



REFLECTIONS

The Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost -
The Last Saturday of the Church Year
October 27 - November 30, 2024



OCTOBER 27 - NOVEMBER 30

This season's Reflections were written by

*Rev. Bradley Drew, pastor of Mount Olive Lutheran Church in
Metairie, LA*

*Rev. Warren Graff, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in
Albuquerque, NM*

*Rev. Caleb Weight, associate pastor of Peace in Christ Lutheran
Church in Hermantown, MN*



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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 Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost

OCTOBER 27, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 10:46-52

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

And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; He is calling you." (Mark 10:48-49)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. If you ever want to stop Jesus in His tracks, just cry out to Him for mercy. You can practice that today when the Church sings, "Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us." I usually sing that at the top of my lungs, not because I think the louder I sing it, the more likely Jesus will hear me. Jesus hears me and you because we are His.

I will cry "out all the more" for mercy because I can still hear the world, the devil, and my own conscience telling me, "Be silent! Who do you think you are, pastor, crying out to Jesus for mercy? You are not worthy to do that. Crawl back under whatever rock you crawled out from and leave Jesus alone."

To silence such fears, Jesus says to the blind man and to us, "Your faith has made you well." Jesus doesn't say this because faith deserves some credit— Jesus deserves all the credit. Jesus says this to tell us our faith in Him to have mercy is never wrong, is never misguided. Mercy is why the Father sends Jesus to us.

Mercy is why the Father sends Jesus to the cross for you. His cross sets you free from everything that makes you unworthy. Mercy is why the Father sends Jesus to you in your Baptism. Your Baptism promises you that whatever rock you crawled out from under has been washed away by His blood. Mercy is why the Father sends Jesus to you in your pastor and at the Holy Supper today. Jesus wants to say to you, too, "I love you. I forgive you. And I save you. Go your way; your faith (your Jesus!) has made you well."

You want to stop Jesus in His tracks? Just cry out to Him for mercy. You can practice that today when the Church sings the Kyrie, "Lord, have mercy upon us." In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, the helper of all who call on You, have mercy on us and give us eyes of faith to see Your Son so that we may follow Him on the way to eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saint Simon and Saint Jude the Apostles

OCTOBER 28, 2024

Today's Reading: John 15:12-16, 17-21

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

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. (John 15:18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Why did the world hate the apostles Simon and Jude? Their names are tied together on the church calendar today because, according to tradition, they were both martyred on the same day. Why did the world hate them to death? Because they were faithful to Jesus' doctrine. That's why.

Simon and Jude both taught that God's salvation does not depend on sinners choosing Jesus but on Jesus choosing them. They taught that God does not love us because we love Him. We love God because God first loved us. Faithful to their Friend's doctrine, Simon and Jude both taught that we are not saved by the help of grace; we are saved by grace itself. That's a huge difference.

Had Simon and Jude taught that God only did His part in our salvation by voting "yes," and the devil did his part by voting "no," but now we must do our part and cast the deciding vote— the world would have loved them. Their Jesus would not condemn the world's works. He would reward them.

Simon and Jude were Jesus' friends because Jesus Himself is the Friend of sinners. And as friends of the Friend of sinners, Simon and Jude did what Jesus commanded them. They weren't going to hide "this little gospel light of mine." They would remain faithful to the Jesus God sent for us.

That Jesus went to the cross for you to cancel your vote. You are saved by that Jesus. That Jesus comes to you every day in your Baptism to keep calling you His friend. You are saved by that Jesus. That Jesus comes to you in the pardon you hear from your fellow friends in Christ and from your pastor. You are saved by that Jesus. That Jesus comes to you at Holy Communion to say to you, "I choose you. I still call you friend. I forgive you all your sins. And the only vote my Father ever listens to now is Mine."

Thank God for Simon and Jude. For in their being chosen by Jesus, they have taught us God loves and chooses poor, miserable sinners just like us. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Third Tuesday After Pentecost

OCTOBER 29, 2024

Today's Reading: Hebrews 7:23-28

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

Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Perhaps you have heard it said of someone, "That's their life. It's what they live for." It could be a boyfriend or a girlfriend. It could be fishing, school, or sports. There's just something about those things that seem to define who they are.

When it comes to Jesus, what is that? You're not going to believe this, but it's you. The writer to the Hebrews tells us Jesus "always lives to make intercession" for you. That is why, as your High Priest with God, Jesus is able to save you "to the uttermost."

You think your sins will finally damn you. Your sins lost that power over you when Jesus died for them on the cross. You think your sins are why God will finally forsake you someday. Your sins lost that power over you when Jesus died for them. You think your sins are why God and you are as close as the East is to the West. Your sins lost that power over you when Jesus died for them. And risen now from the dead, Jesus lives to keep it that way, for you.

In Confirmation class, you learned about Jesus' humiliation, that He was "conceived... born... suffered... crucified, died and was buried." You learned this was designed by God to save you "to the uttermost."

You also learned about Jesus' exultation and that "He descended into Hell... rose again from the dead... ascended into heaven... sits at the right hand of God... (and) will come to judge the living and the dead." You were taught that this, too, was designed by God to save you "to the uttermost" (Romans 5:9-10).

This is the promise God makes with you every day in your baptism. It's the promise you hear in His Word. It's the promise that is given to you at the Lord's Supper, "for you, for the forgiveness of sins." Yes, Jesus lives to save even you "to the uttermost."

You ask, "How far can Jesus save a poor, miserable sinner like me?" The writer to the Hebrews gives you the answer. That's His life. It's what Jesus lives for. Jesus lives for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Third Wednesday After Pentecost

OCTOBER 30, 2024

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 31:7-9

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

For thus says the Lord: "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, 'O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel.'" (Jeremiah 31:7)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Who are you? Forget for a second how you would answer that question. How would God answer it? You are holy to God, righteous in His judgment, an heir to eternal life. That is how God would answer that question.

It was that same promise to Israel of old that prompted the prophet to tell her to "shout aloud with gladness." Not with fear, but gladness, because it seemed so strange to them, too. Not many years before, the Assyrians had carried many of their people away into captivity. Now, the Babylonians were doing the same. It seemed like Israel was defeated and that her people were conquered.

Yet, notice God still calls them "the chief of the nations." They certainly didn't look the part, did they? That's like God calling poor, miserable sinners holy in His sight. That's like God declaring those who struggle with sin and all its ugly consequences righteous in His judgment. That's like God calling those who ever offend Him and who justly deserve His temporal and eternal punishment His children, now.

But that is the promise of the cross. That is the promise God makes with you from the cross, every day, in your Baptism. It's the promise you hear in God's Word of pardon. And it's the promise God places into you at the Holy Supper with Jesus' Body and Blood.

Imagine a great company who had been carried far away, among whom many were blind and lame, some even pregnant, being brought back with tears of joy in their eyes, never once stumbling as they crossed over mountain, desert and sea. That is God's promise to you, to all sinners, with the death of His own Son upon the cross. Not only will God be returning you safely to Himself, holy and righteous in His sight, He already has!

Who are you? What matters is not how you answer that question. What matters most is how God answers it. You are holy to Him. You are righteous in His judgment. You are His child. You are an heir to eternal life. That is how God answers that question. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Reformation Day

OCTOBER 31, 2024

Today's Reading: John 8:31-36

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 32:28-52 and 33:1-29; Matthew 20:17-34

The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:35-36)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Today, we give thanks to God for the Lutheran Reformation, for like an angel flying in midheaven (Revelation 14:6), God used Luther and the Lutheran Reformation to restore the promise of His gospel to a fallen and broken world.

Fallen and broken, everyone is a slave to sin. Jesus says so. "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." If you have committed sin today, and you certainly have, then you are a slave to sin. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Truth is, you and I will be slaves to sin all the way to the final breath we take in this life.

But, as also taught by Luther and the Lutheran Reformation, it is also every bit as true you and I are free now. Jesus says so. "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Not kind of free. "Free indeed." "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Truth is, all the way to the final breath we take in this life, you and I are no longer owned or defined by our sins anymore. Jesus has set us free from that.

"But I still sin!" Yes, you do. But Jesus still remains in the house forever, so forever, you still remain free. That is the promise of Jesus' death for you on the cross. It's the freedom God washes you with in your Baptism every day, speaks to you in His Word every day, and delivers to you at the Altar with Jesus' Body and Blood.

Your sins do not own you. Your sins do not define you. Your sins will never tell God who or whose you are. You are His now. And you are declared by God Himself to be free, eternally holy, and righteous in His judgment.

Abide in His Word, freed one! From cover to cover, Jesus is the truth that sets you free. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

All Saints Day

NOVEMBER 1, 2024

Today's Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

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

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:12)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When Peter made the good confession that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus said, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). When was Peter in heaven? Peter was with Jesus, and where Jesus is, that’s where the blessings of heaven are.

To be “blessed” simply means God has acted and given you Jesus. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” because God has acted and given you Jesus. That is why the kingdom is yours.

“Blessed are those who mourn,” “blessed are the meek,” and “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” because God has acted and given them Jesus. That is why your tears will be wiped away as you inherit the earth, satisfied with the fulfillment of all God’s promises to you with Jesus.

“Blessed are the merciful,” “blessed are the pure in heart,” and “blessed are the peacemakers” because God has acted and given them Jesus. That is why, Jesus is why, you will receive mercy, see God, and be called a child of God.

And while apart from the first and last beatitudes, the ones in between are future blessings where neither moth nor rust can destroy or thieves break in and steal (Matthew 6:19-21), they certainly are present blessings as well. It is just that one day, we will get to enjoy them in all their fullness. And that brings the beatitudes full circle.

In a world that wants nothing to do with Jesus as our righteousness before God, Christians suffer persecution. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,” and “blessed are you when others revile you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Today, on All Saints Day, the Church remembers those who have gone before us in the Lord because “in Jesus” is where all the blessings of heaven are. You ask, “O, when the saints go marching in,” how do I know I will “be in that number?” The Jesus God has given you in His Word, in His Water, and at His Supper. That’s how. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Third Saturday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 2, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 89:1-4; antiphon: Psalm 9:1

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

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all Your wonderful deeds. (Psalm 9:1)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The story is told of a woman wanting to look her best for her daughter's wedding. "Don't worry, ma'am," said the hairdresser, "I'll do you justice." "Justice!" cried the lady. "I don't need justice! I need mercy!"

An Old Testament prophet cries out to God that in wrath He would remember mercy (Habakkuk 3:2). That mercy is the "steadfast love" the psalmist is singing about in tomorrow's Introit. "I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord, forever (89:1)."

It is "the steadfast love of the Lord" that sent Jesus to the cross for you to suffer and die for your sins. It is "the steadfast love of the Lord" that sends Jesus in your Baptism to keep the promise of His cross a present reality in the face of all your sins today. It is "the steadfast love of the Lord" that sends Jesus in the absolutions and sermons you hear from your pastor. And it is "the steadfast love of the Lord" that sends Jesus with the bread and wine at Holy Communion tomorrow, "for you, for the forgiveness of sins."

After all, God made a covenant with His "chosen one," with "David my servant," that He would "establish" his "offspring forever," and "build" his "throne for all generations" (Psalm 89:3-4). That is what will be happening in tomorrow's Divine Service. For that Offspring is Jesus, and that throne is God's throne of grace. God is fulfilling His covenant with David, establishing Jesus, David's Son and David's Lord, forever on David's throne.

That is good news for all of us because God knows our sins. He knows the dreaded fear we have because of our sins. But tomorrow, because of Jesus, God will be calling us to a lively trust, a joyful confidence in His steadfast love for all sinners. Because the justice God will promise tomorrow is the mercy He promised and accomplished for you the first time He sent Jesus. And it will be the same "steadfast love" the Lord sends and accomplishes for you when He sends Jesus on the Last Day.

"The steadfast love of the Lord" "will be built up forever." Thank God, because that means salvation for all of us. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 3, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 12:28-37

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

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:28-31)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. After His Baptism, where the Father publicly declared Him to be "My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17), Jesus was in the wilderness where Satan tempted Him to deny His Father: "The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'" (Mathew 4:8-10).

Jesus has kept the Great Commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

In this, Jesus also keeps the second Great Commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). For Satan was tempting Jesus to grasp control of all people of "all the kingdoms of the world." We don't even need to pause to reflect on the fact that Satan was, of course, lying. Satan had not, in fact, been given authority over all the people of this world. We may focus instead on how Jesus refuses to grasp power and control over all people (cf. Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus receives people from His Father as gifts (John 17:6). Rather than exercising power and control, Jesus desires to serve us with all the gifts the Father has given to Him (cf. Matthew 20:28).

Jesus has kept the two Great Commandments. He has loved His Father with all His heart, and, receiving us as gifts from His Father, He has loved us, His neighbor, even over Himself.

Jesus has kept the two Great Commandments. That is righteousness. Now, as He serves us with all His Father's gifts, Jesus bestows that righteousness upon us freely and abundantly. In all of this, His Father is well-pleased with Him. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Fourth Monday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 4, 2024

Today's Reading: Deuteronomy 6:1-9

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

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. How will you know God? Just look around and see the world struggling to know God, or to find God, or to experience God, or to figure God out. We can see some looking for God by climbing a mountain to meet a spiritual guru or trying to find Him through some sort of spiritual practice such as yoga (which is not truly "spiritual" at all since it's the practice of body and mind and movement techniques), or to locate God by some sort of worldly government or movement, or even by trying to expand the brain spiritually with the use of drugs. It goes on and on. You can probably think of several other ways our generation tries to locate God.

How will you know God? Moses says: "Hear, O Israel ..." It's by hearing. It's through your ears. What goes into ears, of course, are words. You will know God by hearing His words spoken into your ears. Take the words Moses tells us, and cherish them, memorize them ("these words ... shall be on your heart"). Write them down. Speak them to one another. Keep them in your conversation. Speak them with your children when you're going down the road.

In the way the world sees things, we have a strange God. A God comprehended by high-order thinking, a rigidly disciplined lifestyle, or deeply-felt spiritual yearnings—that God our world would accept. But a God comprehended and held onto by hearing His words and holding on to those words in faith—that God is foolishness to our world.

But God comes by hearing. The word to hear is the Gospel, the Word of Christ. This Word forgives sins. It declares you righteous. It cleanses the conscience. It creates faith. As Paul tells us, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:14, 17). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Fourth Tuesday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 5, 2024

Today's Reading: Hebrews 9:11-22

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

How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. (Hebrews 9:14-17)

A man sits in a room with twelve other men. The twelve are legal witnesses. This is serious business. The man knows that he will shortly die. He has assembled the legal witnesses in order to establish his Last Will and Testament. Upon his death, his legally binding Last Will and Testament will be put into effect, and his wealth will be distributed to his beneficiaries, as he established in his testimony to his legal witnesses.

The man on His way to His death is Jesus. Into this death, He was baptized to be the sacrificial "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

His wealth to be distributed? His Body and Blood ("Take, eat ... Drink ye all of it ... this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" [Matthew 26:26-28 KJV]). The beneficiaries? They're the sinners for whom He will shortly die.

When you go to the Lord's Supper, you are receiving the Last Will and Testament Jesus made before He died. As Hebrews 9 says, a Testament is put into force only upon the death of the Testator. Jesus is the Testator. He then died. His death puts His Testament into force until He comes again. So take and eat, take and drink; it is His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of your sins. Because He is bodily resurrected and living, His wealth, His Body and Blood, never runs out.

By the way, some Bible translations weakly use the word covenant instead of testament. So why does your Pastor always repeat Jesus' command as "this is the New Testament in My Blood" when consecrating the Lord's Supper? To answer that, look at Hebrews 9:16-17, where Scripture makes clear that the Greek word is here, emphasizing that it is the legal testament made by a man before his death. In this case, the man making the testament is Jesus; the beneficiary of the wealth is you. Your sin is forgiven. For Jesus will never abandon the promise of his Body and Blood. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Fourth Wednesday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 6, 2024

Today's Reading: Matthew 23:13-39

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

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matthew 23:25-28)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. How do we want to use the holy Law? We might think of having the Law as either a puppy or a wolf. A puppy we can control; a wolf kills us.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law did teach the Law. But it wasn't a killing Law. It was law as a way to act right and look clean on the outside, like cleaning a cup to look good while ignoring the poison inside. That's having the Law as a puppy. It won't kill you. At the end of the day, you end up using the Law the way you want.

In this way, using the Law to outwardly guide your life will make it appear clean, letting you hope that it makes you clean inside, too. But the Law won't cleanse the conscience. The inside remains unclean.

The Lord uses the Law as a wolf coming at the sinner with a killing accusation. You can't control the Law, finding the use for it you want. Rather, the Law puts to death the Old Adam. When the Old Man of sin falls dead to the Law, then the Gospel cleanses the conscience, forgiving the sin. In this way, the sinner is made clean not by cleaning up the outside but by the Lord speaking the Gospel to him. This is the new, cleansed, inner man, the man of faith, the New Adam.

Jesus says to the teachers of the law, “First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.” This is Jesus' gift to you: He cleanses your inside, your conscience, by His Gospel. He justifies you. Then, from a clean heart, your works are clean as they are done in faith toward Him.

And when your works aren't clean (which is, after all, every day), it is, again, repentance. Repentance is the Law accusing you, then the Gospel turning you back to Jesus, forgiving you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Fourth Thursday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 7, 2024

Today's Reading: Catechism - Table of duties: To workers of all kinds
Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 11:1-23; Jeremiah 12:1-19:15; Matthew 24:1-28

To Workers of all kinds. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever God he does, whether he is slave or free. Ephesians 6:5-8

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Are we forgetting a man in the boat? When Jesus calls James and John to leave their fishing business to follow him as Apostles, we might forget who else was in that boat (See Mark 1:16-20).

Zebedee, their father, was in that boat, too. He was not called to be an Apostle. What became of him? The text tells us Zebedee was left in the boat with "the hired servants." This was a business—there were employees, and all that entails.

Jesus called Twelve men as Apostles. But other Christians were not called to be Apostles. Jesus didn't forget them. Every Christian has several vocations. Zebedee, left in the boat, had the vocation of catching fish and even of running a business with employees. And we can add to Zebedee's God-given vocations such things as father, husband, neighbor, and more.

That's how Jesus takes care of us and our families in this world. He first provides the blood of redemption on the cross, forgiving our sins and cleansing our conscience. But our Lord also provides for our daily needs. He sets us in vocations, whether catching fish or building boats or many other vocations (carpenter, engineer, doctor, nurse, teacher, police officer, and many, many more you might think of). This is Jesus using our hands to provide for our neighbors.

When we see how our Lord honors us by using our hands and minds and bodies to serve family and neighbor, we can then have much joy in our labor (even when that labor is difficult and not very fun), and, as the Catechism puts it, "serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men." For Jesus loves all people and honors us by using us as His hands to serve our neighbor. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Fourth Friday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 8, 2024

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 20:1-18

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

O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me... O Lord of hosts, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause. Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers. (Jeremiah 20:7, 12-13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Are we ready to learn how to pray from Jeremiah? Here's an odd thing about prayer: we must be taught it (cf. Luke 11:1). It doesn't come to us naturally. That's because the sinful flesh wants to justify itself by the Law (cf. Luke 10:29). And a self-justifying sinner sees no need to make an appeal to God. So, where will we learn to pray? The Lord's Prayer, of course. Then also from the prophets and Psalms.

When we learn to pray from Jeremiah, we find the prophet speaking to Holy God in a way that seems almost insane. Jeremiah's prayer: "O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me... For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. (Jeremiah 20:7-8)"

This is the voice of faith. Jeremiah calls on the LORD's Name (the word LORD in our translations is actually the Hebrew word for the Lord's name, Y-H-W-H; the Lord makes an oath by His Name, giving His promise—the Gift of the Gospel). Jeremiah intercedes to the throne in Heaven that the Father's will would be manifested so that the Lord's servant would live in peace.

Shall we pray Jeremiah's prayer? Yes. In praying to our Father, we don't paper over the affliction we have in life as his people. And as long as we are in our sinful flesh (i.e., until we die and are with our Lord, or Jesus first comes again on the Last Day, Matthew 24:29-31), the Lord's Word which justifies us and makes us His people, will bring us into conflict with the world, with our own sinful flesh, and with the demons (who do not want us to hear the Gospel, but want to tempt us to try to justify ourselves). Our prayer, uttered sometimes from desperation or doubt, is heard by the Lord who loves us, justifies us, and keeps us in his promise. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Fourth Saturday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 9, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 107:1-2, 41-42; antiphon: Psalm 107:8

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

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble... Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!... but he raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like flocks. The upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth. (Psalm 107:1-2, 8, 41-42)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Do you want to see the devil shut his mouth? In teaching us to pray the Lord's Prayer, Jesus gives us the Petition, "Deliver us from evil." We are praying for delivery not just from some general, abstract evil or bad stuff, but from the Evil One, from Satan. As the Large Catechism gives it, "Since the devil is not only a liar, but also a murderer (John 8:44), he constantly seeks our life. He wreaks his vengeance whenever he can afflict our bodies with misfortune and harm. Therefore, it happens that he often breaks men's necks or drives them to insanity, drowns some, and moves many to commit suicide and to many other terrible disasters. So there is nothing for us to do upon Earth but to pray against this archenemy without stopping. For unless God preserved us, we would not be safe from this enemy for an hour." (Large Catechism, 7th Petition, in Concordia, The Lutheran Confessions, CPH, 2005.)

The demons afflict our conscience, accusing us of sin (but not telling us the Gospel!) and bringing us into doubt and despair. Wouldn't it be nice to see the devil shut his mouth?

Psalm 107 gives us words extolling our Lord's steadfast love and redemption of the sinner (Psalm 107:1-2) and rejoicing in the Lord raising up sinners out of affliction and making the wicked one finally shut his mouth (Psalm 107:41-42).

What makes Satan shut his mouth? The Gospel. The Gospel is the Word of Christ crucified, of all sins forgiven, and everlasting life. The Gospel rips all accusations out of the mouth of Satan, for where sins are forgiven, who can accuse?

While we still live in our sinful flesh, of course, we will continue to be under the accusation of the Law, terrified by Satan. Yet, the Gospel creates the New Man (Paul calls him the New Adam). The New Man, the life of faith, hears the promise of the Gospel. In that promise, we know the defeat of Satan now by faith; in the resurrection, we will know that defeat of Satan by sight. He will have no more voice by which to accuse and afflict us, bringing us into shame. His mouth is shut In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Father in Heaven, let your Name be holy among us as you make us holy with your Son's Gospel. Deliver us from the evil one, and lead us away from all temptation. Amen.

The Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 10, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 12:38-44

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

And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. (Mark 12:38-42)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The widow enters the scene. The usual Temple characters are present, too, but Jesus draws our eyes to the widow. The widow is not to be left alone. Moses had instructed the Israelites how they were to love the Lord God ("with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind") and to love their neighbor ("love your neighbor as yourself"). In the Commandments, the Lord places you as His servant to care for your neighbor, especially for the weak and helpless. Moses taught how the fatherless, the orphans, the sojourners, and the widows are not to be left to fend for themselves. Deuteronomy 24:19, 21 states:

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands... When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. The sojourner, the fatherless, the widow—don't leave them to fend for themselves. Be with them and help them. Why? Moses tells us, "Because you, too, were a slave before you were redeemed" (Deuteronomy 24:18).

The widow shows up. She is right where she belongs— at the location where the Lord is taking care of the fatherless, the widow, and those who are alone. Those who belong to Christ Jesus are the Israel of God, says Paul (Galatians 6:16). The Word comes to the church. The stranger, the fatherless, and the widow come to the church. Be with them: help them. These words our Lord gives us for one other: comfort, console, suffer with, encourage, build-up. For we are redeemed by Christ Jesus; we are his body, the Church. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Fifth Monday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 11, 2024

Today's Reading: 1 Kings 17:8-16

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

Then the word of the Lord came to [Elijah], "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." And she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die." And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth." (1 Kings 17:8-14)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. This Zarephath widow expected death. The famine was severe. The prophet Elijah had announced the cause of the deadly drought: Israel had been unfaithful to her Lord. Elijah gave the warning, calling Israel to repentance. Still, Israel continued to go to the gods of the Canaanites— gods that were supposed to guarantee favorable seasons, steady rains, and bountiful harvests.

The woman knew what was happening. She's from Zarephath, a town in the unclean region. But the Lord's Word travels. God won't be mocked. His people, to whom He had given this good land, had turned from Him to man-made gods. Zarephath, home of the Canaanite gods, would suffer, too. The Zarephath widow spoke truthfully in saying, "We will eat, and then we will die!"

But now she will know God not for His retribution but for His grace. Elijah brings the word of promise. By this Word, the Lord not only honors the widow by appointing her as His servant to feed His prophet, but He also brings her into the life of faith. She, too, is now an Israelite. She, too, now belongs to the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. (Take a look at the widow's statement of faith at 1 Kings 17:24) In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Bless our pastors, Lord, with your Word. Let them rejoice in preaching your cross to sinners whom you love. Let them rightly accuse the old Adam with the Law and raise up the new Adam with your Gospel so that your people may be cleansed, strengthened, and comforted with your Word. Amen.

The Twenty-Fifth Tuesday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 12, 2024

Today's Reading: Hebrews 9:24-28

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

For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf... But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Hebrews 9:24, 26b)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Is there anything worse than standing at someone's face when you're in trouble? Maybe you had to tell your dad you broke the car window with a baseball or tell your mom that you dropped her pottery bowl on the ceramic tile floor.

There's nothing worse than having to stand at someone's face in judgment. But then there's Holy God! To stand at his face, where's relief from that? Wait. Someone's standing at the face of God! It's Jesus. Holy and blameless. He stands with no sin of His own. Why is He standing there? The Letter to the Hebrew Christians tells of Jesus standing at the Father's face on our behalf (Hebrews 9:24). He's at His Father's face not for Himself, but for you, for me!

Are we troubled? Is Satan able to twist your conscience with guilt? He keeps bringing up your malice and inadequacies. Are the demons covering you in shame for what you have done, but also for what has been done to you? You have someone standing in your place before the Father. The Apostle John says this: You have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous! (1 John 2:1-2) The Apostle Paul speaks of Jesus testifying to his Father on your behalf: Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding for you! (Romans 8:34)

What is Jesus saying on your behalf? What is His intercession for you? It is the testimony of his own blood. Jesus testifies that His sacrifice on the cross has put away your sin (Hebrews 9:26). With your sin put away, you're guilty no more. You are no longer covered in shame. Jesus covers you in the honor of His own Name. We do, indeed, stand at the face of the Father, but there's relief. By the word of Jesus, you stand before His Father with no sin, no guilt, and no shame. You are now clothed in honor— you have Jesus' Name on you! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Fifth Wednesday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 13, 2024

Today's Reading: Matthew 26:20-35

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 26:1-19; Revelation 13:1-18; Matthew 26:20-35

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the [new testament], which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is with His Apostles in the Upper Room, preparing to go to the cross to die. Three days later, He will be raised from the dead. Forty days later, He will ascend to Heaven, leaving His Apostles and His church here on Earth. Jesus is the Lord who will not leave His people alone. Ascended to Heaven, He will never not be with His church. So, on the night when He was betrayed, He gave His church a mandate. He instituted the Gift by which He would bodily be with His church until he comes again.

Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the [new testament], which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Until that day, when He comes with glory to judge both the living and the dead, He remains with His Church. He brings us again and again into His remembrance, forgiving our sin. In the midst of the church, He is with us in his Body and Blood. Among the people He loves, He is proclaiming His Father's Name (cf. Hebrews 2:11-13), cleansing us of all sin, declaring us innocent of all guilt, and covering all of our shame. Here, among us, with us, He is bestowing on us the wealth of His cross.

That's what Jesus was doing in that Upper Room with his Apostles. A Man on His way to death— He was instituting His Last Will and Testament so that upon His death, the wealth of His cross would be freely given out to His beneficiaries, to all those He calls into His Church (cf. Hebrews 9:15-16). It's His Gift. Christ instituted it. It is life itself, instituted by Christ for us Christians to eat and drink.

The sureness and certainty of this Gift depends upon Him alone. We do not make the Sacrament, nor does it derive any authority or worthiness from us. It is His Body and His Blood. Your sins are forgiven. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Twenty-Fifth Thursday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 14, 2024

Today's Reading: Catechism - Table of duties: To Employers and Supervisors
Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 29:1-19; Revelation 14:1-20; Matthew 26:36-56

Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him. (Ephesians 6:9)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It can be fun to consider the changes in descriptive language from the time of the Bible and the Catechism to our current generation.

The Bible speaks of farm and ranch life. A man's wealth was his sheep, his olive orchard, and his water wells. At the time of the writing of the Catechism (the 1500s), the descriptive titles at the workplace included master and servant. Even words such as slave had meanings ranging from household servants to indentured servants and also those slaves captured as bounty in war.

Now, we don't often speak of masters and servants. The titles might be Executive, administrative assistant, clerk, shift supervisor, project engineer, janitor, owner, or franchisee. You can probably think of many more.

The titles change (just as a farmer now plows a field with a tractor, not a pair of oxen), but we can still discern our Lord's desire for us. He gives us to love our neighbor as ourselves (e.g., Mark 12:30-31). How do we love our neighbor? Love for neighbor flows from the heart of faith— faith that clings to Jesus' love and mercy for the sinner and then brings forth the fruit of that faith in words and acts of love toward one another.

This love for neighbor has practical results in our lives. Our minds and hands produce actual, real-world benefits. This is how we may understand our vocations in life. We are the Lord's servants to our neighbor. So, if we are employees, we serve our vocation well by rejoicing in our work and being productive employees. If we are employers or supervisors, if we're given the job of boss at the workplace, then we serve our neighbors by treating our employees with respect, honoring our contract with them, and rejoicing in helping them to be productive in their employment.

The language has certainly changed since the days of speaking of master and servant, but the Lord has not changed. He still uses us in our many and various vocations to provide for our neighbors. We know that the Lord who has redeemed us with His own blood is using our lives, even our minds, and hands, to provide food and home, safety, and honor for those He loves. And our Lord loves our neighbor. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, help us walk Your servant way Wherever love may lead And, bending low, forgetting self, Each serve the other's need. (LSB 857:1)

The Twenty-Fifth Friday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 15, 2024

Today's Reading: Matthew 26:57-75

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 30:1-24; Revelation 15:1-8; Matthew 26:57-75

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean." And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:69-75)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. A great spiritual battle in the history of the world is unfolding. On the one side, Satan and the demons. Along with Satan are those who serve him as they work to bring Jesus to the cross: the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, the chief priests, Caiaphas, Herod, and, of course, Judas. On the other side is Jesus, and those who belong to Him, foremost would be His Apostles.

Of the Apostles, Peter stands out. He had promised Jesus, "Though [the other Apostles] fall away because of you, I will never fall away" (Matthew 26:33) Who can Jesus depend on? As it turns out, not Peter. This preeminent Apostle folds under pressure: "Then [Peter] began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, 'I do not know the man [Jesus].' And immediately the rooster crowed" (Matthew 26:74).

Is there any hope for Peter? If it depends on Peter, no, there is no hope. But if it depends on Jesus, there is hope. He's the One going to the cross for Peter's sin and the sin of the world. He's the One who made the promise to keep all those the Father has given to Him (John 17:6-12), and that includes Peter. For Peter, it is the Word of the cross; it is life and salvation, even over against his doubting and denial.

The Word of the cross comes to you and me. Over against our doubting and denial, we hear the Lord's promise. We hear His Word forgiving our sin, and where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. (Small Catechism, "The Benefit of the Sacrament of the Altar") In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Praise for Your great apostle So eager and so bold, Thrice falling, yet repentant, Thrice charged to feed your fold. Lord, make your pastors faithful To guard Your flock from harm, And hold them when they waver With Your almighty arm. Amen. (LSB 517:10)

The Twenty-Fifth Saturday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 16, 2024

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 26 - Ps. 48:11-14; antiphon: Mark 13:13b
Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 31:1-17, 23-34; Revelation 16:1-21; Matthew 27:1-10

*Let Mount Zion be glad! Let the daughters of Judah rejoice because of your judgments! Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever.
(Psalm 48:11-14)*

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Zion is the city of David. It's the city of promise. The Lord promised David that his throne would not end. The promise goes not just to David but to all Israelites, for from David's lineage will come forth the Messiah, the Savior.

In this way, the Canaanite woman, pleading to Jesus to help her daughter, rightly addresses Jesus as Son of David: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon" (Matthew 15:22). Psalm 48 gives us to rejoice, "Let Mount Zion be glad, let the daughters of Judah rejoice ... consider her ramparts, go through her citadels ... tell the next generation that this is God, our God, forever and ever."

The promise to Zion is "forever and ever." We don't reduce the Zion promise to a political action of establishing a powerful government in Jerusalem. The promise is that Mt. Zion will be the everlasting throne of David's greater Son, and He will be the everlasting King of Mercy for every sinner. The promise of a "forever and ever" Zion is the promise, then, of the cross. At the cross, Jesus establishes His Throne of Grace for all those who, like the Canaanite woman, turn to the Son of David for mercy.

Jesus is the Son of David. Those who belong to His cross are His "city of Zion," the city of the Living God. When Jesus called you into his Church, He gathered you into the assembly of all those who belong to Him. That is the promise of Zion brought to you and me and our families.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new [testament], and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:22-24). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Dear Jesus, Son of David, bless your holy Church on Earth. Let us be glad in the Gifts of your Church and rejoice in your judgments of salvation by which you justify us. According to your promise, keep us in the assembly of your people gathered to your Name to receive your blood of the new testament for the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

The Twenty-Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 17, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 13:1-13

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 33:1-22 and 34:1-36:32; 45:1-51:64; Matthew 27:11-32

*And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray.
(Mark 13:5)*

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There is no shortage of people who have claimed to be the Messiah throughout history. A quick Wikipedia search will bring up over forty names of people who have claimed to be some kind of "messiah." This is not a surprising thing. It is actually expected if we read the scriptures and take Jesus' words seriously. He already has warned of this. People will come and they will make false claims, not only about being the messiah but about the end times as well.

Most recently, the Eclipse brought out all the conspiracy theories and doomsday preppers on places like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. It was flooded with calls to get right with God because the time is drawing near. Clearly, the signs tell us this. Maybe you rolled your eyes at the predictions. After all, Jesus makes it clear that no one knows the day or the hour of His return except for the Father. Or maybe you found yourself struck with fear. After all, wars, national disasters, persecution— all of those things sound scary. I, for one, can admit if I had the choice, I would rather not live through wars, natural disasters, and persecution. Yet, we ought not be afraid of the things to come. Instead, we stay vigilant, discerning against the voices proclaiming false truths and listening to the Voice of Truth. Listen to Jesus and what He has to say to you.

My mind goes to the Gospel of Saint John, where Jesus speaks to His disciples. Allow these words to speak to you who find yourself worried about what the future holds. "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Christ continues to overcome the world, Christ continues to bring peace, Christ continues to give himself to you. So go where He promises to be, receive His Body and Blood, hear His Word preached, and be at peace; Jesus has overcome the world. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, by your bountiful goodness release us from the bonds of our sins, which by reason of our weakness we have brought upon ourselves, that we may stand firm until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Twenty-Sixth Monday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 18, 2024

Today's Reading: Daniel 12:1-3

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 37:1-21; Revelation 17:1-18; Matthew 27:33-56

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2) In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Here, at the end of Daniel, we have yet another vision of what the end times will bring— something that tends to bring many people fear and trepidation. But for the Christian, there is a beautiful truth here in Daniel 12 of what awaits us. Now, I know there is a lot of preaching and teaching done proclaiming that the goal of the Christian life is to “die and go to heaven,” but this isn’t what Christ’s eventual return will bring. At least, not according to Daniel.

If we remember well enough, Daniel is filled with some of our favorite Bible stories. There is the account of Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego, who were thrown into the fiery furnace, only to be joined by a fourth person, and the fire left them miraculously unharmed. There is the account of Daniel praying, even though it was against the law and his punishment was to be thrown into a den filled with hungry lions, and God miraculously shut their mouths. But did you know that Daniel also has the account of Easter?

Of course, it isn't the account of Jesus rising from the dead, but it points to the final Easter, the ultimate Resurrection when all who believe in Christ will be called out of their graves. This is the ultimate hope of the Christian life. To not only “die and go to heaven” but to be raised from the dead, body and soul reunited, being raised to new life wholly human. On Easter, Christ defeated death for all, and on the Last Day, death will be swallowed up forever. Only then will all creation be made new, and only then will every tongue confess, and every knee will bow. Daniel, so many years before Jesus is born, reveals to us the end, the goal. He reveals the Resurrection, your Resurrection. This is the end goal of the Christian life. In Baptism, we receive the Gift of heaven. When we die, we will rest in the arms of the Father, and on the Last Day, we will be raised from the dead in body and soul and will spend eternity in the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

City of God, Easter forever, Golden Jerusalem, Jesus the Lamb, River of life, Saints and archangels, Sing with creation to God the I Am! Jesus is risen and we shall arise, Give God the glory! Alleluia! (LSB 474:5)

The Twenty-Sixth Tuesday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 19, 2024

Today's Reading: Hebrews 10:11-25

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 38:1-28; Jeremiah 39:1-44:30; Matthew 27:57-66

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:23-25)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Being a Christian is not as easy as some may think. The world rejects the Gospel of Jesus. In some places, it is outlawed; in others, it is frowned upon; in our own nation, it is no longer the cultural force it used to be. The church in America faces new challenges as it loses some of the privileges it once had. Yet, there is no reason to fear. Christ will sustain His church no matter what it looks like. He is Lord over all. Yet, as you go through life following Jesus, there is no doubt that fear, anxiety, and struggle will greet you. Satan will poke at your wounds, whisper poisonous lies in your ears, and remind you of old sins that have been forgiven. He will assault you relentlessly, especially those who follow Christ. This is all the more reason to heed the words of Hebrews, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."

Christ has conquered all things. He has conquered the sin Satan throws in your face, He has conquered death that awaits you, and He has conquered the devil himself. He has kept His promises, of that you can be sure. Yet, if you find yourself doubting, go to church and, along with your fellow brothers and sisters, hear the promises of Jesus spoken and proclaimed. This church spurs one another along in love and good works, prays and cares for one another, and rejoices and weeps with one another. Do not try to stand against sin, death, and the power of the devil alone, but instead stand with Christ and all the faithful.

So, do not forsake the gathering together of the church. Do not forsake attending the Divine Service on Sundays. The less you go, the more weak spots you have, the more lies you'll believe, and you'll forget the forgiveness Christ has won for you. Instead, run to the house of the Lord as often as possible. Go and have your sins forgiven by your Pastor in Christ's stead, receive Christ's true Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar, and rest assured in the promises of Jesus. This world is rough, life is difficult, and the burdens can be heavy, but Jesus will lead you on. He will carry the load, and He will invite you to rest. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

We share our mutual woes, We pour our ardent prayers; And often for each other flows The sympathizing tear. (LSB 649:3)

The Twenty-Sixth Wednesday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 20, 2024

Today's Reading: Matthew 28:1-20

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

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (Matthew 28:18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It's only been a few weeks since the election. This is being written months before it ever takes place, but that doesn't change the message. Elections always end up the same way: there is a winner and a loser. There will be people who rejoice and people who are angry, sad, and maybe even afraid. There will be people who will think their savior has come and those who think doom has come. Maybe you don't pay too close attention to elections, maybe you do, maybe they bring you anxiety and fear, or maybe you feel uncertain about the future. Well, if so, Jesus brings you Good News. Regardless of which nations rise and which nations fall, Jesus Christ is the King on the throne.

Christ has all authority not only in heaven but on earth as well. Christ has made the world his footstool, and He is the Lord over all things. But unlike the leaders of this world, elected or not, He is not a greedy ruler. He is not cruel, He is not selfish, He is not corrupt, and He does not fall in any other way to sin that affects those who hold the office or those who rule. Instead, Jesus is gracious. He is merciful, He is just, He is gentle, He is perfect, He is eternal. To confess that Christ is king is a confession of confidence and hope. Jesus is the Lord over your life, and He is a good and gracious Lord.

One can imagine the disciples were rather anxious about going out into the world after Jesus ascended into heaven. Their teacher, master, and Lord left them alone on that hilltop following the great commission. Yet, they would go into the world clinging to the promise He gave them. They would go on teaching and preaching the Good News of Jesus before hostile rulers, councils, emperors, and more. They would go on confessing Jesus Christ and Him crucified, holding to the promise that He made them. They would know that Christ the King would be with them always, to the end of the age, because He promised them. This is who Christ is: He is the Lord of all, the Lord who keeps his promises. To all people, and Christ keeps his promises to you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Christ be my leader by night as by day; Safe through the darkness for He is the way. Gladly I follow, my future his care, Darkness is daylight when Jesus is there. (LSB 861:1)

The Twenty-Sixth Thursday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 21, 2024

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

Daily Lectionary: Daniel 2:1-23; Revelation 18:1-24

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you (1 Peter 5:6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When you are a “youth,” it can be a difficult time of life. There is a lot going on in your world. You strive to navigate the ever-changing world. You go through changes emotionally and physically. You try to navigate the halls of schools, the social scene, and then, of course, the sort of coming of age in finding yourself, whatever that means. The world will heap expectations on you and upon your shoulders. You will carry the weight of the future with you every step of the way, and it can be a heavy load to bear. There are a lot of expectations for the youth of every generation. There can also be a lot of arrogance.

Generational conversations often look like this: the older generations tell the younger generations how wrong and lazy they are, and the younger generations tell the older generations how they screwed up the world they are entering into. It is easy to think that as a youth, you know better than your elders; after all, you understand the latest trends, you understand technology and its advances, and you understand the new lingo that is being used in conversation. You feel like you can accomplish anything you put your mind to, and once you are in charge when you're older, the world will finally be the way it ought to be.

This isn't everyone's experience, but there is a warning. It can be easy to fall into arrogance when you are young. You may not think you need the words of those who are older than you and who have lived life longer than you. You might not think you need God's word, that you will be just fine on your own. My dear brothers and sisters who read this do not believe this lie. Instead, humble yourselves before God, to His Word of law and instruction, and the word of his freeing Gospel. Find yourselves in Him, in who He has declared you to be, His child. Walk in His ways and learn the scriptures. Instead of following your heart, follow Jesus because when you follow Jesus, it leads to eternal life and eternal joy. When you follow the ways of the world, it leads to death and torment. So, humble yourselves before God, and he will lift you up. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

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

The Twenty-Sixth Friday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 22, 2024

Today's Reading: Daniel 2:24-49

Daily Lectionary: Daniel 2:24-49; Revelation 19:1-21

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever (Daniel 2:44)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. History reveals that even the mightiest nations, no matter how long they reign, no matter how much they prosper, rise and fall like waves raging in a sea. It seems that no kingdom is immune to one day crumbling. The great nations of history are proof of this. The Mongols, Romans, Ottomans, and Persians are all examples of this. There was a time when it was said that the sun didn't set on the Roman empire, but eventually, it would. The once mighty Rome would crumble and become simply a footnote in the annals of history. This is how it goes with kingdoms made by the hands of men. Just like everything, sin infects and causes even the firmest of foundations to decay. Leaders become corrupt, those who serve to keep order abuse their authority, and greed gets a stranglehold on the best of us. Eventually, the infection kills.

Daniel speaks of such things in this dream that he interprets. While it talks about a specific group of nations, nothing has changed. But with this word of law comes a promise that in a world where nations rise and fall, where sinners rule and reign, there will come a kingdom that will conquer all. There will come a kingdom that is holy and righteous, and this kingdom will have no end but instead will endure forever. This kingdom is the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom that Christ will bring with Him, the one that He begins to usher in at His incarnation, the kingdom which He fights for in His death, the kingdom He secures in His resurrection, and the kingdom He rules since His ascension.

This kingdom has yet to be fulfilled. It will come to completion when Christ returns on the Last Day. This kingdom will be a kingdom where there is no more death, pain, or tears. It will be glorious. Until that day, though, the kingdom of God is established through Christ's church. It rules with the Gospel, the preaching and teaching of Jesus, who died and was resurrected. It was against sin, death, and the devil through Word and Sacrament. Christ's church brings about this kingdom one Baptism at a time. One day, Christ will return, and all who believe will dwell in His kingdom forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O sweet and blessed country, The home of God's elect! O sweet and blessed country That faithful hearts expect! In mercy, Jesus, bring us To that eternal rest With You and God the Father And Spirit, ever blest. (LSB 672:4)

The Twenty-Sixth Saturday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 23, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 39:4-5a, 7-8, 12a; antiphon: 2 Peter 3:13b NIV
Daily Lectionary: Daniel 3:1-30; Revelation 20:1-15

"O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! (Psalm 39:4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When my wife and I had our first child, we received all sorts of advice. Some advice we asked for, some we didn't. People are funny that way. They like to give advice as if to bring meaning to their experiences, but I realize something now as my first child turns five and is preparing for kindergarten: they were right. The advice we often received was, "Don't blink; they grow up fast," and they were right. I wonder now if their desire to give advice came from a place of regret or grief. They blinked, and their children were grown, just like I blinked and my oldest prepares for Kindergarten. The psalmist gives words to this. God shows us in many ways how short our lives are, how quickly time passes, and how soon death approaches. One thing is certain: regardless of how old you are, dear reader, life is fleeting.

While it seems like this is simply a reality you must face, it can serve a greater purpose in the life of the Christian. Allow it to be a call to you, a call to repent and to turn back to the Father who loves you. Why? Because all sinners have the propensity to get distracted and caught up in trivial things. Time is wasted on reading news articles about Fantasy Football, hours slip by while you scroll on your phone to look into people's lives whom you do not know, and days drift away while you attend your children's tournaments that consume their entire childhood. The list goes on. We waste a lot of time on trivial things. There is this sense that there is time for the important things, but right now isn't that time. There is time to hear God's word, but it can wait for now. There is time to receive His Gifts, but it isn't today. There is time to confess Jesus as Lord, but not until you're older and death is more real.

Don't be a fool. Life is truly fleeting. Life is short. God is near. Do not waste time on trivial things. Don't misunderstand what I am saying: it is okay to play some sports, enjoy some entertainment, and even play some Fantasy Football, but don't let it consume you. Don't let it become your god. Carve out time in your life for the more pressing things. Do not put God in the "to be done later" pile of things on your schedule. Honor the Sabbath by going to church to rest in His care and receive the Good News of Jesus dead, resurrected, and ascended for you. Rest in the presence of God and His mercy. Feed on his word day after day. A day will come (if it hasn't already) when God will remind you that your life is truly fleeting, and on that day, you will cry out to the Lord, and He will answer. His answer is in Christ, the crucified one. He will hear you. And He will speak words of comfort and life to you. For in Him, life is not fleeting; it is everlasting. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Last Sunday of the Church Year

NOVEMBER 24, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 13:24-37

Daily Lectionary: Daniel 4:1-37; Revelation 21:1-8

Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. (Mark 13:35-36)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. I was recently looking at my calendar. It is a busy time of year. I was looking at the weeks and months ahead as Advent approaches, then as Christmas comes, then the new year. There are a lot of things to do in the near future. Things are planned even months or years ahead. Vacations, life milestones, graduations, you name it. Here's the thing: if you are like me, you are certain those days will come, that they will happen, and there is no doubt that tomorrow the sun will rise. We've gotten comfortable. It's almost as if we as a church have fallen asleep or, at the very least, dozed off.

The hard truth is that for many, the imminent return of Christ is not prevalent in how life is lived. Most people do not think that Christ will return tomorrow or that Christ will return soon. Instead, it is some far-off event that will happen years after our lifetime. This is understandable—the church has been waiting for the return of Christ for nearly two thousand years. By our standards, that is a long time to stay watchful, to stay waiting, and to stay vigilant. It is easy to doze off into a slumber when boredom sets in. So, allow this to be a wake-up call. Stay awake.

The day is drawing near. Every time we wake up to a new day, we are one day closer to the Last Day when Christ will return, a day that is not to be feared but to be excited about. Instead of waiting in boredom, wait in anticipation, for the day Christ returns, all things will be made new. The day Christ returns, death will be swallowed up forever. The day when Christ returns, there will be no more sorrow but eternal joy. The day when Christ returns, all believers will be raised to Paradise. That sounds exciting, doesn't it? It's hard to sleep when you are excited. So, look to Christ's return as something to look forward to, and that will make it hard to fall asleep. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, so govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your glorious return, we may persevere in both faith and holiness of living; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Last Monday of the Church Year

NOVEMBER 25, 2024

Today's Reading: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

Daily Lectionary: Daniel 5:1-30; Daniel 7:1-8:27; Revelation 21:9-27

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. (Daniel 7:13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The scriptures are the inspired and inerrant Word of God. They are infallible, meaning they cannot be wrong. They are the way in which God reveals Himself to us, as well as His redemption of our fallen world. Another thing, though, is this: the Bible is flat-out cool. The more you study the scriptures, the more I am convinced you would agree. Many people think about the Bible, and their opinion is that it's an old book full of rules. Even many Christians rarely crack open their Bible that is collecting dust because the reality is they see it as too challenging, or even worse, boring. The Scriptures are anything but boring! They are a divine masterpiece. The Scriptures are cool.

Why use a word that is almost underwhelming? Because it's true. The way the scriptures are constructed and written will never cease to amaze. An example is here in Daniel, where a prophecy is written. A prophecy which is written hundreds of years before Christ is born. A prophecy that doesn't point to Christ's birth, death, or even His resurrection, but a prophecy that points to His return. A prophecy that Christ speaks of before the Jews when He is arrested and a prophecy that He will one day fulfill. We have the privilege of reading the scriptures as people who live in the Last Days because we can be certain that the Bible is all about Jesus. Every page is dripping with Christ and His love for us—Old and New Testament.

The scriptures point to Christ and Him crucified. They reveal God's love for you in Jesus' death and resurrection. Let them become a part of you. Be diligent in reading them, not as a law or a way to become more Holy, but because they reveal Christ. They reveal that on account of Christ, you are holy and righteous in His sight. This has been God's plan from the beginning. God created with the end in mind. There are no mistakes in these scriptures. Instead, they perfectly reveal Christ, who saves you, and that is cool. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thy strong word did cleave the darkness; At Thy speaking it was done. For created light we thank Thee; While Thine ordered seasons run. Alleluia, alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send! Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia without end! (LSB 578:1)

The Last Tuesday of the Church Year

NOVEMBER 26, 2024

Today's Reading: Revelation 1:4b-8

Daily Lectionary: Daniel 6:1-28; Daniel 9:1-27; Revelation 22:1-21

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We live in an extremely individualistic world, a world where the individual is at the heart of personal decision-making. We do not often consider others' happiness or safety when making decisions. Instead, it is about my happiness and success. It is about what keeps me safe and brings me joy. Love and care for our neighbor are usually secondary to loving and caring for ourselves. Self-care can be good, but it is seemingly abused for the selfish purpose of simply doing what you want to do.

At its core, this is simply just an idolatry problem. This is what sin does. Science would tell us that the earth revolves around the sun. Sin says no, the earth revolves around you. Even more so, sin tells you that you are not just the center of the universe; you are god over your own life. What you say goes, what you want happens, and what makes you happy is most important. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks or says because it's all about you all the time—except for a few problems. You are not God. The earth does not revolve around you. You will die.

One of the most helpful things I came to terms with when I began seminary was this: God is God, you are not. This is Good News. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. God is the creator of all things, perfectly righteous, who is, who was, and who is to come. He laid the foundations of the earth, He put the stars in place, and the God who did all of that created you. The God who did all of that loves you. The God who did all that took on flesh and died for you. The God who did all of that forgives you. So, no, you aren't the center of the universe. You aren't God. But that's Good News. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

We praise You and acknowledge you, O God to be the Lord, The Father Everlasting, By all the earth adored. To you all angel powers cry aloud, the heavens sing, The cherubim and seraphim their praises to You bring: "O holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth; Your majesty and glory fill the heavens and the earth!" (LSB 941:1)

The Last Wednesday of the Church Year

NOVEMBER 27, 2024

Today's Reading: Isaiah 1:1-28

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

...Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. (Isaiah 1:18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. I live in Minnesota. The parish in which I serve is less than three hours from Canada. We know a few things about snow. At the time that this is published, there is a good chance there will be some covering the ground. Fall is one of my favorite times of year in the Northland. The humidity and heat of August give way to the mild temperatures of fall. Sweaters, flannels, and mittens become a fashion staple. As the season changes from summer to Autumn, things begin to die. The leaves change color, and what was once green turns to vibrant red, yellows, and oranges, which bring about the greatest of sights. But those brilliant colors only remain for a few weeks before death takes over, and what's left is bare trees and brown leaves scattered upon the ground. Another season and the effects of sin win again as creation groans.

Yet, something happens around November and December; all that dirt, brown, dead foliage that is unpleasant to look at gets covered. Over time, what was once a dreadful sight slowly becomes white—radiant white covering every inch of the ground and even the limbs of the dead trees. There is something peaceful about it. The way the snow muffles the sounds of nature so it is tranquil and calm. Heavenly peace, is the way “Silent Night” describes it. It makes sense, really, because that is what Christ does for us. He covers us up all the muck, the grime, and the dirt. Apart from Christ, we really are a dreadful sight. Yet, in holy Baptism, we put on Christ, and He covers us in His righteousness. It is no coincidence that baptismal candidates are traditionally clothed in a white garment. This isn't simply a symbol; it is representative of what is actually happening. Although you are a dreadful sight, Christ makes you white as snow. He purifies you from all sin.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. Just as the winter snow persists, eventually, it melts away, and what follows is something beautiful. From that purifying snow, the earth gives way to spring, and spring brings with it new life. Plants that were once dead rise again from the ground. From death comes life; not only the earth, but we celebrate the feast of the Resurrection, which points us to our own Resurrection. For our sins were once like scarlet, or brown, in this case, but Christ has made them white as snow. With that, we have heavenly peace. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thanksgiving Day

NOVEMBER 28, 2024

Today's Reading: Luke 17:11-19

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 2:1-22; Isaiah 3:1-4:6; 1 Peter 1:13-25

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. (Luke 17:15-16)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. This reading comes up for Thanksgiving services every single year. There have been numerous sermons preached on this text, and while I haven't listened to all of them, I can imagine that many of you have heard a similar sermon that can be summarized like this: "Be more thankful..." or something along those lines. For some reason, it seems the preaching of giving thanks has transformed into a demand of the law. But if thanksgiving is demanded, then is it truly thankful? Recognize that the men who didn't give thanks were still healed. What is going on here? Why did the one leper turn back?

Imagine you were in that situation. You had an incurable disease that would make you unclean, and because you are unclean, you would be isolated from your community. You would not be allowed to enter the temple where sin was forgiven. Then, you meet a man named Jesus, and in an instant, as you are on your way, you are healed. You are restored! You are free from the oppression of this affliction! What would your response be?

The one leper returns, and what he does is beautiful. He falls to his knees before Jesus, he takes a posture of worship. This is what Thanksgiving is for the Christian. It is yet another opportunity to sit in the presence of God and His abundant mercies. Notice what Jesus gives to the man who returns in worship; He continues to give him more. "Your faith has saved you," He says. In worship and thanksgiving, Jesus continues to give his Gifts to us. So, would you return? Would you give thanks? Who wouldn't take another opportunity to be in the presence of Jesus? Giving thanks is yet another opportunity to receive from Christ, who is good and merciful. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Heavenly Father, God of all grace, govern our hearts that we may never forget your blessings but steadfastly thank and praise You for all Your goodness in this life until, with all Your saints, we praise You eternal in Your heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Last Friday of the Church Year

NOVEMBER 29, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 89:6, 14-16, 18; antiphon: Zechariah 9:9b, alt.
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 5:1-25; Amos 1:1-9:15; 1 Peter 2:1-12

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

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. As Advent approaches, the introit brings us to a strange place. It doesn't bring us to the manger, or to the stable, or any place of the sort. Instead, it brings us to Jerusalem, to Palm Sunday of all places. Usually, the celebration is at the beginning of Holy Week. Yet, there is something I love about this— beginning the church year with the end in mind. That is what Advent is; it is the beginning of the end. In Advent, we prepare for Christ's coming at the incarnation of Christmas, but not only that, we prepare for Christ's second coming when He will bring the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God and bring about the new creation.

Jesus brings the kingdom of heaven down. He comes to us. He doesn't demand that we climb the ladder of righteousness, bringing our good works as an offering to Him, no. He humbles Himself; our king comes to become one of us. A king who comes to conquer, riding in just as King Solomon rode into Jerusalem many years ago. Jesus comes as the one they have been waiting for, the one for whom we have waited. We begin Advent with the end in mind, knowing that this Jesus who came to us as a baby will also come again. When He comes again, He will come in glory, power, and might. He will come on the clouds of heaven, and He will come to swallow up death forever.

As we begin Advent, let us remember that we are Advent people. We live our lives with the end in mind, and we wait for Christ our King to triumphantly return at the end of all things. That end will bring about the beginning, the new. That end will usher in the new kingdom, the kingdom of God, the new creation. We wait for that day, we pray for that day, and we long for that day. So, live in the reality of Christ and live in the reality of the end in mind. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Savior of the nations, come, Virgin's Son, make here your home! Marvel now, O heaven and earth, That the Lord chose such a birth. (LSB 332:1)

The Last Saturday of the Church Year

NOVEMBER 30, 2024

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

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 6:1-7:9; 1 Peter 2:13-25

He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. (John 1:41-42a)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever seen something so exciting that you had to tell someone about it as soon as possible? Maybe you saw a meteor dart across the sky or the northern lights for the first time, or maybe it was simply seeing someone you have been waiting for, like a child waiting for dad to come home from work. The first thing the child does when they see their dad drive up the driveway is run to the others and yell out, "Dad's home!" This is good news, so it is news that must be shared.

Upon hearing that Jesus had come, Andrew couldn't help but tell others about what he had seen and heard. This is the proper response to following Jesus, the Messiah. It is such good news that Jesus has come that it must be shared. Others must know. This is how the church works. Jesus sends His disciples to tell others about what they have seen and heard, and then those who hear tell others, and then those who hear tell others. There is a good chance that you are reading this because someone at some point in your life told you about Jesus. Maybe they invited you to church to see and hear. Maybe they simply told you of Jesus' love for you. This is the most effective evangelism program ever, telling people about Jesus.

But Andrew didn't stop there; he then brought them to Jesus. So, we continue this tradition of telling people about the Messiah, about Jesus who died for the sin of the world, for your sin and mine. This is remarkable news, and it must be shared. So, as people who believe in what we have heard, we, too, go and tell people, just as Andrew told Peter, but we do not simply stop there. We bring people to Jesus, to where He has promised to meet us, to His church, where He meets all of us in the preaching of His Word, in Holy Absolution, in Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper. Jesus died for you. Isn't that Good News? Go and tell it. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You have called Your Church to witness that in Christ You have reconciled us to Yourself. Grant that by Your Holy Spirit we may proclaim the Good News of Your salvation so that all who hear it may receive the Gift of salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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