

REFLECTIONS

The Baptism of Our Lord -
The Seventh Saturday After Epiphany
January 12, 2025 - March 1, 2025



JANUARY 12 - MARCH 1

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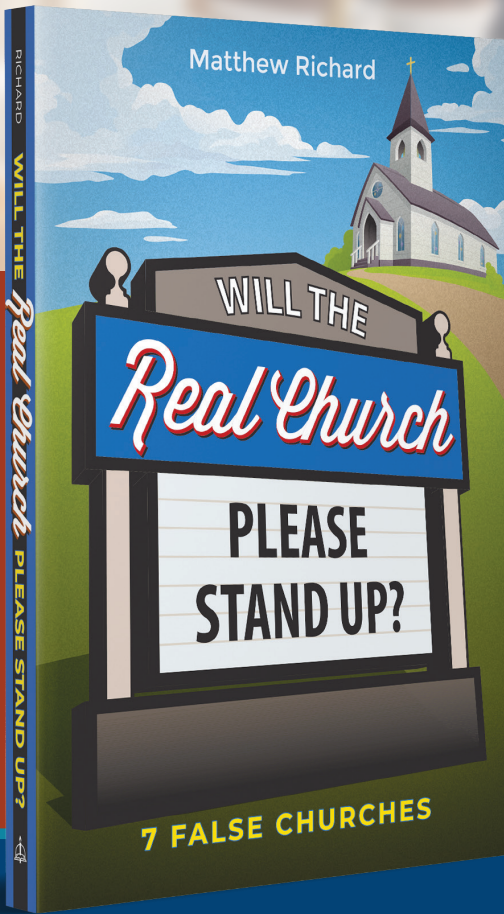
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A Short Form for Daily Reflection

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 Baptism of Our Lord

JANUARY 12, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 3:15-22

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 34:1-24; Romans 3:19-31

*"His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire"
(Luke 3:17)*

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

John testifies to Jesus, the "mightier One" Who holds the keys to life and death and the winnowing fork separating wheat from chaff. God's prophet doesn't blunt the sharp edges of the Word and exhorts people with the Good News of Jesus, Who will be baptized with the "Holy Spirit and with fire" (Luke 3:16). John was faithful and bold. Even Herod wasn't exempt from his rebuke over having "his brother's wife." It would land John in prison and ultimately beheaded, as we hear in Mark 6:14-29. But John's preaching, that holy Word testifying to the Kingdom of God in the person of Christ, transcends any decree of earthly tyrants like Herod. John would suffer a grisly death, a martyr for the faith. But it's that faith that is victorious over the world (cf. 1 John 5:4) precisely because faith grabs Jesus and His saving work. John would die only to live because Christ lives and promises life for His Church obtained by blood (Acts 20:28).

Luke places Jesus' Baptism in the context of persecution. This is no accident. Jesus' Baptism would mark the beginning of His public ministry (cf. Acts 1:22), "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15), and following the descent of the Holy Spirit merit the Father's eternal voice "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Jesus fulfills all righteousness at the cross, where the penalty for sin is paid by His blood. Holy Baptism today means life "in Christ," a popular phrase in the New Testament marking the baptized believer as one covered in the righteousness of Jesus and now an heir to everlasting life.

Suffering, persecution, and martyrdom still besiege God's Church on earth. Still, the devil and his tyrants cannot overcome the "mightier One" with the winnowing fork in His hand. God's enemies decree death to the saints, but the Church needn't be afraid. God in Christ decrees life, eternal life given in the waters of Holy Baptism where Christ is present to call us by Name, make us His children, and on the Last Day do what the Small Catechism also teaches: "...give eternal life to me all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true."

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

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

The First Monday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 13, 2025

Today's Reading: Isaiah 43:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 36:13-28; Romans 4:1-25

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

With Scripture, context is important. This glorious passage in Isaiah is on the heels of God's rebuke of His people for their failure to hear and see. Isaiah, like all the prophets, labors to bring Israel to repentance. He would preach a stern law in hopes people would see their sin, repent, and live. Read Isaiah, and you'll find there's no mistaking God's threats and punishments for Israel's deaf ear. Still, God's mercy, love, and promises never disappear, as Isaiah reminds God's wayward children of the LORD Who has created and redeemed them. The words "fear not" are Words of peace from the God reminding Israel, "I am the LORD our God, the Holy One of Israel, Your Savior." Don't be afraid; you're in the hands of God as His child, His redeemed child brought from death to life, living by faith in He Who promises to take you through the fire. Verse 2 is clear: the fires will come. It's not "if" but "when." For Israel, exile is imminent for the impenitent nation, though God promises to be "their Savior." He never abandons His promises in times of suffering and grief.

In a fallen creation, suffering and grief are never distant. Many and various temptations besiege God's people. A popular one now is despairing over an undesirable body. This powerful temptation assails many people who look at themselves and long to be something different when it's God who forms and creates. The physical body, however "imperfect" it seems, is God's Gift and work. Sin wrecks all flesh, to be sure, as everyone ages and decays. However, we should thank God for the bodies we have while hearing His promise: "I have redeemed you." You have been redeemed, purchased, and paid for in full by the blood of God's own Son. He calls you by Name, a Name put upon you in Holy Baptism at those words "in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." You live under the God Who reigns in the heavens and has the hairs on your head numbered. At the resurrection of the body when the Lord Jesus returns, there will be no discontent over who we are. God says it now: "You are mine." You belong to God in Christ, Who died to obtain you for Himself. He will bring you through fire, and the rivers won't overwhelm you. Since Jesus lives, so does His Church.

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 First Tuesday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 14, 2025

Today's Reading: Romans 6:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 36:33-37:14; Romans 5:1-21

"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (John 6:4)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

It's easy to make snap judgments on what we see. We've heard the phrase "seeing is believing," and to a degree, the eyes have played a role in the spread of Christianity. Think about the Resurrection. This isn't a myth but a real-time event recorded as history in Scripture. Many eyewitnesses attest to having seen the risen Christ. Therefore, every occurrence of a name in the New Testament is significant. On the other hand, seeing alone is no help in divine matters. The Israelites saw the miraculous parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army. But it's no time before they're grumbling against God. People saw the crucifixion and mocked the dying Christ. The eyes saw blood, gore, and death—just another corpse and crucifixion for the books.

Romans 10:17 teaches faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. The senses aren't the cause of faith. That comes by the Holy Spirit through the Word. Snap judgments in divine matters can be devastating for how we think about God and His Gifts. Baptism, for example, doesn't look like much, only some water by a man in robes on a baby's head. The baby does nothing during the rite of Holy Baptism except maybe cry and fill a diaper. But St. Paul's inspired Words in Romans 6 teach us what Baptism does without human aid and cooperation. Something happens, something affected by God, when someone is baptized in that triune Name, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One is "buried with Him." One dies with Christ. The Old Adam dies, and "just as Christ was raised...we too may walk in newness of life." This is a reality for the baptized given by God in Jesus. It's not earned by human merits, decisions, emotional pleas, and movements in the heart. It's God's work that faith receives. Since faith is a Gift, it's not dependent on intellectual capacity. Baptism doesn't look like much, but according to Scripture, it means life in Christ, being dead to sin and alive to God. It means sins forgiven in the Name above all Names, the only Name under heaven and earth by which man is saved (Acts 4:12). These promises don't go away over time, something faith sees when the eyes don't.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Heavenly Father, grant us faith to daily repent and turn to you. Preserve us from evil, and comfort us with Your promises in Holy Baptism to make us Your dear child robed in the righteousness of Jesus, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

The First Wednesday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 15, 2025

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 37:15-28

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 37:15-28; Romans 6:1-23

"My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes" (Ezekiel 37:24)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

A united nation under Solomon was ripped apart following his death. A carousel of kings would follow in both kingdoms, most of them being evil. Over time, Israel would succumb to their sins with stiff necks and hard hearts towards all the prophets' pleas for repentance.

Ezekiel, like the other prophets, doesn't mince words. He calls out Israel's filthy sins, begging for her repentance. As the imminent exile approaches God's rebellious flock, His mercy, love, and faithfulness don't disappear. The LORD's promise to make Abraham a father of "many nations" doesn't fade, considering Israel's horrid sins. Even her idolatry and unbelief don't rouse God to forsake His Word to Abraham eternally. In this reading, we see the mercy, love, and faithfulness of God. Fragmented and scattered, ransacked by sin, idols, and "detestable things," God promises to untie and make "one nation" in the land on the mountains of Israel (v22). At first, it might seem like a geographical promise and a return to prestige, glory, and power, surpassing the kingships of David and Solomon. However, further reading indicates this unity transcends earthly boundaries. David is long dead by this point, and yet God says, "My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd." God promises His sanctuary forevermore in their midst twice (v26 and v28). God is promising something more, something greater than earthly land with temporal kings.

The fulfillment of Ezekiel's preaching, God's inspired Word, comes in the establishment of the Church under the "Son of David," the "Good Shepherd" Himself, Jesus. The Holy Christian Church is the one "body" of believers united always in Christ Who is the Head of His Church and Shepherd of His people. This is God's work to gather and unite, to build a Church Jesus "obtained with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Thus, we shouldn't despair over a fragmented world. We shouldn't panic and fear all the divisions wrought by Satan. God unites His Church, and Hell can't tear it asunder. This is our courage to strive patiently for unity on earth. The Church walks boldly in the ways of God, heeding His Word and resting in peace, for she's not alone. Always at the Head is the Good Shepherd, the One Who has established His Kingdom forever. Reigning even now is Jesus, Who died to make us the people of His pasture, "heirs of God" and "fellow heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

"O Comforter of priceless worth, Send peace and unity on earth; Support us in our final strife And lead us out of death to life" (LSB 655:3)

The First Thursday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 16, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Fourth Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 38:1-23; Romans 7:1-20

"Honor your father and your mother."

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Luther's Small Catechism says, "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them." Parents are special and distinct neighbors who serve in a vocation backed by the divine command to "honor." We don't just love our parents. We extend them honor differing from other neighbors we're called to love, yes. But honor goes to the parents. The Fourth Commandment prioritizes parents above others, as Luther explains in his Large Catechism: "It is a far higher thing to honor someone than to love someone, because honor includes not only love, but also modesty, humility, and submission to a majesty hidden in them" (LC 4:106).

Parents are fallible, with sins requiring a Savior. Children see this and so suffer the temptation to despise their parents and rebel against their wisdom. The Old Adam drives us to think we're always smarter and stronger than others, which is another reason to repent. We should repent for relying on the flesh, trusting in ourselves, and shirking advice at every turn. No matter a parent's sins, they still inhabit a vocation established by God deserving honor based on the Word. That's a crucial point. Parents are due honor not because they're flawless. We honor them according to God's Word, calling us to see them for what they are, in Luther's words, "the most precious treasure on earth" (LC 4: 109).

Luther's meaning of this commandment extends beyond the parental office to include "other authorities." Teachers, policemen, magistrates, and principals serve in vocations requiring faithful obedience. We may not like it when the police officer gives us a speeding ticket, but he's enforcing a law to curb us from sin that could hurt others. The teacher and principal may be hard on a student when desiring the best alongside the father and mother. Such authorities work in tandem with the parental office with the hope children grow, we pray, into faithful, God-fearing adults. Such vocations, though good and beneficial, are often abused by sinners. Still, we live by the Word and God's call to recognize those authorities He has established and thank Him for faithful servants. When we fail in our vocations, whether parent or child, the Gospel reminds us we're not saved by our stations in life. We're saved only by Jesus, which is the comfort we need while laboring in those blessed vocations of God. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious God, Your Ten Commands are just and good. Grant us faith always to hear your Word and keep it. Guard us from evil and harm and turn us to your mercy that we would find comfort and peace in the love you have on account of Christ crucified and risen from the dead. In Jesus' Name, we pray. Amen.

The First Friday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 17, 2025

Today's Reading: Psalm 36:5-9; antiphon: Song of Solomon 2:4
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 39:1-10, 17-29; Romans 7:21-8:17

"His banner over me was love" (Song of Solomon, 2:4)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Banners make statements. Schools have them, as do churches, whose banners may boast passages from Holy Scripture. Parades are never shy of banners with pithy messages communicating the beliefs of a group. Banners are meant to make a point and be seen by others. You don't hide them in a closet.

"His banner over me was love." The complete manifestation of God's love for the sinner is in Christ crucified and risen from the dead. For anyone looking for that "banner" of God's love, look to Jesus, and there you will find it. And it's more than a banner, for Jesus' blood does something. Christ atones for the sins of the entire world. His sacrificial death is divine love to purchase sinners from everlasting condemnation and make them children of God. Faith trusts in this promise, and by faith, one is saved because it's keeping faith that grabs Christ, and we live as He lives. This banner is a promise we shouldn't hide but confess it before others, praying by the grace of God that people will hear and believe.

Another term in today's reading is the word "refuge," which occurs often in the Bible. It's in the love of God manifested in Christ where we take refuge in the shadow of God's wings. This raises the question, "from what do we take refuge?" We face storms of all sorts that wreak havoc on our lives. Unexpected suffering can flood us with pain. Neighbors aren't always kind, and too often, their words and actions are like an archer's arrows penetrating the flesh. The devil accuses us in ways meant to distract us from God's love, accusing us of our sins to convince the soul we're unworthy of God's love and destined to Hell. Persecution for the faith also befalls saints throughout the world who still lose their lives for the sake of the Gospel they hold dear.

Christ is our refuge, a very present help in every trouble. He is our banner, our seal from God of His undying love towards us. This love is steadfast and immovable, for not even Hell's gates overcome the Church. Far from being a love that allows sin is this love of God that covers it in Christ. Repentance and faith mean life with this Banner of love, Life in His Name that means ultimately eternal life with our Savior.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

"In suffering be Thy love my peace, In weakness be Thy love my pow'r; And when the storms of life shall cease, O Jesus, in that final hour, Be Thou my rod and staff and guide, And draw me safely to Thy Side!" (LSB 683)

The Confession of St. Peter

JANUARY 18, 2025

Today's Reading: Mark 8:27-35 (36-9:1)

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 40:1-4; 43:1-12; 40:5-42:20; 43:13-27; Romans 8:18-39

"And He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ.'" (Mark 8:29)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus is concerned about what His disciples think about Him. Therefore, the Church should be concerned about what people think about Jesus and be bold to say, "You are the Christ." Furthermore, we know from our Creeds that Jesus, the Messiah, is true God and true man, the "Word made Flesh" Who would save by giving His life only to take it up again on the third day. Faith believes this, and faith makes this our confession.

In our society, there's no shortage of false gods. False worship is everywhere with gods ranging from money to the self. "Who is Jesus?" is a question we can't ignore. Gone are the days of assuming church membership and the influence of basic Christian doctrines. The Church must confess so people hear and, by the grace of God, believe. After Peter confesses Jesus to be the Messiah, Jesus teaches the content of that confession by explaining His salvific work. He will suffer many things, be rejected by religious leaders, die, and rise after three days. Peter's rebuke of this teaching is well-known and warrants Jesus' rebuke, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Mark 8:33). The things of man are many, and include our quest for glory and riches, not suffering and death. The anointed Christ sent to save must die, a point Peter doesn't want to hear in Mark 8. However, to confess Christ demands confessing His crucifixion and death, as well as His resurrection. It's the Church's task to confess this about our Savior unapologetically.

Finally, we've all sinned in failing to make this known. We've hidden the light when afraid the truth would hurt. We've failed to seek heavenly things over the things of man. We've shirked away from taking a stand when we should've been bold. Lord, have mercy. Repent and hear again the Gospel of Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. These are the things of God: life and salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord. This we believe, this we confess. In Him, we live, and in Him, we find comfort for sins like Peter when we dropped the ball and failed to understand and speak. Thankfully, God is merciful and doesn't leave us in our sin. He sent the Christ, the Son of the living God. It's in the things of God we have salvation, and that's what we are to confess, not the things of man.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

God, grant us faith to believe in Your Word and set our minds on the heavenly things above, not the earthly things below. Grants us the mouth to speak, courage to stand, and hearts filled with faith always receiving Your bountiful goodness through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Second Sunday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 19, 2025

Today's Reading: John 2:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 44:1-16, 23-29; Romans 9:1-18

The master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people had drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." (John 2:9b-10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

This whole darn account is a weird one. What's the number one rule at a wedding? Don't upstage the wedding couple... Well, here is this magnificent wedding without a single mention of the happy couple. The only thing that we know about them is that their wedding is about to be the talk of the town because they have run out of wine and none of the guests have run out of party. So here comes Jesus... And I know, I know, Jesus wants to keep things on the down low. He asks His mother why she is trying to get Him involved in their problems, but she doesn't listen. "Do whatever He says," she tells the attendants, "because whatever He says is going to be good."

And so jugs and jugs of wine are made, miraculously, water transformed. And it's the good stuff, too. The top shelf stuff: a 1945 Romanee-Conti, but not just one bottle, a whole vat of the stuff! Jesus is a "save the best for last" sort of guy, coming in at the end to save the day and keep the wedding party happy.

But is this all there is to it? If so, it seems a little bit shallow. One would think that His first miracle would be one with a little more substance. Maybe He is just warming up, making sure that He has all the kinks out before He goes on the road... Or maybe there is something more...

Perhaps Jesus' first miracle says less about the actual wedding, and even the miracle, and more about Him and who He is. Maybe this water into wine thing is a sign of something greater, pointing to a wedding feast that has no end, that the Church gets a foretaste of every week in fleshy bread and bloody wine from here until the Last Day. Maybe, just maybe, Jesus is making it known to the entire world that He is the Bridegroom, that He has taken a Bride for Himself, you and me, the Church. And He is going to provide for Her everything that she could ever need.

Yeah... that's probably it...

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, who governs all things in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the prayers of Your people and grant us Your peace through all our days; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Second Monday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 20, 2025

Today's Reading: Isaiah 62:1-5

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 47:1-14, 21-23; Romans 9:19-33

"You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight I in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married." (Isaiah 62:4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Come to think of it, this text is probably why Jesus' first miracle took place at a wedding. (We read all about that yesterday.) It's the Bridegroom and Bride stuff, the Ephesians 5 sort of thing that Paul interweaves when he is talking about a man and his wife. It would seem as if you can't talk about marriage without talking about Christ and the Church.

And so Jesus wants to show off His Bride to the nations. Her glory He wants to shine before kings and paupers alike. Everyone is going to see her radiance. Everyone is going to know of her beauty as the Lord walks with her hand in hand in front of the whole world.

Her righteousness will be unmistakable. But know one thing for certain: her righteousness doesn't come from her. For He found her among the Desolate places, Forsaken by all those around her because of what she had made herself to be. But now, beyond all rational logic, her lot in life has changed. His Delight Is in Her, for He has Married her.

And now it is His righteousness that the whole world sees. He rejoices over her because she is no longer dressed in the attire of a lady of the evening, but He has taken His own garment and clothed her with it. Head to toe, she is covered in His glory, the glory of the cross, the glory of sins forgiven, the glory that can only be found in an empty tomb with the only thing still buried inside is Satan and the death that could not kill Him.

This is the righteousness that His Bride now wears. And He leads her out before nations and kings that they might know that His righteousness is for them, too. His desire is that they, too, would be His Bride, that they would wear His glory—forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation given freely, given for all.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thou camest to our hall of death, O Christ, to breathe our poisoned air, To drink for us the dark despair That strangled our reluctant breath. How beautiful the feet that trod The road that leads us back to God! How beautiful the feet that ran to bring the great good news to man! (LSB 834:3)

The Second Tuesday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 21, 2025

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Joel 1:1-20; Romans 10:1-21

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in every one." (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Paul is laying out for the Corinthians a whole long list of spiritual Gifts. Right after this section, He uses the example of a body and how there are many different members that make up the whole. None is more important than another. None is greater or worse. It is in that way, then, that he explains that the Gifts they might hold mean nothing for the individual.

We don't see the types of spiritual Gifts that Paul is talking about much in the Church anymore. They seem to have died out within the first couple of centuries, which is all fine and good. They were given in order to move forward, jump start if you will, the early Church, and the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world... But that doesn't mean that this section of Scripture still isn't important for us. For what Paul says about spiritual Gifts holds true for the Gifts that you and I have been given by our Heavenly Father as well. And these Gifts which we have been given, some of which I have that you lack, some of which you have that I don't, are to be used for the good of the whole Body of Christ, for the good of your neighbor.

It is a selfless way of thinking, then, that can only be taught to us by our Head, by Christ. In the same way in which He selflessly loved His neighbor, we, too, are called to love our neighbors as ourselves. Christ gives us Gifts so that we can be a blessing to others. The Gifts we have do not make us greater in the sight of God but instead have been given so that where our neighbor lacks, we can be of service and fill him up.

This is the way of the Church. This is what it means to be the Body of Christ: First, we receive all that is good from our God above (First Article gifts Creation; Second Article gifts of Redemption; Third Article gifts of Sanctification, of being made holy as we receive in time and place the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation), then, through Him, because Christ first loved us, we lovingly do good for our neighbor.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Holy Spirit, the wind of great power, Source of strength and of peace and of love, Truest Comforter, plead, As You bring all our need To the throne of God's glory above. Be the light that enlightens the Scriptures; Keep our feet from each devilish snare; Only You can make whole All that troubles our soul; By Your chiasm Christ's triumph we share. (LSB 502:4)

The Second Wednesday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 22, 2025

Today's Reading: Joel 2:1-17

Daily Lectionary: Psalm 102:18-22; antiphon: Psalm 102:13; Romans 11:1-24

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. (Joel 2:12-13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Joel is a tough book to read and perhaps even a tougher book to understand. Not much is known about this prophet, which is why many scholars have differing opinions on when he actually wrote his book. Whatever the case, the point that we should grasp thousands of years removed from this prophet of God is the same as the day he wrote it.

Joel's is a call to repentance, and that is a call that should be heard by every generation. Our text for today talks about the Day of the Lord. This is a day which is quickly approaching; how quickly we do not know, but that shouldn't matter. It could be tomorrow for a thousand years in the making, but the call for repentance is just as valid.

We deserve nothing but temporal and eternal punishment because of our sin. We are worthy of nothing except God's wrath and are unworthy of even receiving this call to repentance. But our God does not delight in the death of the sinner. His desire is for all to hear the truth of their sin and believe in His promised salvation.

You may hear your pastor read this text on Ash Wednesday. In the season of Lent, the Church is called again to view herself in the light of her sin, but more so, she is called to see herself by faith in the light of Christ.

Thanks be to God that He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. This we see in full on the cross of Calvary. This we receive by faith in Absolution within the confines of the Church each and every Sunday, firmly believing that our sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ. It is God who repents us, turning us from our evil ways and granting us the Gifts of the cross: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thy love and grace alone avail to blot out my transgression; The best and holiest deeds must fail to break sin's dread oppression. Before Thee none can boasting stand, But all must fear Thy strict demand And live alone by mercy. Therefore my hope is in the Lord And not in mine own merit; It rests upon His faithful Word To them of contrite spirit That He is merciful and just; This is my comfort and my trust. His help I with with maintenance. (LSB 607:2,3)

The Second Thursday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 23, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Fifth Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Joel 2:18-32; Romans 11:25-12:13

The Fifth Commandment: You shall not murder.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

If you ask the average catechumen which Commandment is the easiest to keep, number five is usually high on the list. That is because the average catechumen hasn't done the "stab-stab" stuff that we usually only associate with this Commandment.

But not murdering someone is the easy part. Have you ever hurt your neighbor in his body? Have you always taken care to help and support him in the ways that his body has need? When put like this, the 5th Commandment becomes a little more difficult to keep.

And then Jesus goes and makes it even more difficult when He tells us that this Commandment isn't just about what we do with our hands; it also encompasses how we think about our neighbor and what evil we harbor against him in our heart.

God's Law is a heavy thing that won't let anyone escape its crushing blow. Lest we think that we have conquered one sin, it will quickly show us where we have failed in five or ten others... God is a God of life, and He would have His people be people of life, too. Not just the life that we receive from Him, but that we would care about the life that He has given to our neighbors.

And so search your hearts and recognize the ways in which you have broken even this Commandment. And then return to the Lord your God and receive from Him the forgiveness of sins that He won on the cross for us by fulfilling the Law which we could not hope to fulfill; by loving us to the point that while we were still murderous sinners, Christ died for us, that we might turn to our neighbor and serve him in his body.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

These are the holy Ten Commands God gave to us by Moses' hands When high on Sinai's mount he stood, Receiving them for our good. Have mercy, Lord! "You shall not murder, hurt, nor hate; Your anger dare not dominate. Be kind and patient; help, defend, And treat your foe as your friend." Have mercy, Lord! (LSB 581: 1, 5)

St. Timothy, Pastor and Confessor

JANUARY 24, 2025

Today's Reading: 1 Timothy 6:11-16

Daily Lectionary: Joel 3:1-21; Matthew 24:42-47

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Timothy 6:13-14)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Paul writes this Epistle to his friend and colleague, Timothy. If you remember from the Book of Acts, Paul first meets up with Timothy at the beginning of his second missionary journey. He takes off, along with Silas, to visit the congregations that were established during his initial journey. Timothy is in Lystra, a member of the congregation, brought up in the faith by his mother and grandmother. There is even a good chance that Timothy saw Paul stoned and left for dead outside of the city walls his first time around.

So Timothy knows what is at stake. He knows the dangers that he is going to undertake as he sets off with Paul and later becomes a pastor of congregations who need to hear of Christ and Him crucified... Paul also knows what immense struggles and burdens await Timothy as he is called to stand in the stead of Christ, and so he sends him at least two pastoral letters to encourage him in his vocation.

The job of a pastor is to speak the Word. Listen to him as one who is set before you to stand in the stead of Christ, not despising preaching and the Word, but holding it sacred and gladly hearing and learning it. For your pastor is called to proclaim the Law in all of its severity and then proclaim the Gospel in all of its sweetness to you... Temptations will arise to commingle the two, to let the Law not be as severe as it should be, and to speak of the Gospel as anything but a pure and complete Gift. So Paul encourages Timothy, and in the same way, then, your pastor, to hold to the Confession of the cross for the sinner because that is what we poor sinners need to hear.

So we give thanks to the Lord above for Timothy and his faithful proclamation of the Word and the way in which he rightly administered The Sacraments. And then, in the same way, we pray for our own pastors that they would remain steadfast so that we might receive the forgiveness of sins through the preaching of the Word that comes from their lips.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, You have always given to Your Church on earth faithful shepherds such as Timothy to guide and feed Your flock. Make all pastors diligent to preach Your holy Word and administer Your Means Of Grace, and grant Your people wisdom to follow in the way that leads to life eternal; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Conversion of St. Paul

JANUARY 25, 2025

Today's Reading: Acts 9:1-22

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 1:1-21; Matthew 19:27-30

But the Lord said to [Ananias], "Go, for [Paul] is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." (Acts 9:15-16)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

It must have been a troubling thing for Ananias to hear that Paul was to be set aside to proclaim the Gospel to Gentiles. Before this time, Paul was an enemy of Christ. He sought to arrest and convict Jewish converts of blasphemy, a charge that would most certainly put their life in jeopardy. And before his conversion, Paul couldn't have dreamed that salvation was ever meant for the Gentile.

But the Lord's way is not our way. He sees things a little bit differently than we would. Where we would most certainly have chosen somebody, anybody, other than Paul, God deemed it good and right and salutary to use this mortal enemy of Christ to then proclaim the very same Christ into the world.

Paul will later admit that he is unworthy of such a task: "The least of all the apostles," he will title himself. But what better way to proclaim the weakness of the cross to the sinner than to use the weakest and most unworthy of all vessels? But this is the way of our Lord: When we are weak, then He is strong.

For the Gospel isn't about the sinner who is being used to proclaim it, but it is about the sinless Son of God who has come to make that sinner, and all other sinners, righteous... We don't look to our pastors to be perfect, but we look to our pastors to proclaim the perfection of Christ. It is in that way, then, that Christ is made known: through the lips of unclean pastors into the ears of unclean sinners.

we give thanks to our Lord above for the conversion that He wrought in St. Paul. If the Holy Spirit can bring about faith in a murderous blasphemer, then He can certainly bring faith and sustain that faith in me, in you, in all.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You turned the heart of him who persecuted the Church and, by his preaching, caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world. Grant us ever to rejoice in the saving light of Your Gospel and, following the example of the apostle Paul, to spread it to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor

JANUARY 26, 2025

Today's Reading: Titus 1:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 2:1-3:10; Luke 10:1-9

"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it." (Titus 1:9)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

You should have a pastor. There's a big list of things he should be. They make him above reproach. The list is a comfort to you. It's terrifying to your pastor because most of us are white-knuckling at least one of those on a good day. It's way easier for him to be a pastor if his life is in order. He has the bandwidth for all the places your life isn't that way. It will be his job to hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. He should have a firm faith and point you to truth, both to point you away from the sin that breaks stuff and to forgive you for when you broke it anyway. It's hard enough to trust your pastor when he has to tell you a law you don't want to hear. It's sometimes impossible when you can see all the places the law makes him a sinner, too. That's the reason for the list of things he should be. It's not that Jesus didn't die for your pastor. It's that sin breaks stuff. And sometimes that gets so distracting it's hard to hear Jesus from him. So Paul tells Titus not only the list of things he should strive to be but also the reason why so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Your pastor's job is to point you to Jesus and point you away from the things that just pretend to be Jesus. The idols. The false comforts. The lies of the evil one, the world, and the lies of your own heart. Because for your pastor, just like for you, there are two things we want. We want faithfulness and godliness. And we also want the lies to be true. Both can't stand, so we need Christ in truth and purity. And we need to be called out of everything that is not Christ. So God gives you a pastor to point. We are sinners, all of us. It's all the more reason to hold firm to Jesus. Hear Jesus. Hear the cross. Hear the resurrection. Receive The Sacraments. And there's finally a place where it's alright to be white-knuckling it. Hold fast to Jesus. He is the forgiveness for everywhere everything else is falling apart. He is the hope that exists through all the things that tear down. Let nothing distract from Jesus. Especially not the sins He forgives.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You called Titus to the work of pastor and teacher. Make all shepherds of Your flock diligent in preaching Your holy Word so that the whole world may know the immeasurable riches of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Third Monday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 27, 2025

Today's Reading: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 4:1-5:11; Romans 15:14-33

For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. (Nehemiah 8:9b-10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The people wept as they heard the words of the Law because it paints a picture of how things are supposed to be. It paints a picture of good. And we aren't good. The consequences of being not good are...well...not good. Sin breaks stuff. You hurt the people around you. The law points it out, even when you'd rather not look. It threatens punishment. God's allowed to be angry when you hurt His kids. He's even allowed to be angry when you hurt yourself. The law is a black-and-white picture. There's no room for shades of grey, either, from best intentions or blame. The people heard how far from good they were.

But something strange happens. The people who deserve to be sent away in wrath, condemned to eat of the damnation they sow, are instead sent to eat the best portions of meat and drink sweet wine. They're to share the Gift they don't deserve with anyone and everyone around them. Sinners receive something unfair. Love. Because even though, in our sins, we are not good, God still is. We hear His word and in faith even come to see that the law paints a picture of Jesus, who fulfilled it, and in mercy, forgives us who do not. Because even though, in His righteousness, Christ is good, He dies on the cross bearing the weight of the wrath over every sin. It's unfair, but it's love. Jesus died for you. Your sins are forgiven. The day where He hands out forgiveness is holy. Go to church on that day. Eat and drink a measure of God's mercy in Communion. And rejoice. We who ought to shed a lot more tears over our confrontation with the law are only measured by the gospel. Christ's death on the cross paints a picture of you. You're worthy of love. Jesus says so, then invites you to take and eat.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

God's Word is our great heritage And shall be ours forever; To spread its light from age to age Shall be our chief endeavor. Through life it guides our way, In death it is our stay. Lord, grant, while worlds endure, We keep its teachings pure Throughout all generations. (LSB 582)

The Third Tuesday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 28, 2025

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 6:1-7:14; Romans 16:17-27

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

I sort of wish I could see Paul's facial expressions as he wrote to the church in Corinth. He had more than a couple of frustrations. Even though bickering over who's the most important honesty seems trivial compared to some of the other stuff they were doing, this one's pretty serious. Imagine just conveying, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the truth of the gospel of Christ Jesus, that apart from anything you could ever do by works of the law, you were saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who died and rose for you and for all. No one in the church can save themselves by works, and nobody has to. But they'll still fight about who's the most important based on what they can do anyway. If we are the body of Christ, you are the appendix. Why are you even here?

If the whole body were a nose, how would you pick it? It isn't just a call to repentance for all who think too much of themselves. This desire to be the most important isn't just dangerous for the ones convinced of how much they do. It's the ones who think they go unnoticed. Overlooked. Forgotten. The feeling of worthlessness that permeates any culture rooted in works. Ironically, it's the one thing the people who think too much of themselves and the people who think too little share in common. They can only think of themselves. But the whole body is not a nose. And, much more importantly, you are not worth simply what you can do.

The body of Christ, knit together, works as God has ordered it. But the true worth of each part is not in what it can do but in the cost that was paid to knit us together under Him who is our head, Christ. Our Lord died and rose to give you your worth. It doesn't have to rest on you doing enough, and it can't be diminished by you not doing enough. You are worth what was paid for you. So, if you happen to be the appendix, the nose, or the finger, what matters most is that you're attached to the head who has redeemed and saved us all the same and works good through us, the body, each day.

Suffer together. Rejoice together.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

In what You give us, Lord, to do, Together or alone, In old routines or ventures new, May we not cease to look to You, The cross You hung upon - All You endeavored done. (LSB 853:4)

The Third Wednesday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 29, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 4:16-30

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 8:1-23; 2 Timothy 1:1-18

"And he said, 'Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.'" (Luke 4:24)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus wouldn't do miracles in His hometown. It gave everyone big feelings, so they tried to throw him off a cliff. It's maybe a little easier to stomach Jesus saying no to the people who throw tantrums and try to throw Him off a cliff than when He does it to us. That might be a thing to wrestle with. But instead everyone takes the hometown verse as the thing that matters.

No prophet is acceptable in his hometown. I get why I can't go back to my hometown. I did stupid stuff in high school. People remember. But sinless Jesus wasn't known for stealing road cones from construction sites and closing down public streets for fun. So it's not about reputation. It's not even about the town, either. Elisha didn't go on a healing tour but saw only Naaman, who visited him at home, like 3threechapters after he had shebears kill young men for calling him bald. His reputation was probably... at least something to take note of.

This isn't actually about the prophet. It isn't about the town. It's about the expectation. The thing we didn't want to talk about in the first place when all the bad people who Jesus said "no" to tried to de-cliff Him. The reason we're really not okay when He says "no" to us. The expectation is, "Hey, you work for us." That's a problem. God is for you. But not under you. It's bigger than just who's in charge. God is merciful and good. The great danger in assuming you need to be in charge and not Him is really that you think you need to be. If you need to be in charge and not God, there's an assumption that God isn't merciful and good, so you need to be in charge.

The kind of Christianity where you need to be in charge is the greatest burden and the least hope. It is a false doctrine, a lie of the devil Christ will not allow to stand because that is a Christianity where you get to receive nothing and are forced to take everything. You don't get to trust God; only figure out how to make Him dance. Crosses aren't involved in that kind of Christianity. But Jesus died for you. It's not only the proof that He is merciful and good that we need when our desperate prayers seem to be met with "no." It's the place He gives the answers we really need. Your sins are forgiven. You are already delivered from death and the devil. Rejoice. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Hail, Thou once despised Jesus! Hail, Thou Galilean King! Thou didst suffer to release us; Thou didst free salvation bring. Hail, Thou universal Savior, Bearer of our sin and shame! By Thy merit we find favor: Life is given through Thy name. (LSB 531:1)

The Third Thursday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 30, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Sixth Commandment
Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 9:1-17; 2 Timothy 2:1-26

You shall not commit adultery.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. This commandment comes with baggage. It's the one assaulted by the world. It's the one that hurts to talk about if you're a product of a broken home. It's the one we fail with our thoughts, our web browsing, and worse. Lord, have mercy.

But here's the thing: if you don't believe marriage is worthwhile, why bother? Just like the First Commandment, if you do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things, why would you pay attention to His laws? Marriage is a Gift worth guarding. It is an image of the love shown between Christ and the church. It is a body knit together purely by God's giving of good Gifts. It is the foundation of family.

So we should fear and love God so that we lead a chaste and pure life in word and deed, and husband and wife love and honor each other. We're using the old explanation on purpose. Not only because it's hard to explain "sexual purity" to the 7-year-old the Catechism was written to, but because 'chaste' is a word that is almost altogether free from baggage outside of jokes from old movies. Chaste is a word we should take back. The meaning is simple. What if, either today or someday in the future, God wanted you to have a healthy, happy marriage? The things that help you, either today or in the future, have a healthy, happy marriage are chaste. The things that make it harder to have a healthy, happy marriage, either today or in the future, are unchaste. You can teach that to a 5-year-old, a middle schooler, or a married person. The word chaste grows with us in our vocations. It is a word that surely walls off the things that tear down marriage. But it's also a recognition of the Gifts God gives in marriage, the value that we ought to esteem marriage, and so the lengths we should struggle to go to defend it.

Struggle here, but start from the fact that God gives good Gifts. Marriage is not yours to defend. It's Christ's, who uses it to paint a picture of the forgiveness of sins He gives to sinners. Even the ones who have not upheld the Sixth Commandment. Even you. Jesus died to forgive all the places where this commandment has been broken. He works good through marriage, even in the face of so much sin. And He calls us to rejoice because even though this commandment is not one we can fulfill, it still paints a picture of Christ and the church, where Christ still forgives us, presenting us to Himself without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"Be faithful to your marriage vow; No lust or impure thoughts allow. Keep all your conduct free from sin By self-controlled discipline." Have mercy, Lord! (LSB 581:7)

The Third Friday After the Epiphany

JANUARY 31, 2025

Today's Reading: 2 Timothy 3:1-17

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 10:1-11:3; 2 Timothy 3:1-17

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," (2 Timothy 3:16)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Bible doesn't contain God's word. It is God's word. All of it. The clear parts. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. The quirky parts. John needs you to know he's a faster runner than Peter. The weird parts. A prophet called down a bear attack on the young men who called him bald. The parts I don't like. The 10 Commandments that paint me as a sinner in many and various ways. God wants it all in there. He is the one who used the various writers with their various personalities, flaws, sins, and quirks to say exactly what He wanted said.

It's a Gift, though. Now, it's not our job to sort through the Bible and pick out what's actually God's word and what's just pretending to be. It's funny how when that's our job, God's word always seems to agree with us. It's a cold look in the mirror when we realize that if we are who determine what is and isn't God's word, that's not just cleaning up after apostles who were ignorant because they lived before iPhones. It's making yourself God. If you're the one who chooses what God says, that sort of makes you in charge. Like God.

It's hard enough to believe it's all God's word. It's harder still to believe it's all profitable for you. Because the whole Bible, the narrative, the history, the law, and the gospel, they are for you. They testify of Christ, of hope, and of how things should be. It's easy to carve up the Bible into what is and isn't God's word. It's also easy to carve out all the things we think don't actually relate to us. But all Scripture is for you. To call you away from the things of death. To point you to the things of life. To give you hope because if God can save sinners like those we read of, He can save you, too. When you read the Bible, it doesn't just teach you what good is; it equips you to be good. By faith, you receive the very holiness the law demands, and a clean conscience willing to be corrected, always with the hope that your salvation rests on Christ, whom the whole Bible attests is your savior.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous; Bright with Thine own holiness, Glorious now, we press toward glory, And our lives our hopes confess. Alleluia, alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send! Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia without end! (LSB 578:3)

The Third Saturday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 1, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Epiphany 4 - Psalm 10:16-18; antiphon: Psalm 10:12
Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 11:4-17; 2 Timothy 4:1-18

Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted. (Psalm 10:12)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Text of the Reflection

Even though I forgot where my keys are for the 4th time this week, I'm pretty comfortable telling God He should do a better job remembering the afflicted. Especially when it's me. A little bit, it's because I'm a sinner. A little bit, I think it's how God wants it. He knows we forget. We forget our to-do lists. We forget to help each other. We forget to pray when things aren't falling apart. But when everything's a mess, it feels like God forgets us, too.

So God gives us this psalm to pray. It's a reflection on His character. The LORD hears us in our affliction. He strengthens our hearts. He does justice to the fatherless and the oppressed. His character isn't something the Psalmist worries about. Of course, God is good. Which is why it's easy to wonder if He forgot about us when nothing around us is as good as a good God should make it. Which is the real reason we pray this psalm.

It's an exercise in remembering. In calling to God, we can be sure He hears us and responds in mercy. He doesn't forget. But even in praying, we remember who He is. What He has already done. What He has promised to do. In the midst of all we forget, the character of God is the most important thing to remember, reflect upon, and call to mind and heart in the midst of trial.

The things that are falling apart? They are not things Your God has no care for. He loves you enough to die for you. The things falling apart? They are not bigger than your God. He has conquered death itself. And when we remember who He is and how He's done that, it gives hope to the mess. God destroyed death through a cross, not a day when nothing was wrong, but a day when everything was falling apart. God can and does work mercy for you even in the midst of all that's wrong. Just like Good Friday, things don't need to be apart from sin or disorder or fear for Him to save you. When it's all falling apart, remember who your God is, and remember He won't forget you.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The will of God is always best And shall be done forever; And they who trust in Him are blest; He will forsake them never. He helps indeed In time of need; He chastens with forbearing. They who depend On God, their friend, Shall not be left despairing. (LSB 758:1)

The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Our Lord

FEBRUARY 2, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 2:22-32, 33-40

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 12:1-13:9; Titus 1:1-2:6

"For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Simeon saw with his eyes what the ancients of Israel longed to see, and he saw with his own eyes what many have no idea they need; that is salvation itself. Salvation embodied in the tiny infant, Jesus. A light of revelation to the Gentiles, to those whom Paul says were "at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (Eph. 2:12). But this salvation is also glory to the people of Israel whom Paul says in Romans have "fallen short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23). Simeon cradles that very salvation in Jesus and essentially says, "I can die now peacefully. No regrets. No sorrow. No fear. All in joy, faith, and hope." Why? Because salvation is here in Jesus. To those who know not the True God, the light of Jesus reveals the Divine Grace and tender mercy of the God who remembers our sins no more, all through the wisdom of the cross. To those who know God, He is the glory of God. The crowning fullness of the mystery of our faith, God truly manifested in the tenderness of a baby. The fulfillment of prophecies and even time and history itself. It's no wonder that we join the blessed Simeon in his song every Divine Service because we, too, in the Body and Blood of Christ, receive the light of Gospel revelation and the glory of Israel. For as the venerable Martin Luther would say in his Christian Questions with Their Answers, "Why should we remember and proclaim His death? ...Third, so we may find joy and comfort in Christ alone, and through faith in Him be saved." (LSC 39); just like Simeon.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, by the voice of Your servant Simeon, You have taught us that joy, comfort, and salvation are of Christ alone. Cause us, by faith, to receive these promises in Your Holy Word and Sacraments, that whether we live or whether die, we may do so in Your perfect peace; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever One God, now and forever. Amen

The Fourth Monday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 3, 2025

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-10 (17-19)

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 14:1-21; Titus 2:7-3:15

Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:9-10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

It never fails. Moses feared the call of the LORD because he lived in fear of the inadequacy of his own speaking abilities. And today, Jeremiah feared the call of the LORD because he lived in fear of the inadequacy of his youth. In Holy Baptism, you have been given a Divine call to partake of the promises of God's forgiveness, life, and salvation in Jesus. To live with confident hope in the blessed inheritance that is to come. But, you have also been called to obey all that Christ has commanded and taught with your very life and your very lips. And if we are honest with ourselves, this should make us feel very uneasy. Who am I to do this? Who are you? We are sin, dust, and ashes piled on garbage. Nevertheless, look at where our Triune God redirects Jeremiah's focus: "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth...to pluck up and to break down...to build and to plant." God moves Jeremiah's attention away from his fleshly eyes, which only see weakness and inexperience, and to his eyes of faith, which move outside of his own self. Jeremiah is led now to see the work of God and the power of His Word. It's as though God is saying, "It's not about your youth, Jeremiah, it's that I called you. It's that my words are now in you, and these words are powerful." Indeed, God's Word rightly condemns all falsehood in this world, and God's Word heals all sin in the application of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the Word that truly can tear down what is false and ugly through the work of the law and truly bring forth what is beautiful and good by the power of the Gospel. Yes, you have been called in your station of life (student, son, daughter, friend, employee, etc.) to represent Jesus Christ amongst the nations. You need not fear this call. You only need to get your eyes off of yourself and back on to Christ on the cross, Christ risen, and Christ exalted with all power and authority. You must fix your heart on the power of this Word in that it breaks what needs to be broken and heals what needs to be mended.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous; Bright with Thine own holiness, Glorious now, we press toward glory, And our lives our hopes confess. Alleluia, alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send! Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia without end!" (LSB 578:3)

The Fourth Tuesday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 4, 2025

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13

Daily Lectionary: Job 1:1-22; John 1:1-18

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away...So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:8,13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"Love is love," they tell me. "Love is this feeling I get when I think of my girlfriend/boyfriend." "I really love (insert restaurant)." Love these days has become an excuse for disordered relationships (homosexuality, shacking up, cheating, etc.), but is that what love is? Love that adulterates what is true, beautiful, and good? No! Love these days can be a description of a favorite food or celebrity, but that's just consumption. Is that what love does? Does it consume and throw away the trash? No! Love these days is this emotional hit of dopamine, the feel-good hormone, but what happens when the hormone takes a break? Does love? No! Epiphany is the Church season of enlightenment and revelation in Christ Jesus, and we, just as much as the world, need an epiphany of what true love is. This is the love that is cruciformed with Christ. That is, a love that Paul says "never ends" (vs. 8). It is a love that is of God who is eternal. It is a love that only reaches its full potential at the return of Christ. It is the love that is purely found and only done through Christ. It is as patient and kind as Christ. It is as humble and content as Christ. It is as calm and forgiving as Christ. It walks aligned to the truth of Christ, and it endures every adversity, small and large. This is the same love that stooped down from heaven to earth and took responsibility for our sin. This is the same love that died for us when we were God's enemies. The same love that Jesus says, "All the law and prophets hang upon." It is not a love that comes naturally to those who are poisoned with sin, but it is the very love that bathed us in the blood of Christ through Holy Baptism and the very love that is poured into us through the Holy Spirit. And it is our joy and our opportunity to practice this love daily in Christ. Will we fall short? Yes! Will it still be lacking? Yes! But this is the Divine Love in Christ that daily and richly and freely forgives your sin. So practice love, pursue love, learn love, for the love of Christ will never fail you.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Love in Christ is strong and living, Binding faithful hearts in one; Love in Christ is true and giving. May His will in us be done. Love in Christ abides forever, Fainting not when ills attend; Love, forgiving and forgiven, Shall endure until life's end." (LEB 706:1,3)

The Fourth Wednesday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 5, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 4:31-44

Daily Lectionary: Job 2:1-3:10; John 1:19-34

And they were all amazed and said to one another, "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!" (Luke 4:36)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

We return again to this reminder: Epiphany is the season of the Church that reveals and enlightens us about who Christ is. Today, we get to see this unfold in an exorcism. Now, modern horror films and stories portray this elaborate and horrific image of demonic possession. And often, it becomes this story about the priest's faith versus the power of the demon. Usually, all who walk away from the story shiver in the spine and are terrified to look in the mirror, go down to the basement, or be by themselves. All of it is enough to show that this is not the fruit that comes from God, and more importantly, this is now how our God has called us to live. In actuality, an exorcism is a lot like what happens when we repent. It is not about our faith having to be strong enough, the priest's faith, the kind of demon, etc. It is about encountering TRUTH and our realignment to that very truth. It is the Truth of the Gospel that encounters us with the authority of Christ. It's not about how much faith we have. It's about the power that is in Christ Alone and what He has done to the powers of darkness. He has, by His very blood, made a public mockery of them (cf. Colossians 2:15). And you have been made a partaker of this Heavenly power in Christ, for all who are baptized into Christ and all who drink of His Body and Blood, are one with Him as He is one with them. You need not fear the dark. You need not fear the wicked spirits. You need not feel stuck or trapped. Their power has been brought to nothing in the blood of Christ. Keep your eyes on Jesus, your confidence in your Baptism, and your heart captivated by the Word of God; demonic darkness will have no power over you.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

I bind unto myself today The strong name of the Trinity By invocation of the same, The Three in One and One in Three. Against the demon snares of sin, The vice that gives temptation force, The natural lusts that war within, The hostile foes that mar my course; Or few or many, far or nigh, In every place and in all hours, Against their fierce hostility, I bind to me those holy pow'rs. (LSB 604:1,4)

The Fourth Thursday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 6, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Seventh Commandment
Daily Lectionary: Job 3:11-26; John 1:35-51

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"Don't take someone's stuff without permission!" "Alright, got it! Easy peasy! Boom! Done!" As my favorite sports announcer, Lee Corso, would say, "Not so fast, my friend!" Have you ever slacked on your work? Have you ever taken a paycheck when most of your time was spent scrolling the never-ending social media feed? Have you ever taken something without permission, even if it was as small as a paper clip? Have you ever been a little over-generous in describing something as in "good condition" only to sell it with dings? If you have done any of those things, I have news for you: bad news. You are a thief! It's what happens when our hearts are not satisfied in the "fear and love of God," as Luther would say. Instead, I fear my lack. I fear not gaining something on my own terms. So then I take, and take, and take. But that is not how we learned Christ! We have been taught in Christ to shred off the old in the power of Baptism and to remember with joy the promises of God in Holy Scripture. And most importantly, our theft has been paid for by the giving of our Lord Jesus, who paid for us generously in His blood. You are forgiven (and so am I)! So what do we do, we who are now so richly and fully forgiven? We do as the Apostle Paul instructs, "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need." (Ephesians 4:28). We train our hands to labor in a way that is of gracious benefit to the Body of Christ first, and our community second. That's why Martin Luther says, "...help him to improve and protect his possessions and income." The Old Man with his "Give me! Give me! Give me!" attitude is dead in our baptismal union with Christ, and now what is alive is the New Man who looks at others and says, "How can I support them with what they have?"

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"You shall not steal or take away What others worked for night and day, But open wide a gen'rous hand And help the poor in the land." Have mercy, Lord! (LSB 581:8)

The Fourth Friday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 7, 2025

Today's Reading: John 2:1-12

Daily Lectionary: Job 4:1-21; John 2:1-12

"Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. (John 2:10-11)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

This situation was awful! We're not just looking at a wedding reception that happened to run out of food a bit early. This act of running out of wine would have been a massive hit against their marriage and social standing in the Jewish community. And in a spiritual sense, lack of wine was the sign of a lack of God's favor; that perhaps you were cursed and condemned. So the dear and blessed mother, Mary, that most highly favored lady, sought to intervene by the power of her Son, Jesus. But his response to His mother was, "My hour has not yet come." The hour in John's Gospel is a phrase that will appear again and again (John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 12:27; 17:1), and ultimately, the hour is shown to be the hour of His death when He was exalted on the cross to pour streams of living water out. But in grace, for this married couple, He preemptively brings forth in advance the blessings of His hour. Just like running out of wine was more than a minor social goof, the abundance of wine is more than just festivities being able to continue. Wine is the symbol of God's favor and joy, and an abundance is the sign of the age of the Messiah. Amos 9:13-15 says, "Blessings like wine pouring off the mountains and hills. I'll make everything right again for my people Israel: 'They'll rebuild their ruined cities. They'll plant vineyards and drink good wine.'" And Joel 3:18 says, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters..." This act of abundantly fine wine from water is the sign that God's grace flows freely and richly for us because the Christ has come, and His name is Jesus. That's why we celebrate Holy Communion; we drink of the finest of wine, the very blood of our Savior. And we take into ourselves the Christ and the blessings of what is to come. That first married couple received a foretaste; now, so do we.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Feast after feast thus comes and passes by, Yet, passing, points to that glad feast above, Giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy, The Lamb's great marriage feast of bliss and love. (LSB 631:7)

The Fourth Saturday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 8, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Epiphany 5 - Psalm 71:15-18; antiphon: Psalm 71:12
Daily Lectionary: Job 5:1-27; John 2:13-25

O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come. (Psalm 71:17-18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

This psalm of David could have been composed around the time that his son, Absalom, sought to violently overthrow him. Other scholars think it could have come around Sheba's rebellion (see 2 Samuel 20). It's also possible that this Psalm reflects a man of faith who has been through it all, whose earthly life is coming to its conclusion in death (see 2 Samuel 23 for similar words spoken by David). But for us, I believe it is important to know that Psalm 71 teaches three key lessons. First, It calls us to have firm confidence in God and to remember our Lord's gracious mercy to us (see vs. 1, 3, 5-7). Second, it teaches us the right things to pray, such as: that we might never be ashamed of the Lord or His Word but might be rescued from the power of the wicked one even into our old age. And third, King David, by the Holy Spirit, teaches that we may daily have hopeful anticipation that our God will show us tenderness, and we not be forsaken; but it will be the enemies of the cross who will turn back in dishonor and shame. Ultimately, this song teaches us that God in Christ will not let us stagger at the promises of the Gospel through unbelief, but instead, He will fortify our faith like a faithful friend, even to the very end. How good it is to know that even as this was David's earthly experience, we see that this is all true through "great David's greater son," the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come, Be Thou our guard while troubles last And our eternal home! Under the shadow of thy throne Thy saints have dwelt secure; Sufficient is Thine arm alone, And our defense is sure. (LSB 733:1,2)

The Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 9, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 5:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Job 6:1-13; John 3:1-21

But when Simon Peter saw [the great catch of fish], he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." (Luke 5:8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Everyone thinks they are special. Everyone thinks they are different. Except you're not. You think you are, and you think that you would react differently than St. Peter after this great catch of fish.

You see, you just know better than poor ol' Peter. You would see through everything and know that Jesus is the Son of God from the jump, and you wouldn't have these moments of doubt like he and the other disciples do. You can just tell.

Except you can't. That's just the benefit of knowing how the whole Biblical story played out. We can't look at Holy Scripture in any other way than as people who have seen the final outcome of what was foretold. We only see it from this side of history.

One of the hardest things to do as a Christian, as a baptized child of God, is to set aside the knowledge of the truth that you have and realize that outside of God the Father's gracious Gift of faith, you would be as terrified as St. Peter at the outcome of that fishing trip.

St. Peter was the expert, and this rabbi just schooled him in his own area of expertise. This teacher just taught him something he never expected to learn: that the incarnate God has come into his world to make the wrong right, to make the broken new, and that he has power over all of creation. All of it.

It is a humbling thing to realize that you are not as important (or as smart) as you thought you were. That's also a good thing. It is good to be reminded that you don't have all the answers and that not all of the weight of the world rests upon your shoulders.

That is the comfort of the Christian faith, after all: that you rest in the arms of your Lord and God, and you trust that he has your future in mind and cares for you more than anyone else on earth. He has made you his own through the blood of Christ and your Baptism; no matter what comes your way, he will carry you through.

Be amazed at his works and his ways. It's OK. It reminds you that he's got you in his hands, and he's never going to let you go.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, keep Your family the Church continually in the true faith that, relying on the hope of Your heavenly grace, we may ever be defended by Your mighty power; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for The Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany)

The Fifth Monday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 10, 2025

Today's Reading: Isaiah 6:1-8 (9-13)

Daily Lectionary: Job 6:14-30; John 3:22-46

Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump. (Isaiah 6:11-13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. This is the Word of the Lord? Talk about doom and gloom! This isn't something you would want to talk about in Sunday School, is it? Yet, there is a glimmer of hope here.

Isaiah is called to be a prophet in a strange and miraculous way. He sees the Lord God while praying in the temple. God sends him to the people of Israel and tells him to speak in a way that they will refuse to understand and comprehend. And he does.

Isaiah doesn't prophesy like he's just gotten a thesaurus; he is very down to earth in his prophecy, and the people are so stunned by his simplicity that they think he's too dumb for them to hear. So, he tries again, and they refuse to hear him again because he does the same thing—he tries to explain it in a way that a child could understand.

God tells him to keep doing this until Israel is a barren wasteland and the cities are empty. Their sin is so great that he will lay waste to his own people and send them away into exile for their iniquity (some of them will be gone forever).

But look at the very last sentence of the reading. There is still hope; there is still a promise of love to be fulfilled. The tree is burned and cut down, but the stump remains, and that stump is the holy seed; it is the new growth to come.

The shoot from the stump of Jesse, as it were. From the tiny remnant that remains, the few people still in the land, a great people will grow again, and from that people will come the Savior God promised since the Garden of Eden.

And that people will keep growing, branches and vines and shoots from that Savior, until God's people will cover the earth. That is us. We are the ones who have grown from that burned and scarred stump that was left for dead.

It grew into Jesus, and he has grafted us into himself. We are now those who live in him, a life of promise that will never end. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Preach you the Word and plant it home To men who like or like it not, The Word that shall endure and stand When flow'rs and men shall be forgot. (LSB 586:1)

The Fifth Tuesday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 11, 2025

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 14:12b-20

Daily Lectionary: Job 7:1-21; John 4:7-26

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. (1 Corinthians 14:14–15)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Are you happy with the way you pray, or do you think you could learn to pray better? St. Paul talks about speaking in tongues here, but at the heart of it is how one's fellow believers understand what you are praying or singing.

Some people are really good at *ex corde* prayers—prayers that seem to flow effortlessly from their hearts to their lips and cover every need. Others may have trouble remembering the words to “Come, Lord Jesus.”

In the end, what matters is that one prays from a place of faith, that one prays a prayer for himself or others in a way that everyone can understand. It can be a printed collect from the hymnal, it can be a wonderful expression from the heart, or it can be a barely-remembered prayer from childhood.

What matters is that you pray, not how eloquently you pray. Sometimes, “Lord, have mercy!” is all you can manage, and that is fine. St. Paul also reminds the Romans that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans beyond words and that even the Godhead remembers you in prayer.

It is hard to always know what to pray for, and that's OK. Nowhere does God demand specific subjects or wording for your prayers. This very booklet has prayers to help jumpstart your own. Not confident in your praying ability? Pray to God by yourself with those printed prayers. Work those “prayer muscles” until it gets easier and easier.

God never turned away a prayer because you got the words wrong; he knows what you need even before you ask. He wants you to ask; he wants you to pray! And you are able to pray because God himself has given you the ability by making you his child in Jesus. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for you, the Gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation that is yours in Christ; these Gifts give you the assurance that God will hear your prayers and that you can speak boldly to our Lord and God and be heard.

Someone will always pray better than you. It's a Gift some people have. Rejoice in that you hear their requests to God so clearly. That's what St. Paul is most concerned about, that the gathered people of God are built up together, and their love for one another grows stronger.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

As holy conversation, In silence or by word, In ev'ry situation Through Jesus, we are heard. So let us pray securely, expressing hopes and fears With confidence that surely Our Father ever hears. (LSB 772:3)

The Fifth Wednesday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 12, 2025

Today's Reading: John 4:27-45

Daily Lectionary: Job 8:1-22; John 4:27-45

"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." (John 4:35-38)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

It might seem strange that there is talk about a harvest in the middle of Jesus talking to his disciples following his chat with the Samaritan woman. But Jesus has a point.

The harvest isn't wheat, but souls. The Samaritan woman had returned to Sychar and told everyone she met about Jesus and what he said to her. Now, they are on their way to the well to see for themselves.

They are the harvest, the ones who have heard the Word of God. Jesus uses the idea of the harvest several times when he talks about gathering in the faithful at the end of time, so it shouldn't be a big surprise here.

Jesus is laying out not only the past history of the work of the prophets but also the future work of the disciples and those who follow them, all the way down to your own pastor. The disciples will talk about Jesus to those who have heard the prophets' proclamations, and they will trust in Jesus for their salvation and "be harvested" for eternity.

The disciples will also go into the world to establish the church, and it continues to this very day, sowing the seed of God's Word by proclaiming it to those gathered and those who will hear it. Ever since their time, there has been a continued harvest.

The disciples may never have seen most of the seed they planted come to its fullness, but someone did. And it has been that way in every generation, all the way to the present. You, and the faithful gathered around you, are those ripe for harvest.

Thanks be to God that he has given us this seed, this Word, that produces the fruit of faith, and that it preserves us to the Last Day when all the faithful will enter into his glory!

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Some take up His task in morning, To their Lord responding soon; Some are called in heat of midday, Others late in afternoon; Even as the sun is setting, some are sent into the fields, There to gather in the bounty That God's Word so richly yields. (LSB 827:2)

The Fifth Thursday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 13, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Eighth Commandment
Daily Lectionary: Job 9:1-35; John 4:46-54

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way. (Luther's Small Catechism – The Eighth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Gossip. That's what the Eighth Commandment is about. False testimony is listed, but isn't that what gossip is? Lying about your neighbor? Stretching the truth? Saying untrue things to hurt someone or to make yourself feel better?

Even saying true things can be gossiping when you say them for the wrong reasons. Has someone told you a deep, dark secret? Was it so juicy that you just couldn't keep it to yourself? You just had to share it with that one person you thought you could trust? Or were you the betrayed one? Your secret got out. Someone lied about you. Made up a story for their own entertainment.

Words can be nasty weapons that cut deep and hurt for a long time. Words can also be shields that protect. One of the hardest things to do is to stand up to gossip and defend someone against lies. It is also the most loving thing to do.

"Are you sure that's true? Have you asked the person?" Brave words, those. Or, how about "I heard something about you. I want you to know what's being said. Can I help you set things straight?" Defending and speaking well of your neighbor can be really hard to do, especially when it seems that you stand alone. But this is the Gift we've all been given: a good reputation. How do you defend it?

We have all been on both sides: betrayer and betrayed. Thanks be to God that the One who was betrayed to the cross shed his blood to cover that sin and shame. Because you have been washed anew in the blood of Jesus and the waters of Baptism, you can thank God that he doesn't hold those sins against you; they are forgiven.

Jesus never believes the lies told about you, so he'll never turn away when you are in your deepest need. Instead, it is entirely likely that one of your fellow Christians will stand beside you and help you through the rough times. Reach out for that help from your baptized neighbors. And be on the lookout when you can love your own neighbor in this way.

Loving your neighbor is the highest calling you have in this world. Our Lord has gifted you through your Baptism to do just that. Let him give you that strength, now and always. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"Bear no false witness nor defame Your neighbor nor destroy his name, But view him in the kindest way; Speak truth in all that you say." Have mercy, Lord! (LSB 581:9)

The Fifth Friday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 14, 2025

Today's Reading: John 5:1-18

Daily Lectionary: Job 10:1-22; John 5:1-18

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. (John 5:6-9)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There is a lot going on here. If you keep reading, you see that this healing took place on the Sabbath, which led to a huge discussion a bit later. What is the nature of the day of rest? What is the nature of this healing? Can something so strange really be done with God's approval on a holy day?

We can easily look back and say that of course it was good and right for Jesus to do this. But, in the moment, it was a strange thing for faithful Jews to try and understand. How could someone sent by God violate God's own law about working on the Sabbath?

But look closely at what Jesus both says and does. There is much more happening here than 'just' a healing miracle. He speaks words of creation and resurrection. He asks if the man wishes to become "whole." He tells him to "rise" and walk. And all of this happens near water.

What Jesus essentially does is raise this man from the dead and restore him fully to the people of God. This is why the authorities were so angry; to them, Jesus, who they saw as only a man, had done something with evil intent to destroy God's holy law because there was no way God would allow this.

On the other hand, the man healed saw the whole promise of God fulfilled in Jesus's words and work for him. Only God could work such a miraculous thing, so of course, Jesus was from God.

Creation came forth from water, and our rebirth and resurrection is done through Baptism, but Jesus' words also remind you that "Let there be" came even before that. Here again is the promise that Jesus is indeed God in the flesh, that everything he does is for the love and salvation of his people.

It may not always make sense, and it may sometimes be hard to understand, but everything Jesus does, even if it upsets the religious authorities, is a promise that his work is for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

*Ev'ry wound that pains or grieves me By your wounds, Lord, is made whole;
When I'm faint, Your cross revives me, Granting new life to my soul. Yes, Your
comfort renders sweet Ev'ry bitter cup I meet; For Your all atoning passion Has
procured my soul's salvation. (LSB 421:4)*

The Fifth Saturday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 15, 2025

Today's Reading: Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5; antiphon: Psalm 119:7

Daily Lectionary: Job 11:1-20; John 5:19-29

*Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole
heart. (From the Introit for the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany)*

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

There is a difference between blessedness and happiness. Happiness is a fleeting emotion, while blessedness is a state of being given by God. You can start out as happy as can be, but then something will come along and ruin your day. Your happiness is now a memory.

Blessedness, on the other hand, is something that doesn't come and go based on how your day plays out. It also doesn't depend on you, how you feel, or your behavior. Too many people want to hear this Introit say that IF you are blameless, and IF you walk in the law of the Lord, THEN you will be blessed.

But there is a reason this part of Psalm 119 was chosen for tomorrow's Introit. Look at the Gospel reading from St. Luke 6. Jesus speaks the Beatitudes and not once says you are blessed because of your actions. It is all passive. You are declared blessed by God.

So also with this psalm. The Word of God has had its way with you; it has reshaped you into God's child. You hear him calling you and teaching you, and you are glad to walk in his ways. He has made you a blessed one. He has blessed you in your Baptism, and out of deep love and respect for what he has done for you, you are glad to seek him, to keep his testimonies, to be one who lives as he has called you to do because he has re-made you as his own child.

Good or bad, happy or sad, nothing can change the fact that God your Father has declared you blessed because of Jesus. When your day goes badly, when you feel that things aren't working, remember these words of the psalmist and Jesus's words of truth. You are blessed by God. You are his child. You are safe in his hands, no matter what this world does to you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O holy and most merciful God, You have taught us the way of Your commandments. We implore You to pour out Your grace into our hearts. Cause it to bear fruit in us that, being ever mindful of Your mercies and Your laws, we may always be directed to Your will and daily increase in love toward You and one another. Enable us to resist all evil and to live a godly life. Help us to follow the example of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and to walk in His steps until we shall possess the kingdom that has been prepared for us in heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (Collect for obedience to the Word)

The Sixth Sunday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 16, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 6:17-26

Daily Lectionary: Job 12:1-6, 12-25; John 5:30-47

And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all. (Luke 6:17-19)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

What should we make of this strange event? Power coming out of Jesus and healing all who sought his help? Clearly, Jesus has compassion on his followers, and healing them is a way to both show his love for them and to show what following him will lead to: a kingdom of perfect health and life, free of pain, sin, illness, and death.

Admit it, though. You are a bit miffed that Jesus doesn't heal you immediately when you call out in your time of sickness or injury. I mean, why did these people receive healing and you don't?

Can't Jesus see that you are worthy of his attention? Of course, he can see that you are worthy! He is the one who made you worthy in your Baptism. He is the one who washed and redeemed you! And that's the thing most people miss about these healing miracles. They think Jesus only pays attention to those right in front of him, those who need help right now.

Even though these are effective healings, and these people walked away in much better shape than they arrived, they still died eventually. It wasn't perfect healing after all. Death still came for them. Just as it will for all of us should Our Lord delay his return.

These healings pointed to the eternal future Jesus would usher in with his own death and resurrection. They point to our future because we will be alive in that eternal kingdom of God, the life of the world to come, the presence of God with the angels, archangels, and all of the company of heaven.

As hard as it may be, don't worry that Jesus may not heal you bodily right now; rejoice that he has already healed you for eternity in your Baptism when he raised you from the dead and placed his name upon you in water and Word, a miracle even more potent than any healing in the Gospels.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, graciously hear the prayers of Your people that we who justly suffer the consequence of our sin may be mercifully delivered by Your goodness to the glory of Your name; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for the Sixth Sunday After the Epiphany)

The Sixth Monday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 17, 2025

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 17:5-8

Daily Lectionary: Job 13:1-12; John 6:1-21

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The prophet Jeremiah meditates on the state of the sinner and the saint. No, he doesn't use those exact words, but that is certainly what he means in this passage.

In whom do you trust: man or the Lord? Are you trying to make it through life on your own power and strength, or do you rest in the Lord's power and strength and let him guide you? Are you grasping at things to make your own way, or are you letting the Gifts the Lord gives to you inform your life?

The sinner, the one who trusts in his own way, is lost. He's in the wilderness, withering away to nothing, using all his energy just to try and make it through each day. The saint, the one who trusts in the Lord, on the other hand, is sustained, strengthened, and borne up by the Lord's power and Word.

You can almost see a baptismal reference here, that the one watered by the Lord has the strength to flourish, regardless of what comes his way. And really, that's the point. You can try to work your way through life, and yes, there is hard work to be done. Studying, training, sports, vocational skills—they can all be tough, they can drive you to frustration. But they aren't ends in themselves.

These are all means by which you love your neighbors and serve your Lord. Keeping in mind that you do these things because he has gifted you and has given you the ability to do so helps you remember that it isn't all up to you.

So when life gets tough, when the blazing sun of hard times and frustration threaten to wear you down, stop for a moment. Take a deep breath and remember your Baptism. Remember that the Lord God himself has called you by name, that he has planted you where you are, and he waters you there through his Word and Sacraments.

He gives you everything you need to be successful in his eyes. He empowers you and strengthens you to bear fruit that grows into love for those around you. And he does it in his way, on his schedule. Trust that he has you in his hands. Hear his voice, and rest in his goodness.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, when the tempest rages, I need not fear, For You the Rock of Ages, Are always near. Close by your side abiding, I fear no foe, For when Your hand is guiding, In peace I go. (LSB 722:2)

The Sixth Tuesday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 18, 2025

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:(1-11) 12-20

Daily Lectionary: Job 13:13-28; John 6:22-40

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:12-14)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

There is only one reason that we gather for worship. It is because Christ has been raised from the dead. That is how fundamental the resurrection of the body is to the Christian faith.

If there is no resurrection, there's no reason to get up and go to church when you'd rather stay in bed on Sunday morning. Plenty of people in other church bodies hint at a "spiritual resurrection," that "Jesus is raised in our hearts," and that if you believe in the idea of the resurrection, that's what really counts.

Except, St. Paul says the opposite. It doesn't matter what you think; it doesn't matter what science seems to say; if Jesus did not come back to life after he was crucified, then there is no reason to be a Christian. Period. That is how important the bodily resurrection is.

You are flesh and blood, just as Jesus, the God-Man, is. When he died for your sins, it wasn't just for some abstract idea of resurrection, but that your body would also be redeemed, not just your mind, not just your spirit, but all of you; everything God our Father created and made holy is to be saved and renewed in the resurrection. So real water washes your physical body in Baptism. And real bread/Body and wine/Blood touch your physical tongue in the Lord's Supper.

This is how important you are to God. This is why the universe even exists! God created all you see so that he would have a place for you to live, grow, and enjoy his creation. He made you so that you would have an eternity with him in a New Creation that has no sin.

So yes, the bodily resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning is a really big deal. This is how you know that God the Father has made a place for you in eternity— because he has made you a body, and he promises to raise it up on the Last Day, perfect, so that you and all the faithful may enjoy his creation as he intended. With the body he has given you.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Christ is risen, Christ is living, Dry your tears, be unafraid! Death and darkness could not hold Him, Nor the tomb in which He lay. Do not look among the dead for One who lives forevermore; Tell the world that Christ is risen, Make it known He goes before. (LSB 479:1)

The Sixth Wednesday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 19, 2025

Today's Reading: John 6:41-59

Daily Lectionary: Job 14:1-22; John 6:41-59

"I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (John 6:48-51)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen

Bread that brings life to the world. That's what Jesus is, the source of life and sustenance for people who hunger, for people in need. These days, with our suspicions about gluten and refined carbohydrates, it can be hard to see simple bread as something so important for life. But that is exactly who and what Jesus is: the foundation of life itself.

Elijah ate bread brought by the angel and went forth in that strength for forty days. The Israelites lived on manna all throughout their wilderness wandering, bread also given by God.

Even though this miraculous Old Testament bread fed and sustained them, it didn't last. The Israelites died, and Elijah eventually found food elsewhere. For us, though, that bread pointed to the importance of Jesus as the living bread from heaven. Our ears are already tuned to the sound of God's Gift of bread being given to feed us.

And the fantastic thing about this bread is that it doesn't come in only one form. You don't only find it upon the altar in the Sacrament. Jesus gives us a bread that we eat with our mouths and with our ears. He doesn't restrict his life, your life, to one source only, but he gives it in many ways.

Baptism, Holy Absolution, Holy Scripture, the preached Word, the Supper. Christ Jesus never wants you to go hungry, so he gives his bread, his life, his Gifts, in many ways so that you will never be hungry for a lack of it, and so that it is always available in your time of need.

This bread is given to you in faith, the living faith created in you by the work of the Holy Spirit. You receive it in faith as well, knowing that the good and gracious Gifts of God, especially the Gift of his Son Jesus for you, will keep and strengthen you throughout all your days.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Praise the Father, who from heaven To His own this food has given, Who, to mend what we have done, Gave into death His only Son...Let this food your faith so nourish That its fruit of love may flourish And your neighbor learn from you How much God's wondrous love can do. (LSB 627:4, 10)

The Sixth Thursday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 20, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Ninth Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Job 15:1-23, 30-35; John 6:60-71

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, or get it in a way which only appears right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it. (Luther's Small Catechism – The Ninth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Covet: (v.) to sinfully desire what is not yours. This is not meant to be political, but what follows is sometimes used politically. We hear that the “Top 1%” are only seeking more. That the bottom end of the income scale is in terrible shape.

But if you look around the world, the poorest Americans are richer than most of the rest of humanity. Billions of people live on around \$2.00 per day. Yes, two dollars. It puts into perspective that desire for a new iPhone, doesn't it? A new car for graduation sounds a bit...much when billions of people don't have running water at home. I don't say this to make you feel guilty (unless you are coveting something fiendishly right now!) but to put things into perspective.

Your neighbor is anyone on earth who isn't you. So, how can you be a faithful Christian who loves all of your neighbors and doesn't just think of yourself? By remembering what Jesus did for you. We can love only because Jesus first loved us. Jesus showed his perfect love for you in his life, death, and resurrection. He still shows that love in his Word, in Holy Absolution, in Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper— Gifts freely given to you in love.

Because he piles this love and these Gifts upon you, you are able to love your neighbors near and far. You can consider how to love them both spiritually and materially by remembering how Jesus has already loved and forgiven you. Yes, Jesus will forgive your covetousness just like every other sin you bring before him in repentance.

Do you need an iced coffee every day, or could you help the local food bank with that money? Do you need another pair of sneakers (that everyone else in your class has!), or might you be able to love your neighbors by giving those dollars to the mission society your church supports?

You aren't going to solve world poverty by giving up Starbucks and Vans, but that's not the point. Instead, focus more on your neighbors than yourself. Love those around you as you can and as you are able with the love of Christ, and that will help you to think less about what you want and more about your family in Christ.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

“You shall not crave your neighbor's house Nor covet money, goods, or spouse. Pray God He would your neighbor bless As you yourself wish success.” Have mercy, Lord! (LSB 581:10)

The Sixth Friday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 21, 2025

Today's Reading: John 7:1-13

Daily Lectionary: Job 16:1-22; John 7:1-13

For not even his brothers believed in him. Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." (John 7:5-8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Are you more comfortable with the truth or with what is popular? Tough question, isn't it? You want to say the truth, but you're often more likely to stick with what is popular; it is easier, after all.

People fret over what Jesus will do for the Feast of Tabernacles. Its ceremonies of light and water clearly point to Jesus as the Light of the world and the One from whom living water truly comes. Will Jesus be baited into going to the place of sacrifice (the temple) early by his enemies? What is the Messiah to do? Be rash, or wait until his time fully comes?

Satan tempted Jesus for forty days in the wilderness, but that wasn't the end of his work. He never stops. He always wants to disrupt and harm, you know this. Which is what he does here through these "brothers" of Jesus. He is trying to get Jesus to act rashly and get himself in trouble.

That is why I asked about truth or popularity. No one spoke openly of Jesus during the feast because they were afraid of the religious authorities. It was almost as if they could believe in Jesus secretly, as long as it didn't impact their lives.

But that is where they are wrong. Confessing Christ is always a finger in the eye to this sinful world. That is what most of the New Testament is about; proclaiming Christ crucified gets you into trouble! But does that really matter? Is that the end of it?

Of course not! Jesus eventually does go to Jerusalem openly on Palm Sunday. He dies for the sin of the world, is raised to life again, and sends his disciples out to proclaim his salvation for you. This truth may not be popular, but as Jesus says a bit later in St. John's gospel, this truth sets you free.

It will always be a struggle to be faithful in this sinful world. But because Jesus has washed that sin away in his death for you, you have the promise that he forgives your failures even when they hide the truth. So be bold; Jesus has your back.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

What is the world to me! My Jesus is my treasure, My life, my health, my wealth, My friend, my love, my pleasure, My joy my crown my all, My bliss eternally. Once more then I declare: What is the world to me! (LSB 730:4)

The Sixth Saturday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 22, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Epiphany 7 - Psalm 37:1-5; antiphon: Psalm 37:7a, b
Daily Lectionary: Job 17:1-16; John 7:14-31

Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. (From the Introit for the Seventh Sunday After the Epiphany)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Tomorrow's Introit focuses on the heart of the Scripture texts appointed for the day. On the face of it, this looks like a "do A and God will do B" kind of text. But look more closely at the whole of the Introit.

It begins with a reminder that evildoers and wrongdoers will fade and wither, but trusting in the Lord leads to peace. The rest of the psalm is like that, too. King David writes that our peace, our rest, our salvation, and our strength are all found in the Lord.

In the Old Testament reading for tomorrow, Joseph has only love and compassion for his brothers, who once wanted him dead. In the Gospel, Jesus reminds his hearers to love their enemies and do good to those who hate them.

So also with this psalm. Rest in the Lord. Trust in God alone. Don't seek to make your own way to salvation. Live as one who absolutely believes that Almighty God has your best interests at heart. He will care for you; he will sustain you.

Oh, sure. Evil will still attack. You will still suffer the insults and lies of those who don't like you. You will feel terrible at times because of the work of Satan against you. But your ultimate fate has already been sealed in Jesus.

That's what trust is: believing that you are safe, even if you can't exactly see that safety. Ever done a trust fall? You fall backward into the arms of friends, and they catch you. Or, at least, that is what is supposed to happen. You trust that when you fall, they will catch you.

God your Father is the one who will always catch you when you fall. He is the one who will always hold you close. He is the one who will always search you out like the lost sheep and carry you to safety on his shoulders.

Trust in, delight in, and commit yourself to him. He has already acted for you in Jesus' death and resurrection. Because you are marked with his blood, you are always safe in his hands.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and ever-living God, You make us both to will and to do those things that are good and acceptable in Your sight. Let Your fatherly hand ever guide us and Your Holy Spirit ever be with us to direct us in the knowledge and obedience of Your Word that we may obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (Collect for divine guidance)

The Seventh Sunday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 23, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 6:27-38

Daily Lectionary: Job 18:1-21; John 7:32-53

[Jesus said,] "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back." (Luke 6:27b-30 ESV)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Okay, time to explain away Jesus' words. Time to find a way to make them say something different than what we just read. Surely Jesus doesn't mean for us to literally do these things, right? We would just end up a doormat. People would walk all over us. And we would be abused. There has to be a way out of these words. A way that we would be safe from them. A way to break these commandments without, you know, breaking these commandments.

But that's not the way it works.

We think that the more difficult something is to do, the greater the person who can do it. Loving your enemy is hard, so the love it takes to pull it off must be accomplishing a great work. But Thomas Aquinas puts it this way: "[I]f the love were so great as completely to remove all difficulty that would be a still greater love."

For us, Jesus' Word here is Law. Our love, apart from Christ, is not great enough to do this at all, much less with great difficulty. But in Jesus we see the one who has the greater love, in that He loves us without it being difficult for Him.

For it is Jesus Christ who has done good to us who have hated Him. He has blessed us with forgiveness as we cursed Him with our sin. He has prayed for us to the Father that we would be saved, even as our sin put the nails in His hands and feet. He has received our strikes, by whip and cord. He has had His garments divided, and His tunic taken away by lot. And for this He has demanded none of it back. But died on a cross for our sake.

That is the love with which Jesus loved. Not with difficulty, but with more of it than we could ever imagine. That is the love He has for you. That is the love which sacrificed Himself for your sake. That is the love that covers all your sins with His blood. And that's the love He has for you even now.

And now, with that love, we return to Jesus' Word. His love in us loves our enemies, and He counts it as ours. His love in us endures, and He counts it as ours. His love gives, and He counts it as ours. And we don't always realize we're doing it. Jesus keeps the Law for our sake. And He also keeps it in you

St. Matthias the Apostle

FEBRUARY 24, 2025

Today's Reading: Matthew 11:25-30

Daily Lectionary: Job 19:1-12, 21-27; John 8:1-20

*"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
(Matthew 11:28 ESV)*

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. On this day, the Church remembers Matthias, the thirteenth of the Twelve Apostles. As the book of Acts starts, the Eleven figure that they need a replacement for Judas, who betrayed Jesus, and died a horrible death. But doesn't it feel like the Gospel reading assigned for this festival doesn't quite fit? Does replacing Judas sound like an easy yoke for Matthias? Does facing death by confessing Christ sound like a light burden?

We might ask the same question. This world inflicts heavy burdens on us. We face rejection for confessing Christ. We face addiction, depression, loneliness, and fear. Where's this rest that Jesus promises? When will all these things end? At our death? But what about now? What does rest look like now?

However, we first must know what rest is. Rest isn't simply the cessation of work. Rest isn't simply the end of doing something difficult. Rest isn't turning off your brain, or simply sleeping. Our world defines rest that way. But how do you feel after doom-scrolling for hours? How do you feel after binge-watching shows all evening? Or, when you've done nothing at all. How do you feel after enduring work all day, and waking up the next, only to do it all over again? It's not rest you receive, no matter what our world calls it.

Josef Pieper in his book, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* explains it this way: The highest form of rest comes from the festival. And at the heart of every festival is worship.

You don't turn off your brain, or sleep, or do nothing when there's a festival. Instead, they are often very busy. But the doing is in service to the joy, rather than because it is necessary.

Today is a festival. We celebrate St. Matthias, the apostle whom Jesus chose, that His Word would be proclaimed. There's a feast at the festival, a feast at the center of our worship, and the feast is Christ Himself. Facing the world? Christ says "Take and Eat, this is My body." Facing addiction, depression, loneliness and fear? Christ says, "Take and drink, My blood shed for your forgiveness." Doing nothing doesn't prepare us for fighting these battles. Christ putting Himself in us does. Because rest doesn't come from inaction. Rest comes from the feast in worship, which brings the strength to endure the world.

Jesus Himself is who eases the yokes of this world and lightens the struggles we face. And Jesus gives you His Body and Blood in His feast for that purpose. This is why the Church has so many feasts, including the weekly feast celebrating Christ's resurrection from the dead every Sunday. We need the festival. We need the joy it brings. We need the rest it provides. We need Jesus. And here He is. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Seventh Tuesday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 25, 2025

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:21-26, 30-42

Daily Lectionary: Job 20:1-23, 29; John 8:21-38

"The last enemy to be destroyed is death." (1 Corinthians 15:26 ESV)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Christ has been raised from the dead. This is the act of God upon which we base our entire faith. Christ has been raised from the dead. And this is the event around which all of history revolves. Because all of a sudden, a small group of fishermen, tax collectors, and nobodies started telling us about a man who claimed to be God. And this man said that He would be killed by the religious authorities of His day, and yet would stop being dead on the third day. And they killed Him, just as He said. Then He rose on the third day, just as He said.

This small group of men proclaimed this resurrection. And when they threatened to kill them for it, they did not stop. James they executed publicly. Peter they crucified upside down. Nathaniel they flayed alive. All were killed confessing the resurrection of Jesus, save John, who lived unto old age confessing Christ. All the apostles were unafraid, because that resurrection was for them too. They willingly died to make sure everyone who heard them, heard the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

People don't always willingly die for the truth, that is a hard thing. Nobody dies for lies. The apostles confessed what they saw. They confessed the resurrection. And put their hope in that resurrection. Rightly so, because Jesus did die for them. Jesus did die for you. So that when Christ was made alive, that life is for you too.

It's our sin that brings death in the first place. So that's why Jesus dies. To bear our sin in our place. To take our sin onto His shoulders, so that it is not yours or mine any longer. He fights our enemies in our place. Enemies that are too strong for us to ever consider resisting. Jesus conquers death. And Jesus has conquered your death as well. It is the last enemy to be destroyed. And it's last day is The Last Day. Jesus returns and all the dead rise. All death's trophies are taken away. And the faithful enter into eternal life. The same faith given to you by God Himself.

Therefore we look forward to that day. We await the end of death. We are ready for the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus makes us bold. For we are no different than the apostles. We face a world that does not want to hear about Christ's resurrection. And we may even one day be asked to die for that. But our strength does not come from our own effort. Our boldness does not come from our steadfast will. We are only able to stand for the same reason the apostles did. Because Jesus really did rise from the dead. And He has made that resurrection ours as well. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen

The Seventh Wednesday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 26, 2025

Today's Reading: Genesis 45:3-15

Daily Lectionary: Job 21:1-21; Job 21:22-30:15; John 8:39-59

"I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life." (Genesis 45:4b-5 ESV)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Until the moment Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, they were very afraid. Simeon had been taken prisoner the first time they showed up. Benjamin was about to be taken as a slave, which would kill their father. And Judah had just offered to be the sacrifice to pay for Benjamin's sin. It was a selfless act done for the sake of a brother who was loved, for a father who was loved.

Besides, it had been the brothers' own sin that had caused this mess in the first place. They had acknowledged that sin on the first trip down, where Simeon was lost. To lose another brother in the same way brought that sin right back to the forefront of their thoughts. So it wasn't solely a selfless act, it was Judah confessing his own sin, and the need for him to be the sacrifice that paid for it.

It was at this point that Joseph stepped forward and told his brother Judah, "You're not the sacrifice. I am."

The one sinned against went before the brothers into Egypt. He endured slavery, prison, and becoming an Egyptian in order that they would be saved. He gave up all, that they might live.

We, too, have sinned. We sin against God. We sin against our brothers and sisters, the people God has put in our lives. And standing before God cannot help but remind us where we have done wrong and failed to do what is right. Convicted of our own sin, we know a sacrifice must be made. Sin must be paid for. And the price must come from us.

It is at this point that Jesus steps forward and tells you, "You're not the sacrifice. I am."

The one sinned against goes before you into this world. He endured the suffering life of this world. He was betrayed, beaten, and crucified. He shed His blood on your behalf. He bore your sin on His shoulders, so that you would not have to. He entered into death, in order that it might be conquered in full before you got there. And He gave up all that you may live.

He says to you, "I am your brother, Jesus, whom you sinned against. And now do not be distressed, for the Father has sent Me before you to preserve life." He has preserved your life. Your sins have been forgiven. The sacrifice has already been made. And His resurrection is yours forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Seventh Thursday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 27, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Tenth Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Job 30:16-31; John 9:1-23

What is the Tenth Commandment? You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not entice or force away our neighbor's wife, workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

King Herod was told by John the Baptizer that it wasn't lawful for him to have his brother's wife. But what law? If he'd taken his brother Philip's wife by force, there would have been war. If Herod had acted in the legal wrong, Philip would demand Herodias back.

But covetousness pretends that nothing was wrong. There's nothing illegal about convincing someone of something. Perhaps Herod convinced Philip that he should simply leave Herodias. It wasn't illegal in Rome for Herod to marry a woman who was divorced. What law did Herod break?

It was God's Law, of course. And let's see it in light of the Tenth Commandment. Convincing others to destroy their relationships is evil. Especially when you benefit from that relationship being destroyed. Maybe it's difficult to prove, difficult to legislate against, but God knows the heart.

The gift this Commandment protects is the gift of relationships, ours and our neighbor's. He's provided these relationships for us. Brothers and sisters, parents and children, husband and wife, all for our good. And so, our Lord protects these gifts. And commands us to honor those relationships among our neighbors as well.

But, this is a sin that's in our hearts. We want to have who we can't. And we try to make it happen while appearing to do the right thing. Even when we hurt those who lose that relationship. Even when we hurt the one we're after. It's a lie by action rather than word. One we don't plan to have found out. This is also the Commandment that convicts us, even if we convince ourselves that we've kept all the others. We cannot hide our hearts from God, even if we can from everyone else.

And so we repent. We're sorry for our sin. And we turn in hope to the one who forgives sin. We turn to the one who has kept this Commandment in our place. Jesus faced all temptation for us, even the temptations of the heart. He refused to act selfishly, in ways that only appeared right. Instead, He stood against Satan in the wilderness during those forty days. He stood against Satan while hanging on the cross. And He fought to make even our broken relationships whole again.

The Seventh Friday After the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 28, 2025

Today's Reading: Job 31:1-12, 33-40

Daily Lectionary: Job 31:1-12, 33-40; John 9:24-41

"Let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!" (Job 31:6 ESV)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When Christians are confronted with suffering in their lives, they often read the book of Job. After all, Job suffered, and God blessed him. Maybe there's some secret in there for us. At the end, though, most people are confused. They're told this is how you deal with suffering. But reading it gave them no clue on how to deal with suffering. What did we just read? We know Job's friends aren't supposed to be any help to him. But their words are the same as found in Proverbs.

Rather, Job sounds like the problematic one. Can't he see that God blesses the good, and punishes the evil? Does Job really believe that he has no sin for which to repent? Does Job think that he is on equal footing with God to make statements like these? We come to the conclusion that Job needs to get his act together. Which isn't what we went looking for.

Because our lives sometimes look a lot like Job's. We're told to repent of doing good. Those who do wrong are prospering all around us, while we suffer. We find ourselves paying the price when we did the right thing. The pain we endure feels meaningless. We cry out as Job did, and wonder where God's answer is.

Did you know that everything Job lamented was answered in Jesus? Chapter sixteen, Job laments that he is attacked by enemies on all sides. Jesus conquers all of Job's enemies, including the devil who is behind them all. Chapter twenty three, Job wishes that he could find God. Jesus is our God who became flesh and dwelt among us. And through it all, Job laments that the innocent suffer at God's hand. Jesus, the one innocent man, suffers the wrath of God in order to save us all. He's crucified, the worst death anyone can possibly imagine, because that's why He came. That's how he saved Job, you, me, and the world.

The book of Job is about a man who suffers even though he was relatively righteous. The whole Bible is about another man who suffers, even though He has no sin of His own, but in order to save all people. The lesson of Job is that there is no such thing as pointless suffering. The suffering we think is unjust, does in fact serve God's purpose.

It isn't as though our Lord gives you no answer. It's that the answer is always found in the death and resurrection of Jesus. All of Job's questions are answered in Jesus. All of our pains, and regrets, and sins, and death, are answered completely in Jesus. For Jesus suffered, and we are given forgiveness, resurrection, and eternal life through Him. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Seventh Saturday After the Epiphany

MARCH 1, 2025

Today's Reading: Psalm 84:1-2, 9, 11; antiphon: Psalm 84:4

Daily Lectionary: Job 33:1-18; John 10:22-42

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts!" (Psalm 84:1 ESV)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Tomorrow, the Church celebrates the Transfiguration of Jesus. On that mountaintop, Peter will say, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." The people weren't the only ones with tents. The Lord had a tent. We call it by its Latin name: tabernacle. It was a very nice tent, but it was still a tent. And it's where the Lord resided when the people made camp in the wilderness. The Lord resided in the midst of His people.

Sometimes, we want to blame Peter for wanting to either demote Jesus to a tent with Moses and Elijah, or raise Moses and Elijah to the place of God. And there are ways that idea can point us to Jesus. But perhaps the problem with Peter's suggestion, and the reason we're told that he didn't know what he said, isn't that he wants to make tents, but where he wants to make tents.

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts!" "Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!" (Psalm 84:1, 4 ESV) The Lord doesn't dwell on a mountain apart from His people, or only with a select few of the greatest prophets. The tent of the Lord is pitched in the center of the camp, in the midst of the people. The Lord makes His house right where you're at. The Lord is not far off. He's right here.

That's why we find Jesus in the midst of our sorrow, because He was betrayed for our sake. That's why we find Jesus in the midst of our loss, because He lost everything for our sake. That's why we find Jesus in the midst of our shame, because He was stripped bare for our sake. That's why we find Jesus in the midst of our sin, because He who knew no sin became sin for our sake, so that we might have forgiveness. That's why we find Jesus in the midst of our suffering, because He went to His cross for our sake, died for our sake, entered the grave for our sake. All to save us.

What makes the house of the Lord so lovely and splendid is not the decorations or the holiness. What makes it lovely and splendid is that it is near. Jesus is here. In the very places the devil wants us to think He's not, Jesus is present for you, sets up His house for you, invites you in. And He remains with you through all you endure in this world. His dwelling place is in His Church, which you are a part of. And He will be by your side through everything the world throws at you.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

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