an example... He alone is the Good One... sent by His Father, as the blessed Good One, Who fulfills both tables of the law, crediting His work to us by Baptism and bestowing the inheritance of forgiveness and life freely.

No one is Good but God alone, that's true... but St. Mark writes and the Spirit opens our ears to see that Christ alone has accomplished all that is good and right. He's fulfilled all the law, bore the weight of our sin, died to put our death to death, and has risen again to justify us... that is... to bestow forgiveness and life to us... to bestow the inheritance of the kingdom of God, salvation and eternal life to us in the church. The Good Teacher IS the Good Shepherd... who has bestowed His goodness to us, Who lives in us by His word and makes us good, beautiful, righteous, and perfect. In the Name ✠ of Jesus.

The Twenty-First Monday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 14

Today's Reading: Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

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

They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth. (Amos 5:10)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Amos was a shepherd who tended sycamore trees. More important than that, though, was the truth that God, according to His good pleasure, made Amos a prophet to Israel. God made Amos a prophet... and wonderfully, it pleased God to send a sinner as a prophet to preach to sinners both to repent of their wickedness and to receive the forgiveness of God. But they hated Him Who spoke at the gate. Sure, they hated Amos... it was easier for them to do that... the truth, though, was not that they hated Amos... they hated God... because they hated the word of God that Amos was sent to speak.

The Israelites took advantage of the poor, they cheated in business, they lied and shouted down those who told the truth, they neglected the beggars, and they remained silent when they should have spoken against the sin around them. They worshiped golden idols... every sin against God and men could be found among the people Amos preached to.

Amos and all the Prophets were sent because God loved His people... and yet, all many of God's people could see were pesky men who came to lay out every sin before them. That usually had the result of making the people feel bad, and it made them angry. So it's important to know that Amos and the prophets weren't sent to make them feel bad... Amos was sent so that the people of God could see what was killing them... and in this, Israel was to see God's love and care for them: their dire need and lack, and God's abundant forgiveness and peace. How would the people know that God loved them? He'd sent them a prophet... God's mouthpiece to turn them to repentance... God's prophet to give them the forgiveness of God.

Amos was booted out of Israel... Jesus was tortured and killed... St. Paul was ultimately killed in Rome... and a man is sent to preach and rightly divide law and gospel to you. In great love, our Gracious Lord loves us and sends a pastor to assure us that Jesus has removed our sin, shame, and guilt. He puts His words into our mouths, and He fights the powers of darkness. Jesus restores our voice to speak in faith toward Him and in fervent love toward one another. What a wonderful blessing and promise that even in the sinful and fallen world, we don't fight alone! In fact, we don't do the fighting at all; Christ does all that is needed for you. "It is finished," He said... finished for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-First Tuesday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 15

Today's Reading: Hebrews 3:12-19

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

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Hebrews is a definitive book that states so well the freedom we have from fear, death, and the Devil. So exhortation/ encouragement is spoken of here as an ongoing action. It is for today, for each other, that we provide exhortation, encouragement, and comfort... and that can be accomplished in no other way than in preaching the full counsel of God. At first, this sounds overwhelming, doesn't it? That would mean we'd need to know the entirety of Scripture, all that God has done for us... and that's certainly true... reading, marking, and hearing the Word of God is certainly important enough for God to give us a commandment that says we should gladly hear the Word of God. There's more, though... we hear the Word of God together, we talk about what our Lord says to us in the Word of God, and we wrestle with the text and discuss it. What better place to do this than the Lord's church? As St. Paul mentions to us in Acts 20, he never failed to preach the whole counsel of God... what does this mean? Just this: that Christ Jesus was born to suffer for us, bear our sins to the cross, die, and rise again for our justification! That's the whole counsel of God, and here's the best part... what does the writer of Hebrews mean when he writes, "as long as it is 'today?'"

A friend of mine once asked me a good question... "Do you live in yesterday? Perhaps you believe that you live in tomorrow?" "Of course not," I said... to which he replied, "Of course you're right!" It's always today. What greater joy do we have as the baptized children of God than to believe and trust that our Lord Jesus has been raised from the dead to bestow to us eternal day, the light of His word, and His forgiveness today and forever! It's always today, and yet, within each day, we are bought and redeemed. The deceitfulness of sin continues, the temptations of the Devil and world seek to harden us... so it will be until the Last Day... so our Lord gives us His good counsel, sends the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to attend to the Word, and to give faith, hope, and trust in the Lord Who abides with us in His church. So we exhort, provide good counsel and correction to erring brothers, encourage one another with the word of Christ the Crucified, and always are given to the comfort and the stilling of troubled consciences in the word of forgiveness. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-First Wednesday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 16

Today's Reading: Matthew 13:24-43

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 14:1-2, 22-23, 14:28-15:15; Matthew 13:24-43

'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. (Matthew 13:28b-29)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. A few verses before our text for today, the disciples ask Jesus, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" (Matthew 13:10) "Seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." (Matthew 13:13) Jesus doesn't speak in parables to confuse anyone; sin has accomplished this since the Fall. Neither does Jesus speak because the disciples or we Christians are better informed or more deserving of what Jesus gives... Jesus speaks openly and plainly because He is life and truth and also because it's the Holy Spirit that gives faith, brings people into the church, and keeps us in the church, as the explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed states.

Jesus explains the parable in Matthew 13, and what He explains is what you and I see every day. That mixed up and growing together in this world are sinners and saints... people who you can tell the difference between. But Jesus would have us know that the one sowing the seeds of dissension, the Devil, is sowing seeds of sin, hatred, doubt, and temptation that grow up in us, too. Thankfully, then, Jesus doesn't say that we should scrap the whole mess and start over again with better material, hoping for a better result. Christianity isn't first and foremost about sinning less... Christianity is about Jesus, who buys back sinners with His precious blood and innocent suffering and death. Jesus would have us see that the seeds of doubt, despair, and dissension are eradicated not by tearing them out, ripping them up by the roots, and throwing them into a burn pile. Our Lord lovingly provides stern law... law that reveals the weeds and thistles that choke out faith in us... He provides pure sweet gospel by His church and His pastors to hear those sins confessed. From the mouth of the pastor, those sins are put to death. In the ears of the man who hears your confession and from the mouth of the pastor as from God Himself, the words of life and forgiveness are given freely to us.

The good seed, Christ Himself, has planted Himself in us. It is His word watered by Baptism and fed with bread and wine that is Body and Blood that gives life and sustains us in this fallen world. Life this side of heaven is fraught with sin and great temptation. Thanks be to God for Christ, our Lord, who has won salvation and bestowed that victory to us in His church. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-First Thursday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 17

Today's Reading: Catechism - Table of duties: To Parents

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

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. No doubt you recall that after your study of the Small Catechism in confirmation, you breathed a sigh of relief that you were almost finished... only examination remained... and then your pastor pulled a fast one... the Table of Duties. Just what is this table about? We've heard of the two tables of the law and the Lord's Table... yet there was one more... the table that gave us time to reflect on vocation... our stations in life. While specific matters didn't pertain to us (men cannot be wives, women cannot be husbands, etc.), the table of duties painted a gracious and wonderful picture of the relationship between Christ and his Church.

So you might be wondering if you're a child: What does this article about fathers not provoking children to anger mean? Here's how you fit in. As we are God's children, He is our Father. And, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer, God has given earthly authority over us and for our good, as we confess in the 4th Commandment to honor mother and father.

It might seem like St. Paul is warning fathers of the stuff that they're not to do. He certainly is doing that, but what's implied by St. Paul is this... fathers are given to care for, protect, work for, and sacrifice themselves for the well-being of their wives and children... this is good and wise. The most important part of all of this is that fathers are to lead us to the Heavenly Father and the Gracious Lord Jesus, who gives all the best Gifts. THAT is the best gift a father can give... Jesus and His forgiveness and life.

So what about not provoking children to anger? Thankfully, it's as simple as this... Fathers are to avoid unfair, cruel behavior or blatant favoritism. Fathers are to give as Christ gave: freely, abundantly, and to all given to their care. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, Heavenly Father, You have blessed us with the joy and care of children. Give us calm strength and patient wisdom so that as they grow in years, we may teach them to love whatever is just, true, and good, following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

St. Luke the Evangelist

OCTOBER 18

Today's Reading: Luke 10:1-9

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

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. (Luke 10:2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Nothing in Jesus' ministry happened by accident... nothing in this world happens without our Lord's knowing it. So St. Luke records that Jesus sent out 72... to whom were they sent? What would they say? Just this... that Jesus had set His face to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51) and would be visiting them in various towns and cities on His way. Jesus sent the 72 to get the people ready. He sent them so that they wouldn't be surprised and so that they'd talk to their friends, family, and neighbors about Jesus, the one who'd set His face to Jerusalem's cross, was coming to them.

And here's the thing... 72 wasn't enough. There were countless towns and villages, countless poor, widowed, and fatherless who needed care and consolation, countless sinners steeped in their sin, drowning in guilt and remorse, shame and despair... what could 72 do among so many? Nothing is the answer... unless they were sent by the Lord, who would do something for all people. What is so endearing about St. Luke, among many things, is that he was a physician, a medical doctor... chosen by our Lord not because He was special in and of himself, but because God had set him aside to write the Gospel that bears his name and the Book of Acts that records the birth and early growth of the Christian Church. St. Luke was there to witness the Lord's ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection. He traveled with St. Paul and saw with his own eyes the promise of Jesus. The harvest was plentiful... it is plentiful... Jesus sows the seeds and gives them growth... Jesus does it all, and yet He commends Luke to write for our benefit... not of the work that we must do to reap the harvest, but to labor together as ones redeemed by Christ in the vineyard together, to rejoice greatly that we have a place in the vineyard and yet there is still room! It started with 72, and the Christian church has been growing ever since. In fact, it's never gotten smaller... for those departed saints who sleep the sleep of death rest secure as they await their raising, we who have been born are shepherded, cared for, and forgiven from womb to tomb, and yet there are many still to come for whom the Lord Jesus has died to save.

We pray for what the Lord promises... not results... not that we would even be 'successful...' Luke writes, "Pray for the Lord to send laborers,"... and so He does. Perhaps it's you men who will preach and teach as pastors. Perhaps it's you young ladies who will see to the mercy arm of the Lord's church in diaconal ministry. We pray that the Lord will send laborers to provide us with the eternal Gifts of our Gracious God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-First Saturday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 19

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 22 - Psalm 34:1-4, 17; antiphon: Psalm 34:18

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

*The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.
(Psalm 34:18)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The beauty of Holy Scripture is that it clearly tells us who God saves... the broken, the weak, the weary, the downtrodden, the sick, and the dying... just to name a few. Too often, though, we hear those around us stating things like: "God is worthy of our praise," "Praise the Lord always," "Make a joyful noise,"... and so on. Often enough, though, these quippy truisms fall flat... after all, we sinners still live in a fallen and sinful world.

Praise is a wonderful thing, but we live in an age where our understanding of this word has unfortunately affected our theology. For example, many expect praise for doing the things that they ought to be doing. How often have you sought accolades for cleaning your room or rearranging the desk in your office? Twenty-eight years ago, right around 1996 (ancient history to most of you), athletes were 'awarded' ribbons just for participating... praise was given just because you tried and gave it your all. This way of thinking is corrosive and exceedingly terrible in the regular world, but in many ways, it's infiltrated theology... many in 2024 believe that God is pleased with us just because of the effort we put in. Others believe they are entitled to the Gifts that God gives and are moved to praise God only when their needs are met.

David writes Psalm 34 for our benefit and to reveal to us that praise is rightly given to God, not because He wants or needs it from us. He doesn't want our praise so He can reward the one who praises the most... David says that we praise God continually because He never stops giving! He never ceases to give us all of the things that are most needful. Notice also... David writes that although we might praise God for what He's done for us individually, there is all the more joy when we praise God together in the wonderful realization that He's bought us back from sin and death, too! We praise Him because we, in our sin, know that we deserve nothing but eternal death and condemnation... yet the judgment we've received from Him is this: on account of Christ and for His sake, we are judged NOT GUILTY... righteous on account of Christ. Like prisoners set free from shackles and certain death, we rejoice together at our amazing good fortune... as those once dead in sin, we rejoice as the living in Christ who has given us life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 20

Today's Reading: Mark 10:23-31

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

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:25-27)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. You may have sung the hymn "What is the Word to Me" before. I used to think it was a question. It's a statement of faith. "What is the word to me With all its vaunted pleasure When You, and You alone, Lord Jesus, are my treasure!" (LSB 730:1)

Truth is, it is easier to believe in God's love when you have what the world calls "treasure"—when you have money and everyone else loves you, or when you are getting "A's" in everything and are always knocking it out of the park. But what about those times when you are not? What about those times when you are poor, and it seems like no one likes you? When you are not getting good grades and are always failing at everything? What about those times when all you see are your sins, and you can't find any reason at all to believe in God's love? What then?

Jesus. That's what then. Jesus on the cross for you. Jesus in your Baptism for you. Jesus in holy Absolution for you. Jesus in the sermon and in the Word for you. Jesus in the Supper for you. Jesus is how God calls you treasure, His treasure. This Jesus is how God saves you from all your sins. This Jesus is how God comes to you and declares you righteous in His sight and as His dear child.

If this salvation depended on you, it wouldn't be possible. Thank God His salvation does not depend on us at all. It depends on Jesus. Jesus only. Jesus always. Jesus period. Not everyone else loving you, but God loving you. Not you saving the day, but God saving the day for you. Not in anyone having what the world calls treasure, but in God having what He calls treasure— you.

Jesus not only makes this salvation possible; He makes it yours. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O God, Your divine wisdom sets in order all things in heaven and on earth. Put away from us all things hurtful and give us those things that are beneficial for us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Twenty-Second Monday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 21

Today's Reading: Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 20:1-20; Matthew 15:21-39

As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. (Ecclesiastes 5:15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Does someone need to buy Solomon a Snickers bar? Why all the doom and gloom? The country singer who "never saw no hearse pullin' no U-Haul" couldn't hold a candle to Solomon today. But it is not doom and gloom Solomon is preaching. He is preaching faith and life because Solomon is preaching Jesus.

From clothing and shoes to house and home, food and drink to good government and good weather, land and animals to family and friends, Solomon says it all comes from our heavenly Father. But Solomon also knows what St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians centuries later: "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Solomon preaches about how this life is unpredictable. One day, you can be sitting on top of the world, and the next day, the world can be sitting on top of you. It's vanity, he says, a great evil. But that is where the promise of Jesus' death on the cross comes in. The cross is where you are promised your identity in this life and the next: God's own dear children.

Whether you are on top of the world or the world is on top of you, Solomon says not only is your heavenly Father there and in control for you, He has placed you right where He wants you and is smiling on you the whole time. Why? Because you never sin? No, but because He is your Father. That's why. Your sins do not own you anymore. Your sins do not, cannot, define you now. They lost that power over you when Jesus died for them on the cross.

Whether you accumulate a lot or nothing at all in this life, you can smile and rejoice, too, because God's got this. And He's got you. With Jesus washed onto you in your Baptism, proclaimed over all your sins in His Word, given to you at His Supper, your life will not, cannot, end now. You are God's dear child. He loves you. So you need not be afraid of today or any other day. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The world seeks after wealth And all that mammon offers Yet never is content Though gold should fill its coffers. I have a higher good, Content with it I'll be: My Jesus is my wealth. What is the world to me! (LSB 730:3)

The Twenty-Second Tuesday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 22

Today's Reading: Hebrews 4:1-13, 14-16

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 21:1-23; Deuteronomy 22:1-24:9; Matthew 16:1-12

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. As with Israel of old, the promises God makes with us seem too good to be true. When we die, we will not die but live forever. When we face His judgment, God will find no sin at all to accuse or condemn us. Does God even know us?

When God calls out to “strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience (Hebrews 4:11),” He is calling us to ignore every other voice but the one calling us back to our Baptism into Christ. For God knows how many our sins are, how overwhelming our guilt is, how insurmountable the odds of us doing anything to help ourselves in His judgment. Either Jesus saves us all the way, or we will not be saved.

In his commentary on Galatians, Luther writes, “I remember how Doctor Staupitz used to say to me: ‘I have promised God a thousand times that I would become a better man, but I never kept my promise. From now on I am not going to make any more vows. Experience has taught me that I cannot keep them. Unless God is merciful to me for Christ’s sake and grants unto me a blessed departure, I shall not be able to stand before Him.’” Luther goes on to point out how this was “a God-pleasing despair. For no true believer trusts in his own righteousness, but says with David, ‘If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?’” (Ps. 130:3).

What we need from the throne of grace is not more time or energy. For poor, miserable sinners who ever offend God and justly deserve His temporal and eternal punishment, what we need, what truly helps us, is the grace from above that says, “I love you. I forgive you. I got this. And true to My Jesus, true to My Word, I save you.”

But that is the promise God makes with Jesus on the cross for you, with Jesus in your Baptism for you, with Jesus on your pastor’s lips for you, and with Jesus at His Supper for you. Yes, your rest, too, has been won. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The world seeks to be praised And honored by the mighty Yet never once reflects That they are frail and flighty. But what I truly prize Above all things is He, My Jesus, He alone. What is the world to me! (LSB 730:2)

Saint James of Jerusalem, Brother of Jesus and Martyr

OCTOBER 23

Today's Reading: Matthew 13:54-58

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

Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him. (Matthew 13:56-57)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. We would have taken offense, too. Imagine being raised in a house where mom and dad thought the oldest hung the moon. No, I mean, literally hung the moon. It might have been hard enough with Jesus always on the honor roll, winning the Christian Citizenship award all the time, and being the envy of every other parent. But "Hanger of Moon and Stars" was a bridge too far. "And they took offense at him."

On this day, the Church celebrates the life of St. James of Jerusalem, Brother of Jesus and Martyr. Why? Because of the grace of God. For despite all the offense James had taken toward his Brother (John 7:3-5), the risen Jesus appeared to him first, before any of the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:7), calling James to faith in Him as his Savior, too. What grace.

Jesus does the same for you. Despite all the offense you take toward Him, Jesus comes to you every day in the promise of your Baptism, calling you to faith in Him as your Savior. Despite the offense you take toward Him, Jesus comes to you in the absolutions and sermons you hear from your pastor, calling you to faith in Him as your Savior. And, despite all the offense you and I take toward Him every day, Jesus still comes to us in the Holy Supper, calling us to faith in Him as our Savior, too, "for you, for the forgiveness of sins."

Jesus knows the indignation in our own hearts, all the offense we take over how He rules and governs this life. He knows our own stubbornness to believe that our Big Brother really is Who He says He is. It's why the church sets aside special days like these: to remind everyone that He gets us. And not just that He gets us, but to remind us that Jesus never stops coming to us and calling us to faith in Him as our Savior, too.

What grace. And James would be the first to say, this Jesus, this grace, is for everyone. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

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

The Twenty-Second Thursday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 24

Today's Reading: Catechism - Table of duties: To Children

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

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." (Ephesians 6:1-3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. And you thought the Bible was just for old people. No, it's for young people, too, even children. That's because what God has done for the oldest, He has also done for the youngest.

Earlier in Ephesians, St. Paul writes to the baptized, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him" (Ephesians 1:3-4). "In Him," or "in the Lord" is what changes everything for you and me. And that is where God placed us when we were baptized. At the Font, God washed you "in the Lord," declaring you "holy and blameless before Him." In fact, at the Font, God "made us alive together with Christ" and "seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:5-6). Baptized children are in the heavens now, seated with God, in Christ, "holy and blameless before Him!"

Baptized children, then, are not lacking in any spiritual blessing. That is why St. Paul calls even children now to acts of kindness and love, beginning at home with their nearest neighbors, Mom and Dad. This is what it means to live out your baptismal identity as God's child. There is no work for you to do to become "holy and blameless" before your Father in heaven. You are already that every day— so promises your Baptism into Christ. You can turn to your neighbor in love, beginning at home, not to become something you are not, but because of the something or someone God has already declared you to be "in the Lord." His child.

As your proud Father in heaven, God rejoices over you as you do your chores at home, study your homework, clean your rooms, play nice with each other, and obey your parents. "In the Lord" is the key. For God does not rejoice simply because of the work that is being done. He rejoices because of the ones who are doing the work: you. That is God's mercy, God's love for you, "in the Lord." In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Our works cannot salvation gain; They merit only endless pain. Forgive us, Lord! To Christ we flee, Who pleads for us endlessly. Have mercy, Lord! (LSB 581:12)

The Twenty-Second Friday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 25

Today's Reading: Matthew 17:14-27

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

What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?" And when he said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. (Matthew 17:25-26)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It sounds too good to be true, but that does not mean that it's not true. That's just the nature of the gospel. It defies all human reason and thought because the gospel is for those who cannot pay for it, not for those who can. It's for the unrighteous, not the righteous. The gospel is for you.

The gospel is for you because Jesus places no burden or tax on you being in His Father's kingdom. His death lifted every burden and paid every tax for you. Beware of anyone, then, who would want to turn faith into the only burden or tax demanded of you. Faith will quickly become just another burden or tax you cannot fully pay. Jesus says, "If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to here,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20-21). Like the apostles, then, all we can confess is, "No wonder I am always crashing into mountains." "I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

Like the apostles, we have an imperfect faith. But also, like the apostles, we have a perfect Savior. Jesus' death on the cross declares us fully righteous in God's sight and completely holy in His judgment. Jesus' death on the cross is why God does not keep score but sets all our sins aside and declares us heirs in His eternal kingdom. Baptized into Jesus, pardoned by His Word, fed His Body and Blood, God has moved mountains Himself and set us free from the greatest mountain of all, ourselves.

"O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" (Matthew 17:17) Hear in that cry the call of the One Who moves mountains for you, for there is no burden now, no tax at all. God requires nothing from you for you to be or to remain in His kingdom. Jesus' death lifted every burden and paid every tax for you. That is the promise of the gospel. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God's own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ! He, because I could not pay it, Gave my full redemption price. Do I need earth's treasures many? I have one worth more than any That brought me salvation free Lasting to eternity! (LSB 594:1)

The Twenty-Second Saturday after Pentecost

OCTOBER 26

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 23 - Psalm 131; antiphon: Psalm 130:1-2
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 28:1-22; Matthew 18:1-20

O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! (Psalm 130:1-2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Psalm 130 (all eight verses, not just the two from which the antiphon for tomorrow's Introit is derived) is popular at funerals. It's a psalm that pastors often pray out loud as the procession moves from the hearse to the graveside.

There was a country song released recently called "I Wish Grandpas Never Died." I wish that, too. Most painful of all, though, is when a child dies. Why would God allow something like that to happen? Psalm 131 (tomorrow's Introit) gives us wise counsel. "O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me" (verse 1). Like a weaned child trusting its mother, the psalmist then cries out, "O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore" (verse 3).

There are many things in life we will never understand, and the death of a child is certainly one of them. But whether we understand something or not, it is always good to "trust in the LORD." Why? Because with the LORD "there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption" (Psalm 130:7). In His Word, God has revealed to us that He did not put Jesus on the cross only to leave us at the mercy of things we don't understand in this life. He put Jesus on the cross for you and me so that the only hands we are at the mercy of now in this life and the next are His. That's a good place to be because those hands were nailed to the cross for you and me to save us from all our sins.

Along with tomorrow's psalmist, we, too, can "wait for the LORD." For in His own timing, perhaps not until eternity, He will make it clear to us how He was always present, always good and merciful in all He sent or allowed in this life. In "the depths," that seems impossible to believe. But the promise of your Baptism, the forgiveness you will hear from your pastor tomorrow, and the redemption you will receive in Communion all promise you that the Lord's got this. The Lord's got you. And there is nothing at all to fear. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, Let this blest assurance control, That Christ has regarded my helpless estate And hath shed His own Blood for my soul. It is well with my soul, It is well, it is well with my soul. (LSB 763:2)

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