



REFLECTIONS

**Easter Sunday-
Pentecost Eve**

April 20, 2025 - June 7, 2025



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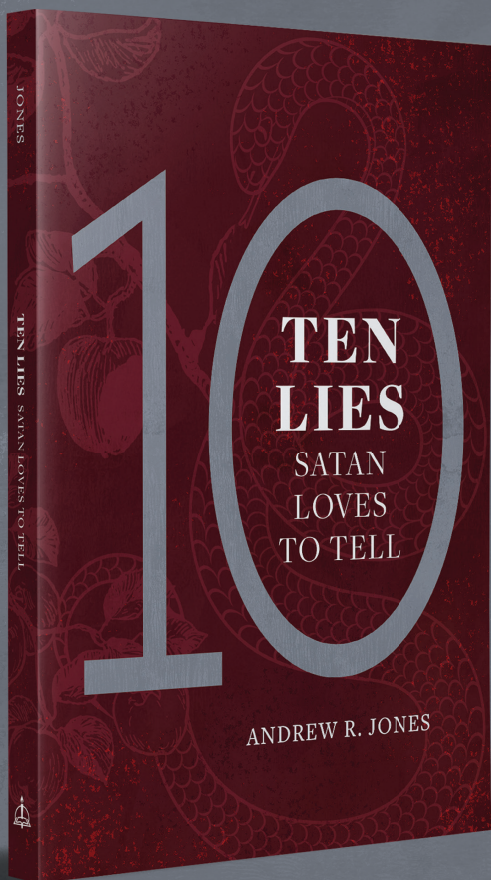
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A Short Form for Daily Reflection

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.

Easter Sunday

APRIL 20, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 24:1-12

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 14:10-31; Hebrews 7:23-8:13

"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen..." (Luke 24:5b-6a)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The question asked by the angel is a peculiar question. The ladies have arrived to finish the burial process. The last couple of days were very unpredictable for the disciples and the followers of Jesus. They were prepared to celebrate the Passover, but then everything went sideways for them. Jesus is arrested, He is tried, He is crucified, and He is buried. The ladies did not have time to attend to the burial process faithfully. Then, when they arrive at the tomb, they are greeted with, "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" I am sure the ladies were thinking, "Well, we are not looking for the living; we are looking for the dead."

It is a change of events that takes place on Easter morning. The ladies were looking for the dead, but the angels corrected them by saying, "...you seek the living..." Jesus is Alive! Death is conquered. The tomb is open. The angels are present to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. If they wanted to see Jesus, they would not find Him with the dead.

We, too, can look for life among the dead. In our own deadness from sin, we search for life in a fallen world. We look to the popular philosophies that surround us for comfort and peace. Popular thought teaches that we need to find peace within ourselves in order to be truly alive. Life is redefined as joy, happiness, wealth, and popularity set by worldly standards. We are inundated with the cries of the world to conform to these worldly standards.

Real life only comes through Jesus Christ. The life He gives is not of this world. As the ladies were looking for Jesus, they were still of the mindset of the world. He died and is, therefore, "only" dead. Christ conquered death! No longer does the one thing that all of us succumb to prevail. Death is conquered. In your Baptism, you are made alive in Christ Jesus. Paul reminds His readers in Romans 6 that as we are Baptized into His death, we are Baptized into His resurrection. Your Baptism connects you to the resurrection of life. Your Baptism connects you to life in Christ. His life is your life. His resurrection from the grave is your resurrection from the grave. Because of your Baptism, right now you have eternal life. He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia! Amen!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God the Father, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, You have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by Your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Easter Sunday)

Easter Monday

APRIL 21, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 24:13-35, 36-49

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 15:1-18; Hebrews 9:1-28

"When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them." (Luke 24:30)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia! Amen. For the disciples, their world had just been rocked. The Messiah had been crucified, and now they were potentially in the crosshairs of the local leaders. Their world was one of chaos and uncertainty as they worked to navigate the aftermath of the crucifixion of Jesus. They were not given a pamphlet or a grief book from the local church to contend with their feelings and emotions after the crucifixion. The two travelers did not know that it was Jesus who walked with them, who spoke to them, who inquired of their conversation, and who accepted their invitation into their home to spend the night. They did not know that it was Jesus sitting in their midst that evening. Finally, their eyes are opened, and they see Jesus in the blessing and breaking of the bread.

Our lives are filled with the uncertainty that a fallen creation gives us. We are told that true order comes from following the right philosophies of this world. If we just follow the suggested steps that the latest life-coach sensation advocates, then the chaos will cease our lives. We are pointed to the influencers on social media, advised to watch this reel or subscribe to a certain channel, and then we will have the answers we need to experience true joy and happiness. We have a lot of people, ideologies, and philosophies that want to be the center of our lives.

The presence of Christ in the middle of the disciples brought them order in the midst of their chaos. In our world today, we are given Christ in the breaking of bread. As we bend the knee at the Communion rail, our Pastor places in our mouth the Body and Blood of Jesus. The true presence of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine. He speaks words of comfort and order to us when he says, "Take and eat" and "Take and drink." In the reception of His Body and Blood, forgiveness is delivered to you. Our eyes are opened, and our hearts are filled with the peace that this world cannot give. His promises are delivered, and we are restored. He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, in the paschal feast You restore all creation. Continue to send Your heavenly gifts upon Your people that they may walk in perfect freedom and receive eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Easter Evening/Easter Monday)

Easter Tuesday

APRIL 22, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 24:36-49

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 15:19-16:12; Hebrews 10:1-18

"See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." (Luke 24:39)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia! Amen. In the Third Article of the Apostle's Creed, we confess that we believe in the resurrection of the dead. It is a confession that has deep implications in our lives as children of God. When we confess the resurrection of the dead, we are saying that death is conquered. We are saying that in our bodies, in our flesh, we will come from the dead. We will not be spirits, we will not be ghosts, we will not be angels— we will be human beings in the flesh.

In the resurrection of Christ, we are given what will happen to us in the resurrection. The language of the narratives from the Gospels give witness to what the disciples and followers of Jesus saw after His resurrection. They saw Jesus. They heard Jesus. They touched Jesus. Yes, touched Jesus. He was not a ghost or some anomaly from the proverbial spirit world. He was fully human. He was alive and breathing, eating and drinking as humans do every day. He completely rose from the dead.

Oftentimes, we hear about life everlasting in some existential context. Life everlasting is taught as something that is "way out there." We cannot grasp it, so it is taught like fairytales and make-believe stories. Life everlasting becomes supernatural, where the dead end up as ghosts or angels. We are to believe that eternal life is really an experience in nirvana, where we do not have bodies and that we become one with the universe.

All of these false teachings take us away from the Scriptures and what we confess in our creeds. We believe, teach, confess, and practice that on the Last Day, we will rise from the dead in our flesh. We will be able to see, taste, touch, smell, and hear. We will walk again upon a restored earth. No longer will there be death. In Christ's resurrection is our resurrection.

In Christ's resurrection is your resurrection. Death is conquered. Death is destroyed. Right now, you have eternal life. Jesus invites His followers to touch Him after the resurrection. He is in the flesh, resurrected from the dead. When you confess, "I believe in the resurrection of the dead." you confess that you will rise from the dead as Christ rose from the dead. In the flesh. He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, through the resurrection of Your Son You have secured peace for our troubled consciences. Grant us this peace evermore that trusting in the merit of Your Son we may come at last to the perfect peace of heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Easter Tuesday)

Easter Wednesday

APRIL 23, 2025

Today's Reading: John 21:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 16:13-35; Hebrews 10:19-39

"Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead." (John 21:13-14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia! Amen. Jesus gives them bread and fish to eat. The first time that John records the use of fish and bread to feed the people, the local people wanted to make Him the Bread King. In John chapter 6, Christ reminds them that the purpose of the miracle was not so that their bellies could be filled and that they would never go hungry but that He is God incarnate right there in their midst. Standing before them was the creator of all things. Unfortunately, the people did not want to hear this message. The people were more interested in this man because He could feed them forever.

We want signs and wonders to know God's will for us. In sin, we see Jesus as the handyman who has come to fix our lives. He will feed our bellies. He will explicitly show us what decisions we are to make about life choices. We look for the mysterious and the unexplained events in our lives as God speaking to us. We want God to speak clearly to us about His will for us and His desires for us. We search for His voice in places where He has not promised to speak. We cry out, "Show me a sign!" when we want to know what He wants us to do in our lives.

He does speak to us. He speaks to us through the means that He has already promised to work. He reveals Himself to us through His word and sacraments. He speaks His words of Absolution upon us. He gives to us His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins. He takes water and His word and marks us as His children. He takes ink and paper and gives to us a living, breathing document that reveals His son as our Savior. In His word is the true testament of our Savior, who has paid the price for our sins and given to us the resurrection from the dead. No longer does death prevail. It is conquered. The war is won. Christ is victorious. He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, by the glorious resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ, You destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light. Grant that we who have been raised with Him may abide in His presence and rejoice in the hope of eternal glory; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Easter Wednesday)

Thursday of the Week of Easter

APRIL 24, 2025

Today's Reading: Isaiah 65:17-25

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 17:1-16; Hebrews 11:1-29

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind." (Isaiah 65:17)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

He is Risen! His is Risen Indeed! Alleluia! Amen. A new creation sure sounds like a great idea. The people of the southern kingdom were certainly wanting a new creation as the creation that they were living in was not ideal. The Babylonians had ransacked the kingdom. The temple was destroyed. The deportation had taken place. The land flowing with milk and honey had been ravaged by the Baal worshippers. A message of a new creation resonated in the ears of God's people. A new creation where the old things are not remembered sounds even better—no memory of the calamity and desolation that was experienced under Babylonian rule. God's people were anxiously waiting for a restoration to take place.

We, too, are waiting for a restoration. Right now, we live in a world that is full of chaos and uncertainty. The Holy Law of God is redacted to almost oblivion. People bend the knee to the various gods of this world, from wealth and power to self-indulgence and selfish behaviors. The concept of "love thy neighbor" is transactional. I will love my neighbor only if I can get something out of it. What's in it for me is the way we live our lives with our neighbors. The world today seeks ways in which to exploit God's creation, especially the crown of His creation: mankind. We post comments on social media platforms that hurt and harm our neighbor's reputation. We share information that was meant to be private and confidential in order to make ourselves look better. Hope seems lost, and we are left feeling abandoned, lonely, and destitute in this world.

The words of Isaiah are for us, too. As God writes through the prophet, He points His people not only to the immediate restoration of the kingdom of Judah but also to the return of the Messiah. In the end, God will restore the entire creation to how He had made it. He will declare once again that it is very good. He will send His son, our savior Jesus Christ, as the final sacrifice. He will rise from the dead. Death will be conquered. We hear the words of Isaiah and are pointed back to the cross and resurrection, while at the same time, we are pointed forward to the return of Christ. As the people of Isaiah's time waited anxiously for their restoration, we, too, anxiously wait for the return of Jesus. Our hope and focus is not of this world but in the promises given to us that we will rise from the grave and stand upon a new earth. He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Sing with all the saints in glory, Sing the resurrection song! Death and sorrow, earth's dark story, To the former days belong. All around the clouds are breaking; Soon the storms of time shall cease; In God's likeness we awaken, Knowing everlasting peace. (LSB 671:1)

St. Mark, Evangelist

APRIL 25, 2025

Today's Reading: Mark 16:14-20

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 18:5-27; Hebrews 12:1-24

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The end of Mark gives us language that is reminiscent of Matthew's ending: the admonition to proclaim the Gospel and baptize the nations. The sacrament of Baptism is laid before Mark's readers as a life-giving Gift from God. Luther even uses the end of Mark as part of his explanation in the Small Catechism on Baptism, the second part, regarding the benefits of Baptism. Your Baptism saves you.

Baptism is no small, insignificant part of our lives. It is not a once-and-done "the box is checked, life is good, let's not talk about it until confirmation when we can start preparing for the real sacrament, Holy Communion." Baptism gives to us all the blessings and benefits that Christ has done for us. It is a Means Of Grace. It is a vessel that God uses to bring us the forgiveness of sins, life everlasting, faith, and the Holy Spirit.

Our world cannot comprehend how God works through the simplest things to do miraculous work. Water and His word together bring us these benefits and blessings. It is not our faith that makes Baptism valuable but rather faith that is given to us in Baptism. It is God's work through Baptism that His robe of righteousness is placed over us. The world sees only water. The world hears just simple words. It is these two components together that give us Baptism.

We are Baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We carry the name of the triune God upon us. His cross is placed both upon our forehead and upon our hearts to mark us as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. His name, His death, and His resurrection are our identity in Baptism. We are no longer left out in the world, lost and condemned. Sin does not prevail. Satan no longer can condemn us. We are baptized into Christ. It is our condition that we live in each day. We boldly say, "I am baptized!"

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

In a wat'ry grave are buried All our sins that Jesus carried; Christ, the Ark of Life, has ferried Us across death's raging flood. (LSB 597:2)

Saturday of the Week of Easter

APRIL 26, 2025

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 19:1-25; Hebrews 13:1-21

*"For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."
(1 Corinthians 15:21-22)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia! Amen. Adam really messed things up for us. He had the perfect life. He had dominion over everything. He had the perfect wife in Eve and the perfect relationship with God. Everything was perfect. God even declared it to be "Very Good" at the end of Genesis chapter 1. Yet, in Genesis chapter 3, we read about the Fall of man. It isn't Adam, though, who is doing the initial eating. It is Eve who is speaking to the serpent. It is Eve who takes from the tree. Adam gets the blame. Rightfully so, as it was Adam whom God spoke to about eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, not Eve. Adam was with Eve while the dialogue between the serpent and Eve transpired. He was questioning the validity of God's command regarding eating the forbidden fruit. Did God speak the truth when He said, "You will surely die?" Let's do a little beta-testing with Eve and see if she will die when she eats from the tree. She didn't die right there from Adam's perspective.

Man did die. Man lost the image of God. In Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve are confronted by God, and the curses are delivered to the serpent, to Eve, and to Adam. Adam's curse is death. You will die. Through Adam's selfish act of failing to be a faithful groom, death is ushered into all mankind. No longer did they have the image of God. Sin now separated them from their creator. On account of Adam, we will all die. Our hearts will stop beating. Our lungs will no longer receive air. Our minds will be silent. We will die. The consequence of sin is death.

As Paul writes to the church at Corinth, he reminds them that their hope is not in their wisdom and understanding of the things of this world. He points the church back to Christ. In Christ, the world is reconciled to God. No longer are we separated but we are reunited with our creator through Jesus. In your Baptism, you have been reconciled to God. No longer does God look down upon us and see our sin and our deadliness. He sees Christ and His robe of righteousness over us. He sees all the works of Christ upon us. He sees us through Jesus. Sin still exists. Death is still coming upon us. In Christ, we are given the sure and certain hope that all is conquered. In our Baptisms, we are in Christ, and if we are in Christ, we are alive. His resurrection is our resurrection. He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

What these sacrifices promised From a God who sought to bless, Came at last a second Adam Priest and King of Righteousness; Son of God incarnate Savior, Son of Man both Christ and Lord, Who in naked shame would offer On the cross His blood outpoured. (LSB 572:3)

Second Sunday of Easter

APRIL 27, 2025

Today's Reading: John 20:19-31

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 20:1-24; Luke 4:1-15

"Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.'" (John 20:24-25)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Thomas gets a lot of grief for not really believing that the Lord has risen, so he's still referred to as "Doubting Thomas" and depicted in art exploring Jesus's wounds with his fingers. It seems he will always be remembered as the one who didn't believe. Yet, is it all that strange to be a little wary of claims that your teacher, who was very publicly executed a few days before, is walking around amongst his disciples? People don't generally rise from the dead. Ancient people are frequently regarded as scientifically ignorant, but they knew for sure that people who died stayed dead. They knew what death was. Thomas is saying something very rational here—I'll believe it when I see it. But he says something more. He says he won't believe until he can see the wounds in Jesus's hands and put his finger in the wound in his side. Thomas was one of the Twelve; this means he was one of the apostles who was closest to Jesus throughout his ministry, so he surely knew what Jesus looked like and would recognize him if he walked into the room. Why does he proclaim that he will not believe without the verification of his wounds? Thomas, for all the grief he receives, is declaring something central to our faith. He wants to know that it is our crucified Lord who is also our risen Lord because this tells him that Jesus truly has overcome the wages of sin and death, paying the penalty on our behalf. Thomas doesn't just want to know if his teacher and friend is still alive; he wants to know that his redemption (and ours) is secured by Him. How does Jesus respond to Thomas's declaration? He comes to Thomas and shows him his wounds, grants his request, and declares peace to him. Jesus isn't angry at Thomas for his doubt but rather calms his fears by showing him his body. This same body is given for you at his altar. He reminds us all that though Thomas is blessed in seeing and believing, we who only hear and believe are likewise blessed. Receive the same peace spoken to Thomas, and "Taste and see that the Lord is good!" (Psalm 34:8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Monday of the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 28, 2025

Today's Reading: Acts 5:12-20 (21-32)

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 22:20-23:13; Luke 4:16-30

"...they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 'Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.' And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach." (Acts 5:18-21)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Acts of the Apostles opens with Jesus's ascension and the day of Pentecost and then details the wild expansion of the Church. Unless your life is far more exciting than mine, many of the events in Acts aren't terribly common in your daily lives—like extraordinary healings that draw sizeable crowds. At the beginning of this reading, people are hoping they can receive healing just from being under the shade of Peter's shadow, though the text doesn't say whether this tactic worked, and these large crowds result in jealousy on the part of the religious leaders who respond by putting the apostles in prison. This isn't the only case of these types of miracles (and responses from authorities), and just as was the case in Jesus' ministry, it would be easy to think these extraordinary miracles are the main point of the apostolic ministry. While these miracles are important, as they confirm Jesus' place as Lord of all creation and a correction of the poisonous fruits of the Fall, they are not quite the main thing. When the Lord sends an angel to deliver the apostles out of prison, what does he tell them? He tells them to go to the temple and speak the words of this Life. By "this Life," the angel means the life-giving and sustaining Word of God that brings us repentance, forgiveness, and salvation. The miracle that really is at the center of the apostolic ministry and continues today is not the healing, though this is certainly a residue of our Lord's renewal of all things, but the forgiveness of sins. This forgiveness of sins is not just floating on the air but is in the words still spoken to us today as our pastors and fellow Christians forgive us, teach us, and help us walk in newness of life. So, while we may not see healings and deliverances as a regular part of the church's work today, we do see greater healing and greater deliverance as Jesus gives us His words of this Life in the consolation of fellow Christians, the Absolution, and the breaking of the bread.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, Your words are waters living When my thirsting spirit pleads. Lord, Your words are bread life-giving; On Your words my spirit feeds. Lord, Your words will be my light Through death's cold and dreary night; Yes, they are my sword prevailing And my cup of joy unfailing! (LSB 589:3)

Tuesday of the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 29, 2025

Today's Reading: Revelation 1:4-18

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 23:14-33; Luke 4:31-44

"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.'" (Revelation 1:17-18)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

How often do we see the words "fear not" in Scripture? I read somewhere that there are 365 "fear nots" —one for each day of the year—but I'm not sure that's true. There are many encounters people have with God and His angels where they have to be admonished to not be afraid. We see this at Christmas when the angels tell the shepherds not to be afraid, we see it when God speaks to Abraham, we hear it from the prophets, and we hear it from Jesus during His earthly ministry. Why would John be afraid here? He is seeing his beloved friend and teacher, and yet he "falls at his feet as though dead." John is seeing Jesus in His glory, who knows all and sees all, whose face is shining like a sun, and out of his mouth is a sharp, two-edged sword. The visual description is stunning, and that alone is enough to conjure fear, yet even more than that, John knows that the Lord knows all our sins and failings. That alone can be a terrifying prospect. At times, in our sinful nature, we think we can hide our sins from God; sometimes, we even try to hide them from our own consciences through excuses and self-justification, telling ourselves we didn't really sin because we found a loophole. But John here cannot hide. He knows he is bare before not only his teacher and friend but the Lord of all, who, if he were to hold John's sins against him, could strike him down for them. Yet Jesus answers here by reaching out and touching John and telling him not to be afraid, not because they're friends and Jesus is nice, but because He is the first and the last, who has conquered sin and its wages—death and Hell. Jesus tells John that He holds the keys of death and Hades; this means that they are restrained on His behalf and that in order to get into either of them, you have to go through Jesus. Just as Jesus told John not to fear, as He is alive, He also tells you to take comfort in these truths. You need not fear death and Hell because they have been vanquished, locked up, and are restrained by our Lord, who is alive forevermore.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

At the name of Jesus Ev'ry knee shall bow, Ev'ry tongue confess Him King of glory now. 'Tis the Father's pleasure We should call Him Lord, Who from the beginning Was the mighty Word. (LSB 512:1)

Wednesday of the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 30, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 5:1-16

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 24:1-18; Luke 5:1-16

"While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.' And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean.' And immediately the leprosy left him." (Luke 5:12-13)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

In today's reading, we meet a man with leprosy. Leprosy is one of those diseases that most of us have never encountered but is frequently mentioned in the Scriptures, where it is kind of a blanket term for various skin diseases. It is so frequently mentioned in the Scriptures because there were many rules about how the community should treat someone with leprosy. Leprosy made its victims ceremonially unclean, which meant that their presence was an affront to God, so sufferers were cast out of communities so their uncleanness would not spread. It was a terrible affliction to suffer with, not just physically but spiritually and socially, as you were cast away from your friends and family, but also separated from your God. When this leper approaches Jesus and asks for healing, he is not just asking for recovery from an aesthetic problem; he is asking for physical, emotional, social, and spiritual restoration. This leper understands on some level who Jesus is, calling Him Lord, then falling on his face before him in a posture of worship, and trusting that if Jesus wills it, the man will be clean (notice he didn't say cured). Out of His mercy, Jesus wills this, but He goes even further and reaches out His hand and touches the leper. This was forbidden according to purity laws, and Jesus can be seen here intentionally making Himself impure with the man's leprosy, but instead, the opposite happens: at the word and touch of Jesus, the man's leprosy leaves him entirely. Then Jesus tells him to tell no one but to present himself to the priest and make an offering at the temple, that is regain entry to the religious community.

Have you ever felt like you would be shunned if people knew the real you? Or thought that though you know your sins are forgiven abstractly, but probably not that one that no one knows about because that's just going too far. Do you feel like you've been contaminated by your sins or the sins of others against you? Know that our Lord is reaching out to you in His Word and in his mercy, declaring, "I will; be clean."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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

St. Philip and St. James, Apostles

MAY 1, 2025

Today's Reading: John 14:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 25:1-22; Exodus 25:23-30:38; Luke 5:17-39

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.” (John 14:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

There are many things that can trouble our hearts these days. It doesn't take much: a quick check of the news, which is designed to trouble you; a quick scroll through social media that evolves into “doom-scrolling”; a recent diagnosis; a falling out with a friend or family member; or even just general concern about what the future holds. Mental health statistics suggest that in 2023, somewhere around 20% of high school students experienced serious bouts of depression. That is a lot of fear, stress, anxiety, and doubt, and is reflective of the world we live in. This is not the place to address the nation's mental health struggles or to answer all the fears that may surround us; this is just a spot to sit and rest in the One who sees our troubled hearts, who knows our fears and sadness and is with us in these struggles. Looking at our troubled hearts, Jesus answers our fears and doubts, but maybe not in the way we wish He would. Instead of telling us not to worry because He's just going to fix everything up as if it never happened, or will get back at the bully for us, or will at least make it all make sense, He invites us to believe, that is, trust, in Him. What does it mean to trust in Him? It means to know that He loves and cares for us, that He desires our salvation from sin, death, and the devil, and that He will never leave nor forsake you. He goes from asking us to trust in Him to telling us that He is preparing a place for us and that He is the way, the truth, and the life; he is showing us the way, even when the road is steep and rocky. Worry can be suffocating, looming large in our brains as we try to move forward in our lives, but by looking at Jesus, we see that there is a path for us that leads us in truth and life. We need not suffocate on fear and doubt; instead, we can be guided by the light of His word, fixing our eyes on Him, in the knowledge that even if things are not okay today or tomorrow, they are under the eye of the One who makes all things new, and who is leading us through the valley of the shadow of death; we need not fear evil, regardless of what should trouble us.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Yet even though I suffer The world's unpleasantness, And though the days grow rougher And bring me great distress, That day of bliss divine, Which knows no end or measure, And Christ, who is my pleasure, Forever shall be mine. (LSB 713:6)

Friday of the Second Week of Easter

MAY 2, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Lord's Prayer - The First Petition
Daily Lectionary: Exodus 31:1-18; Luke 6:1-19

*"God's name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it."
(Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer - The First Petition, Explanation)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Have you ever been blamed for something you didn't do or had someone lie about you behind your back? It can be a devastating experience with enormous relational consequences that are difficult to undo. It is difficult to trust someone again after they have spoken so poorly of you, and sometimes, it can be difficult to get other people to trust you when they heard you were an [insert rumor here]. How we speak about one another is such a big deal that God has dedicated an entire commandment to it (the eighth). Reputational damage matters because it obstructs people's clear view of who you are and gives them a license to devalue you as a forgiven child of God.

How much more does it matter when God's name or reputation is damaged? How could God's reputation possibly be damaged? Well, when His Word is taught incorrectly, people have an incorrect view of who He is. Perhaps His Word is taught in such a way that they imagine Him to be spiteful and arrogant, unconcerned with the needs of people. Imagine if His word is taught incorrectly, so they imagine him to be unconcerned with sin and evil. What if they just have absolutely no interest in knowing who God is because His people have behaved in a horrendous way, treating other beloved children of God like trash or vermin, turning them away from His love for them? In order to honor (hallow) God's name, we must concern ourselves with the words He says, how He intends them to be understood, and also how we internalize those words and live them in our lives. I know that probably makes me a bad Lutheran to say that, but we are actually quoting the catechism here, so I'm going to roll with it. Luther tells us plainly that we disgrace God's name when we do not lead holy lives according to His Word. Does this mean that we need to be perfect? Yes and no. According to the law, yes, we need to live perfectly, but don't stop there. God's law isn't the entirety of His Word to us. We can also confess our faith in His gospel when we are eager to confess our sins and failures, to seek forgiveness, and are quick to grant forgiveness to others. The holiest thing we can do is point to our Savior, who saves us from our sins out of His endless mercy, who saves our neighbors from their sins, and proclaim Him clearly by speaking that gospel and behaving as if each of us are sinners grasping for the endless mercies of our gracious God.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Father, grant that by Your grace They may Your will each day embrace; With fruits of faith their lives now bless, Till they at death Your name confess (LSB 599:5)

Saturday of the Second Week of Easter

MAY 3, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Easter 3 - Psalm 145:4-7, 9; antiphon: Psalm 145:10
Daily Lectionary: Exodus 32:1-14; Luke 6:20-38

“One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness.” (Psalm 145:4-6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

What are the mighty works of God? Here we are in Easter 2, so perhaps the resurrection is the first thing that comes to mind, but I would imagine that many people might think of the crossing of the Red Sea, Noah's flood, the battle of Jericho, or various miracles of Jesus. I'm sure you thought of something else I didn't list there because there are too many to count. The Scriptures are overflowing with recitations of the mighty acts of God. And yet, all these acts are there to point us to the one singular most mighty act of God—the incarnation and all it encompasses. Many religions have tales of their gods doing various mighty acts like controlling the weather, the harvest, or perhaps how a side fares in battle. It is normal to brag about these sorts of things as demonstrations of your god's power and as a way to call others into subservience to it. But our God is different. He demonstrates His mighty works by taking on human flesh, living, dying, and rising again, to show His power not over armies and weather (though certainly that, too), but to show His power over the one thing that ensnares all of creation—sin and death. There is no escaping the power of these forces; we are all subject to them regardless of where we live or how rich or poor we are. The richest man in the world cannot buy eternal life, a spotless conscience, or a ticket to Paradise; he is subject to this same leveling force that eventually captures all of humanity. We are all sinners, as demonstrated by the fact that we will all die. So our God demonstrates His mighty works by conquering sin, death, and Hell, not through strength, but through weakness, and giving forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation to all who would believe in Him. This is something so mighty and glorious that it's paradoxically easy to ignore. There are many things that tempt us to do just that, but when we see it, we are grateful for those who spoke of it to us and are eager to speak of it to others.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O sing of Christ, whose birth made known The kindness of the Lord, Eternal Word made flesh and bone So we could be restored. Upon our frail humanity God's finger chose to trace The fullness of His deity, The icon of His grace. (LSB 362:1)

Third Sunday of Easter

MAY 4, 2025

Today's Reading: John 21:1-14 (15-19)

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 32:15-35; Luke 6:39-49

"Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, do you have any fish?' They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'" (John 21:4-7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

This resurrection appearance of Jesus always seems a little wonderfully odd to me in how it is so outwardly ordinary while the circumstances are the most extraordinary in human history. Jesus has already appeared to His disciples once, but this time, he appears a second time to have breakfast with them; it doesn't get more ordinary than gathering your friends for breakfast. Really, there's nothing here to tell you this is the Son of God standing victorious over sin and death; he could be anyone waiting for his friends to come ashore. It's so ordinary that the disciples do not recognize Jesus at first, which could simply be a combination of distance and light, or there could be a bit more to it, but they do realize it's Him when they're asked to drop their nets on the other side and catch a great haul of fish. This is a call back to Luke 5, where Jesus tells them to drop their nets on the other side after they've been fishing all night and are exhausted but catch such a great haul their nets end up breaking. This time, their nets don't break, and they are so delighted to see the Lord that Peter jumps in the water after him. Can you picture it? Peter, who denied our Lord at His death, is so overwhelmed with delight at seeing Him that he jumped out of the boat after Him. A few days ago, these disciples suffered a devastating loss as their Lord was crucified, and yet all things are made new as they feast together over the haul of fish the Lord has provided. Here, Jesus comforts them not just in their souls with His presence but also in their bodies with a feast. Jesus' care and nourishment for you continues today, not in a direct command for a catch of fish, but in pastors. He's given you to forgive your sins and neighbors who serve in their vocations to provide for your bodily needs. Thanks be to God for the endless Gifts He provides and will provide, even when it seems we are in the depths of woe.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for the Third Sunday of Easter)

Monday of the Third Week of Easter

MAY 5, 2025

Today's Reading: Acts 9:1-22

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 33:1-23; Luke 7:1-17

"Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'"
(Acts 9:3-5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Karma is a Hindu belief that has passed into the common cultural vernacular. In the cultural vernacular, it means that when you do something bad, it will come back to bite you, and when you do something good, it will be repaid somehow. You can see how appealing it is, I'm sure; I mean, I love the idea that evil doers will receive some clear measurable payout and that you'll somehow be rewarded for doing something good. It scratches our self-righteous itch, doesn't it? Now let me be clear: karma isn't real, and it's a good thing for us it is not. Instead of our actions being carved in stone and us awaiting abstract punishment from "the universe," we have a judge who loves us and is merciful, forgiving, and just. Humans, because of our various biases and blind spots, are rarely ever just, but God is just; this is why He tells us to leave vengeance up to Him (Romans 12:19).

When Paul meets Jesus on the road to Damascus after persecuting the Church, it is not due to karma or some sort of abstract cosmic justice; it is due to the Lord's very particular justice. The Lord's justice does not simply seek retribution for the suffering of the persecuted church but is also merciful enough to call the chief persecutor to repentance. Karmic justice would have necessitated Paul's death. Instead, Paul receives mercy and becomes a preacher of Jesus's mercy and grace. Jesus's forgiveness makes all things new for Paul, reconciling Him to God and his neighbors. This same forgiveness and reconciliation is all of ours, freely given in the waters of Baptism, at the Lord's table, or in the proclamation of the Lord's gospel.

Did you notice as well what Jesus says to Paul? "Why are you persecuting ME?" He doesn't ask why Paul's persecuting the church, but why are you persecuting me. The Church is the bride of Christ, but she is also the body of Christ, as this is how closely connected our Lord is to those who are His. As we make our way in this world, a world that has always been hostile to the gospel of Jesus, we can be comforted in the knowledge that we are defended by Him, not on any merit or worthiness on our part, but because of His love for us, his sheep He will forever remain our Good Shepherd.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Through toil and tribulation And tumult of her war She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore Till with the vision glorious Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great Church victorious Shall be the Church at rest. (LSB 644:4)*

Tuesday of the Third Week of Easter

MAY 6, 2025

Today's Reading: Revelation 5:(1-7) 8-14

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 34:1-28; Luke 7:18-35

"And he answered them, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.'" (Luke 7:22-23)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

John the Baptist is confused. He spent the bulk of his ministry calling Israel to repentance and proclaiming the Messiah who was to come, with all this eventually culminating in John baptizing Jesus then being tossed in prison. Perhaps he had a good sense of how things were supposed to go, and they aren't going to plan. Perhaps he knows he is being punished for calling the ruler Herod to repentance for his sins and assumes that in the age of the coming Messiah, these sorts of injustices would never happen. Scripture doesn't give us the specifics of John's doubt; we just know that John wasn't sure if Jesus was The One. Whatever the root of John's doubt, however, I think we can all relate. We assume things should probably work out a certain way if we are faithful followers of our Lord, or perhaps we cannot stomach the injustice we see in a world supposedly ruled by a benevolent God. It's not that unusual to doubt. But what's important here is what John does with his doubt. John goes to Jesus with it. He asks if Jesus is the promised Messiah. On the surface, this is reasonable, but it's also a little odd when we remember John is related to Jesus. Their mothers knew each other, and I would imagine that John grew up steeped in the knowledge of exactly who Jesus was—angels, archangels, shepherds, Wise Men, all of that. So, it's strange that he doesn't quite know, but stranger still, that Jesus doesn't refer to his relationship with John to reassure John of Jesus's identity. Instead, Jesus points to His works as proof of who He is. Where Jesus is, there is life and salvation; that is, His person is not separate from His work. What are these works of Christ? The blind see, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have Good News preached to them. If you're struggling with doubt or frustrated with how things are in your life or the world, look to Jesus and his work. He continues this ministry today to you as He declares in the Word, the water, the bread, and wine that you are healed and your sins are forgiven.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O be our great deliv'rer still, The Lord of life and death; Restore and quicken, soothe and bless, With your lifegiving breath. To hands that work and eyes that see Give wisdom's healing pow'r That whole and sick and weak and strong May praise You evermore. (LSB 846:3)

Wednesday of the Third Week of Easter

MAY 7, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 7:36-50

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 34:29-35:21; Exodus 35:22-38:20; Luke 7:36-50

"Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." (Luke 7:47-48)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

In this passage, the Pharisees directly encounter Jesus's tendency to scandalize the piety of the arrogant and self-righteous. Here, we see Jesus is invited to dine with the Pharisees, and a woman labeled "a sinner" hears that Jesus will be there and crashes the party. Let's take a step back and think through all of the implications of this: the Pharisees are the teachers of the law, are all men, and are trying to learn from this interesting rabbi by having a respectable meal with him. Then, their all-male party is crashed by a woman. This is boundary stretching on its own, as this culture certainly had a healthy respect for distinguishing between male and female spaces. But she's not only a woman; she's also a "sinner." The text doesn't detail the particulars of the woman's sin, but it's been widely accepted by scholars, from the context, that she was likely a sex worker. This makes sense, as we are clearly meant to understand that she isn't just a regular sinner; she's a pretty grievous public sinner. Yes, we all know that we're all sinners, but most of us have a hierarchy of sins, and frankly, that type of sin was and is considered especially egregious. So, people let their imaginations work, put together a woman who was a great sinner who obviously had money, and draw a conclusion. We can easily see how the dinner party would be surprised at her arrival, but imagine how brave she must have been. She knew what she was walking into, and instead of waiting for a time when Jesus was on His own, where she could avoid the condemnation of the Pharisees, she marches in with her savings in the alabaster jar and worships her Lord with her love and her tears, because that act was more important than her pride. Jesus knows exactly who she is and what she has done and is more aware of her sin than even she is, yet He uses this to preach on love and redemption. She loves Jesus because she knows how very much she needs saving, and that He can do this. The lesson here is not that bigger sinners love Jesus more, but rather those who know intimately just how very much they need Jesus, who know their weakness, can rest in Him as their strength, especially when the world would shame us for that weakness. We happily give Him everything we have, because we know that we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

For all the faithful women Who served in days of old, To You shall thanks be given; To all, their story told. They served with strength and gladness In tasks Your wisdom gave. To You their lives bore witness, Proclaimed Your pow'r to save. (LSB 855:1)

Thursday of the Third Week of Easter

MAY 8, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Lord's Prayer - The Second Petition
Daily Lectionary: Exodus 38:21-39:8, 22-23, 27-31; Luke 8:1-21

"Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.' But he answered them, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.'"
(Luke 8:19-21)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Because of the mention of Jesus' family, this is one of those texts that gets argued over by theology geeks who have really strong feelings about whether or not Mary and Joseph had any children after the birth of Jesus (really, ask a Roman Catholic friend, it's a whole thing). But let's not miss the forest for the trees here. Jesus is saying something monumental that it does us well to take to heart—my mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. Jesus is saying here that more than blood and familial connection, the connection we should have with one another is a bond of faith in the one true God. This is a faith that is confessed in the historic creeds of the church, which most of us say every Sunday. This is a faith that is confessed when we receive Christ's forgiveness for ourselves and extend it to our friends, family, and neighbors. This is a faith which is centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for each of us for the forgiveness of all of our sins. Jesus seems to further underscore this point later on in the chapter where He calls a woman He has healed "daughter," and this is especially interesting in one of the two gospels that open with an entire genealogy of Jesus. Yet Jesus does not allow the favoritism of kin to shape the priorities within his ministry, instead giving familial status to those who believe His word. But what does it mean to hear the word of God and do it? Surely, Lutheran antennae come up here, as we suspect that Jesus is asking us to keep the law and get a little worried. Fear not; read this declaration in the context of the earlier parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-8) and understand that the Word of God is living and active; it grows as you cultivate it, attend to it, receive it. By hearing the Word of God and receiving the Spirit of God in the Word of God, you are declared not only righteous but truly in the family of Jesus.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Church of God, elect and glorious, Holy nation, chosen race; Called as God's own special people, Royal priests and heirs of grace: Know the purpose of your calling, Show to all His mighty deeds; Tell of love that knows no limits, Grace that meets all human needs. (LSB 646:1)

Friday of the Third Week of Easter

MAY 9, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 8:22-39

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 39:32-40:16; Luke 8:22-39

“And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked [Jesus] to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned.” (Luke 8:36-37)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus arrives in the country of the Gerasenes, across from Galilee, and is immediately greeted by a man who is possessed by demons. This man has been so captive to this demonic oppression that he is naked, living in the tombs of the city, and has frequently burst through the chains used to bind him. This must have been a terrifying sight and a situation that was well-known in the city. Most towns these days have the oddball who may come across as slightly creepy, given his mannerisms and clothing, but magnify that by ten thousand, add in clear demonic elements, and you have a better sense of how the city must have viewed this man. It's safe to assume that most of the people in the city wanted nothing to do with him, and beyond being a nuisance, he was probably a source of a lot of fear. But despite this, after Jesus heals the demoniac and restores him, Jesus is only met with gratitude and wonder by the demoniac himself, who asks to follow Jesus. The people of the city, however, respond with fear. This seems a curious response, as it is logical that Jesus solved a problem for them, so they would all be grateful for it. But they have witnessed the power of Jesus, and though that power is wielded in mercy to heal, restore, and forgive, they also seem to intuit that it could be used for judgment. Indeed, a man who can judge and condemn multiple demons, driving them back to the abyss where they belong, could certainly render judgment against any of our sins. People often have this reaction to Jesus. Many of us hear his words of forgiveness, life, and salvation, and like the demoniac, see healing, restoration, and redemption from our sins that we so desperately want. Others hear and see the word and works of Jesus and receive it only as condemnation and terror, responding by asking him to go away. Just as the parable of the sower earlier in chapter eight illustrates, not everyone will receive the Word of God with joy and thanksgiving; some will not receive it at all and reject it immediately. How people respond to God's Word is not in our control; we should simply be ready to speak it and speak it as one delivered out of bondage by grace.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, Your Word is cast Like seed into the ground; Now let the dew of heav'n descend And righteous fruits abound. (LSB 577:1)

Saturday of the Third Week of Easter

MAY 10, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Easter 4 - Psalm 78:70-72; 79:13; antiphon: John 10:14, 15b

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 40:17-38; Leviticus 1:1-7:38; Luke 8:40-56

"And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. And he said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.'" (Luke 8:47-48)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Imagine it: a woman has had a health condition for twelve years that has proved stubbornly incurable. This health condition doesn't only have physical consequences, but we also have to put it in the context of her life and culture. Because it is a bleeding disorder, it would have also made her ritually unclean to the community around her, so she did not only suffer twelve years of feeling unwell in her body, but she also suffered twelve years of shame, ridicule, and isolation from those around her. This is why the woman was so intent on a cure that she spent all she had on physicians. In a word, she's desperate. This desperation causes her to throw caution to the winds and push through a jostling crowd in the belief that if she could just touch the hem of Jesus's garment, she would be well. The healing that she receives, though, is not because Jesus wore a magical cloak or that somehow His clothing soaked up His healing powers, but rather it was her faith that pushed her through her financial destitution, her physical condition, her cultural shame, and caused her to reach out to Jesus for hope. She is instantly cured, but Jesus does not let her sneak away and remain hidden; instead, in the hearing of all who are there, she recounts who she is and why she touched Jesus. If they did not know before that she was unclean, they certainly know now, and yet whatever dismay the crowd might have felt is dismissed by Jesus, who declares her well and at peace. Her wellness is not just the cessation of a physical ailment but is peace with God and her neighbors as the barrier to their fellowship is removed. Jesus is applying His word to the work that has already been done, publicly in the hearing of all, because even though her faith made her well, her faith is not a private affair. None of our faiths are private, but by our baptisms are integrated into the fellowship of believers; at the Supper, we are further accompanied by the whole company of heaven, and in the Absolution, your pastor declares before everyone what Christ has done and is doing for you. Go in peace; your faith has made you well.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone And rest in Him unceasing; And by its fruits true faith is known, With love and hope increasing. For faith alone can justify; Works serve and our neighbor and supply The proof that faith is living. (LSB 555:9)

Fourth Sunday of Easter

MAY 11, 2025

Today's Reading: John 10:22-30

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 8:1-13, 30-36; Luke 9:1-17

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." (John 10:27-29)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus speaks to His little lamb: I am your Good Shepherd. You can trust me.

I speak to you in My Word, and you hear My voice— as you read the Bible, learn your Catechism, hear each sermon, sing the liturgy, and receive Absolution in Confession. I speak to you every time you remember My promise to you in Baptism and as you eat and drink Me in the Supper.

Hear me in My Word; do not listen for me in other places. My words have power. They deliver the Gifts I speak to you.

In My Word, I call you to repentance and forgive your sins. I give you the life I won for you through my death and resurrection— and that life lasts forever.

Little Lamb, you are precious to Me. I have rescued you from sin and death and Hell, and I will not let you go. I am your Good Shepherd. My Father sent Me to save you, and He holds you safe in His Hand.

Jesus' little lamb responds to Him: Good Shepherd, I need you always. I have no strength of my own. I would be lost if I had to find my own way. The enemies who hated you hate me, too, and they try to destroy me. But You defeated them and are always protecting me from them.

Thank you for speaking to me as you promised and for opening my ears to hear. At times, I forget Your Word or get distracted by other voices. Forgive me for the times I wander.

The way home to heaven is long and winds through this broken world. Thank You for staying with me as You promised. Teach me Your Word so that I might encourage other little lambs as we walk along together. Lord, have mercy on me always. Amen.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

I am Jesus' little lamb, Ever glad at heart I am; For my Shepherd gently guides me, Knows my need and well provides me, loves me every day the same, even calls me by my name. (LSB 740:1)

Monday of the Fourth Week of Easter

MAY 12, 2025

Today's Reading: Acts 20:17-35

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 9:1-24; Luke 9:18-36

"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." (Acts 20:28)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus speaks to His lamb through the Apostle Paul: My dear lamb, I am your Good Shepherd. I will keep you safe. I do this through the under-shepherds I send to help you and all the other lambs in the church.

Today, you hear the words of one of the shepherds I called and sent, the Apostle Paul. I sent him to Ephesus, where he taught the people for three years, giving them my grace through the Word and Sacraments.

Listen carefully to the warning Paul gave my flock in Ephesus: Fierce wolves will come, attacking the flock, even from within the church. They will say twisted things that I did not teach them.

You need to understand that Satan will always spread lies. So listen to My Word. Hear the good pastors who teach what I said, what Paul and the other Apostles said, what Moses and the Prophets said. Listen to what's in the Catechism, which is faithful to My Word.

Stay close to me and to the people I send to you who speak what the Holy Spirit inspired in the Bible. Regularly come to receive the Gifts I give you in the Word and the Sacraments. This is how I protect you and keep you safe.

Jesus' lamb responds to Him: Thank You, Good Shepherd, for staying with me. St. Paul said that you obtained me and all the rest of Your flock by shedding your blood on the cross. You wash me clean from my sins by that blood, and now I am safe in You.

Dear Jesus, thank you for the people you send to care for me— my parents and family, my pastor and teachers, and all the other lambs in Your flock. Please forgive me for the times I forget Your Word or wander from You. Thank you for being patient and merciful to me. Train me in Your ways and give me work to do so that I can help keep your lambs safe from the next group of wolves that will come.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; Curb those who by deceit or sword would wrest the kingdom from your Son and bring to naught all He has done. (LSB 655:2)

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Easter

MAY 13, 2025

Today's Reading: Revelation 7:9-17

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 10:1-20; Leviticus 11:1-15:33; Luke 9:37-62

"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9-10)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus speaks to His lamb: My dear lamb, sin is much dirtier than you can know. Only one thing can wash it away... only My blood washes away your sins. My Father sent me to cleanse you because He loves you.

When you were baptized, the Holy Spirit gave you this washing, and He keeps you in the true faith all your life.

In this life, you won't see the washing with your eyes. You'll still struggle with temptation and sin until you die. But you know you're washed because I've told you— in My Word, in Holy Baptism, and when you eat and drink at my Supper. In all these ways, I give you forgiveness.

In Heaven, when I take you home, you will see my glory, and you'll also see the forgiveness I've showered upon you with your own eyes. You will wear a robe I made for you, washed clean by My blood shed for you on the cross.

For now, though, you can trust that I have cleansed you from your sins and that I love you forever.

Jesus' lamb responds to Him: Thank you, dear Shepherd. You know better than anyone how many sins I need to have washed away. When you wash them, they are gone forever. You set me free by Your grace. I don't deserve the love that You've given to me. But You've promised never to stop loving me, and I believe You.

I'm sorry for the times I forget Your Word. Even after all You've done for me, I still chase after the sins You died to wash away. Please don't let me forget the price that my forgiveness cost You.

Lead me in repentance every day of my life, and to walk with You in love.

Thank you for giving me salvation!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Around the throne of David, the saints, from care released, raise loud their songs of triumph to celebrate the feast. They sing to Christ their leader, who conquered in the fight, who won for them forever their gleaming robes of white. (LSB 672:3)

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Easter

MAY 14, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 10:1-22

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 16:1-24; Luke 10:1-22

“And (Jesus) said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Luke 10:2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus speaks to His lamb: Dear lamb, This world is filled with people—people whom I died for on the cross. I want them to hear My Word. Some will hear and believe in Me and be saved. The Holy Spirit will draw them to faith. Some will hear My Word and reject it and be lost.

...But I want them to hear My Word.

I want them to hear My Word like you hear My Word, little lamb. I want them to hear that I died to forgive them. I want them to hear and repent of their sins. I want them to hear the Word as it's being read and preached... as the Holy Spirit draws them to faith, washes them in Baptism, and feeds them My Body and Blood in My Supper.

I want them to have all these things like you are having them.

Dear lamb, pray earnestly that more workers would go into the harvest. Pray for workers in every land who speak every language to go out and serve. Be ready to do the work that I will give you in your vocation, whatever it may be.

My heart is filled with compassion for people. In your prayers, share in this compassion. Remember that My compassion is for you, too.

Jesus' lamb responds to Him: Dear Jesus, You have been merciful to me and saved me from my sins.

Your Word is true and gives life. In this day, in this place, in my congregation, and around the world, please send workers into the fields. Let people hear Your Word — the Spirit will work through it to give Your Gifts of forgiveness and salvation.

Please forgive me for the times I have not shared Your compassion for those not yet in Your Flock. Thank You for being merciful and gracious to me. Please keep me in Your grace.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord God, bless Your Word wherever it is proclaimed. Make it a word of power and peace to convert those not yet Your own and to confirm those who have come to saving faith. May Your Word pass from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip, and from the lip to the life that, as You have promised, Your Word may achieve the purpose for which You sent it; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Easter

MAY 15, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Lord's Prayer - The Third Petition
Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 17:1-16; Luke 10:23-42

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

What does this mean? The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.

How is God's will done? God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus speaks to His lamb: My dear lamb, I give you the Lord's Prayer. Learn it well and pray it often. When you pray this prayer, you pray along with all My baptized lambs in the Church. We pray together and ask for the Father's will to be done.

We ask that Him that My Gospel would always be taught purely and that the Spirit would draw people to faith. We ask Him that the lambs in my flock would follow My Word and not fall away. We ask that that Father would keep My flock on earth safe from Satan and the world and all temptations to sin. We pray that all My lambs would come safely to heaven.

Your Father's good and gracious will is for you to have these blessings.

Jesus' lamb responds: Dear Jesus, Amen! Thank You for teaching me this prayer and making me Your own in Baptism. Please forgive me for the times I forget to pray. I am distracted by many things. Please keep teaching me to pray.

This world can be so hard. People do things that are not what the Father would want. The evil ways that Satan puts into the world are hurtful and hateful. But Jesus, You are my Good Shepherd. You have overcome the world. You will not leave me or forsake me. Strengthen my courage to pray Your prayer in faith. You taught me to ask the Father that His will would be done on earth even in these days. He will graciously do this in Your name. Thank you!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Dear Father, Your will be done, not the devil's will or our enemies or anything that would persecute and suppress Your Holy Word or hinder Your kingdom. Grant that we may bear with patience and overcome whatever is to be endured because of Your Word and kingdom, so that our poor flesh may not yield or fall away because of weakness or sluggishness. (Large Catechism III 67)

Friday of the Fourth Week of Easter

MAY 16, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 11:1-13

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 18:1-7, 20-19:8; Luke 11:1-13

"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:11-13)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus speaks to His lamb: My dear lamb, I will teach you to pray like I taught my disciples to pray. Read closely what I told them here in Luke 11. What I taught them is for you, too. Pray to the Father in My name; He will hear you and give you good.

When you pray to your Father in heaven, think about a father here on earth. Fathers on earth are not perfect. They struggle with sin like every human being.

But we know that fathers want to give good things to their children. If a son asks his father for a healthy meal like a fish or an egg, what father would be so evil that he would give his child a painful, venomous serpent or scorpion instead?!

If an imperfect father on earth knows how to give good gifts to his children, how much more will your perfect Father provide you with something good when you pray?

Your heavenly Father loves you. He gives you good gifts every day. He gave you the best Gift of all, Me— your Savior, your Good Shepherd. So when you pray, you can be confident that He will give you the Holy Spirit, who will create and strengthen your faith through My Word every day until you are safe in heaven. (And remember to tell Him, "Thank You.")

Jesus' lamb responds: Dear Jesus, thank you for teaching me to pray and showing me how much the Father loves me. Thank you, Father, for hearing my prayer and answering with the best of Your Gifts. You give me Your Son. You pour out Your Spirit. And you save me and keep me as your own.

Please give me faith to believe that You are good and that You answer my prayers, just as Jesus taught. Forgive me for the times I do not pray—for when I forget, am lazy, or don't believe you can or will help.

You are good. Thank You for the good you always give me in Christ.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Neither life nor death shall ever from the Lord His children sever; Unto them His grace He showeth, and their sorrows all He knoweth. (LSB 725:3)

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Easter

MAY 17, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Easter 5 - Psalm 98:2-6; antiphon: Psalm 98:1
Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 19:9-18, 26-37; Luke 11:14-36

"Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him." (Psalm 98:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus speaks to His lamb: My dear lamb, I made you with ears to hear so you can listen to My Word. I gave you a mouth to confess your faith. And I gave you a heart so you can have joy that overflows into songs of praise.

We will sing Psalm 98 in Church tomorrow. For hundreds of years before I was born of My mother, Mary, My people would pray this psalm as they waited for the Father to send the Messiah (me).

My flock rejoiced to sing these words, "Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him." They didn't yet know the wonderful way Psalm 98 would be fulfilled. For I AM the LORD from eternity, but I became man and was born to work salvation to give to you.

I left My place at the right hand of the Father and was humbled so I could lift you up. I was born with a physical right hand and a holy arm, the tiny body of a little baby. I used all my strength to love my Flock. When the time came, my hands were nailed to the cross, and I died for you. They pulled the nails out of my corpse when I was laid in the tomb for you. You can still see the marks of those nails in my hands and feet, for I was raised from the dead for you.

I am still both God and man and always will be. I sit in glory at the Father's right hand, watching over you, my lamb, and waiting to bring you home.

So, dear lamb, pray this psalm with joy! Sing together with all My flock! Your salvation has been won!

Jesus' lamb responds: Amen! Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen! "For He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. Alleluia. I Am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Alleluia. (Alleluia Verse for the 4th Sunday in Easter LSB Altar Book p. 794)

Fifth Sunday of Easter

MAY 18, 2025

Today's Reading: John 16:12-22

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 20:1-16, 22-27; Luke 11:37-54

"When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." (John 16:21-22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

As each of our children was coming into the world, I remember the labor process well. I remember the easiest natural birth when my wife and I were walking around the hospital waiting for the contractions to bring the birth. Especially I remember my poor, obvious, and generally unsuccessful attempts to distract her from the labor pains. I also remember the planned C-Section, which seemed oddly effortless as far as the actual birthing process went. Then I remember the long labors when my wife expressed her pain and fatigue. Most of all, I remember how every time there was joy in the new life my wife held in her arms when the work was finished.

This is life in the world as Christians, isn't it? Sometimes our life in the world is relatively painless, and we get to see the joy easily. Sometimes, it's difficult, but we can still get through it relatively unscathed. Then there are those times when we have no idea how we'll finish the course.

Jesus' warning here tells us that the end is attainable, and it is attainable by the joy that is to come. In fact, what we see is that He is our joy. He is the One on whom we fix our eyes, the Author and Perfector of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross and scorned its shame. What do I mean?

I mean that as Christ has loved us, He has carried our sin to the cross to redeem us. He has desired that we would be with Him in the joy of His Eternal Kingdom, and so He has suffered what our sin deserves. He has experienced with that the suffering of death. But in His resurrection on the First Easter is the promise that all suffering has been overcome.

So why still the birth pangs and the suffering now? Because through this, He forms us as those clinging to Him and to His promises of eternal life alone. Through this, He promises us, promises you that as you are His baptized child, as you have been born that child out of the water and the Spirit, you will have eternal joy with Him. But it's that baptismal promise that becomes the way He also strengthens you to endure it. It's hard now, but the light of that life with Him is the light shining at the end of the tunnel of this suffering. It's shining and brightening your life even now so you would know He will never leave you nor forsake you in it.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world, our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Monday of the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 19, 2025

Today's Reading: Acts 11:1-18

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 21:1-24; Luke 12:1-12

"And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.'" (Acts 11:7-8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

That we would restrict our diets is not a weird thing in our day. We have gluten-free diets, we have keto diets, we have vegetarian and vegan diets, we have carnivore diets, and.... and... and... For the Jewish disciples of Jesus, their diet was restricted as well. They were constrained to keep Kosher as Moses instructed in the Old Testament Law. This included things like not eating pork (like bacon or sausage) or shellfish (like two of my favorites, shrimp and scallops). Why? Because God wanted to keep His people distinct. He wanted it clear that they were His and they were holy, and with that, they were unique. But then Peter received this vision from the Lord in Acts chapter 11. The Lord was saying that Peter was to eat some of this "unclean" food. Peter, as you read, was upset at that thought. He had never let anything "common or unclean" enter his mouth. And then God said that this wasn't the way it was anymore. This was not common food; it was not unclean but clean. How could that be?!

Jesus gives us insight into this, for example, in Matthew 15. He tells the disciples there that it is not what "goes into the mouth," that is, it's not what they would eat that would make them unclean. So what was it? Was there no more uncleanness? Well, not in the sense the Jews thought of, which required them to keep Kosher in order to worship God at the Temple (their church). Also, there is not in the sense we might think about things like washing hands or vegetables before we eat them (although that's still a good and healthy thing to do), but there is still uncleanness, and that is the uncleanness of sin. As Jesus said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person." Hopefully, you can see what is happening here. Jesus is making the point that our diet isn't what makes us sinful or not. It's not what makes us unable to stand before God. But what does make us unable to stand in God's presence? Sin. The sin that comes out of our hearts and shows how sinful those hearts are by our thoughts and actions. But all of this is to show that on the cross, sin had been atoned for, taken care of, and defeated by Jesus. Now, by the cleansing of the cross, by the cross given to sinners in Baptism, in Absolution, in the Supper, now that cleanness comes to you and makes you clean. Thanks be to God.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. You have cleansed us by the washing of your Holy and precious blood and innocent suffering and death. Guard and keep us to walk in the life of righteousness, innocence, and blessedness in You in all things. Amen.

Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 20, 2025

Today's Reading: Revelation 21:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 23:1-22; Luke 12:13-34

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more.'" (Revelation 21:3-4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Where is God? Everywhere, right? He's omnipresent, it's true. But here in Revelation, it says that the "dwelling place of God is with man." How is that? On the one hand, we can acknowledge that it's a mystery. On the other hand, we can also recognize that throughout the Scriptures, we see God seeking to be with man. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, there was God, seeking them in the cool of the garden. When God visited Jacob, revealing to him the ladder to heaven, that place became "Bethel," the "House of God." When Moses was given the instructions for the Tabernacle, God said of the tent in it, the "Tent of Meeting," "There I will meet with the people of Israel" (Exodus 29:43). So, this is not a new idea at the Resurrection of the dead at the end of time that we see in Revelation 21.

But what are we to make of this? To begin, as we often need to, we have to realize that the issue is sin. It's because of sin that we can't see God face-to-face. As God says to Moses, we can't see God and live (Exodus 33:20). That's why this is hard for us to understand. However, God came and met with us in Jesus. He came into a body. He came to a place, Judea and Jerusalem. In that place, He carried our sin to the cross so that by the life in the resurrection of His body in that place, now we have life and the victory over sin won by this forgiveness. Now, God meets with us in His Word, in the Waters of Holy Baptism, in His Holy Supper. He does this to deliver that forgiveness to us, to make us holy so that we can dwell with Him forever in that place.

What does this ultimately mean for us to understand how God is everywhere but in a place? Once again, we still have to say it's something of a mystery, but we can understand more of it in light of Jesus. Yes, God is everywhere, but He's made us to be in a place and He wants to be with us, which He does in Jesus in a very specific way. Through Jesus, then, we see that the fullness of God dwells in a man bodily (Colossians 2:9). It's Jesus that we'll see on that Last Day, and when we do, it will make a lot more sense. It will also be the greatest comfort as He promises to be with us and even wipe away our every tear.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus, thank you for meeting us in Your Word and Sacraments to cleanse our sin and prepare us to live with you forever on the Day of Your Return. Amen.

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 21, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 12:35-53

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 23:23-44; Luke 12:35-53

"Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." (Luke 12:51)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Every year at Christmas time, I hear those familiar words of Handel's Messiah: "And His Name shall be called... Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Of course, this is a quote from Isaiah 9:6, and it's clear that, ultimately, it's referring to Jesus. So with that, we rightly call Jesus by the title "Prince of Peace."

But in Luke 12, we read Jesus saying that He didn't come to bring peace but division. Isn't that a contradiction? All the more, when we talk about Jesus in our day and age, if people know of Him, they think of Him as being really "nice." So, what is this He's saying about not bringing peace but division?

Let's start with how He does bring peace. Paul tells us that the peace Jesus brings is with God (Romans 5:1). Our sin puts us in enmity with God, and so when our sin is forgiven, that enmity is overcome by peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace because He makes our peace with God for us.

So, what about this division? That is between us and the world. Having been born anew in Baptism, in that washing of rebirth and renewal of water and the Spirit, we are different from the world. We no longer live for ourselves, for the truth of the world, but we live in the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

As we look at that, we see that there are a lot of places in the teaching of Jesus where He describes a separation. There is the separation between the wheat and the chaff, the sheep and the goats, the wise and foolish virgins, and the list keeps going. This separation is ultimately the church and the world. Yes, we ought to try to keep peace with those around us as much as we can. However, we have to realize that there are a lot of times when the world won't want to hear the Word of Jesus. They won't like hearing that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. All the more, they won't want to hear that they, too, are sinners. It's this that causes the division.

Thankfully, we see that Jesus is the One who made peace with the Father so that we could enjoy unity with Him. That does not make the divisions now unimportant. It means that they are a sad reality. But in Jesus, the joy of His peace will overcome the sadness of this time and bring us to eternal communion with Him and the Church throughout all days. Amen.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Blessed Jesus, in You we find our peace. We pray for Your coming that our sad divisions would cease and we would know the perfect unity of Your eternal Kingdom. Amen.

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 22, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Lord's Prayer - The Fourth Petition
Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 24:1-23; Leviticus 25:1-55; Luke 12:54-13:17

God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Have you ever wondered why there are people who aren't Christian, even who are opposed to Christianity, yet who acquire a great deal of worldly wealth and success? That's actually a common theme in the Bible. If you read the Psalms, you see the psalmists asking regularly how long their enemies will have success over them. So, you're in good company for asking the question. It's a logical question, too. If these people are opposed to God and even harming God's Church, why doesn't God cut them off from the money or things they have available to cause this harm?

Jesus gives us some commentary when He tells us that God "makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). So, what does Jesus say there? Well, in the words around this statement, Jesus tells His disciples to love even their enemies and to pray for those who persecute them. So, when you see these evil people receiving these good Gifts, it's a reminder to still love them, even if they're persecuting the Church, for you to pray for them.

But how could that be? How can we love our enemies and pray for those who seek our harm? Because God has first loved us. Because when we were still God's enemies, He sent His Son to die for the very sins that had put us at enmity with God in the first place. God is the One who loves and has even loved us. In fact, God loves those enemies that He's providing for, too.

Does this mean that there will be no justice? No, those who sinfully harm the Church because of their willful rejection of God's Word will not enjoy the eternal benefit of what Jesus has done. They are not saved by grace because they have rejected the faith that receives this grace. But God still loves them. And He loves you, too. May that knowledge draw you to receive all of His Gifts, even the bread on your table with thanksgiving.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God you provide for all our needs of this body and life: clothing and shoes, house and home, loved ones, good weather, good government, friends, and all of the earthly Gifts we receive. Thank You for Your gracious care for us every day. Thank You most of all for the care You give to us in Jesus that will last forever. Amen.

Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 23, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 13:18-35

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 26:1-20; Luke 13:18-35

"He said therefore, 'What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.'" (Luke 13:18-19)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus.

As people, we like stories of victories, don't we? We love it when our sports teams win. We love for hard work to pay off. We love it when we see the fruits of our own labors come to fruition. All of these things bring us happiness and satisfaction, don't they? But then Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed. If you have seen a mustard seed, you know they aren't much as far as seeds go. They aren't acorns that are large and sturdy looking. They aren't walnuts that you can see easily as they fall from trees. No, they're small and seem insignificant. God's work often looks this way. It often looks like the Church isn't making much progress in the world. It often looks like we're not making much progress in being good Christians. It often feels like we're better at sinning than we are being faithful. And when you look at the cross, it's the same way. On the cross, Jesus doesn't look like a powerful God. He looks lowly. He looks like He's defeated, and Satan wins.

But then Jesus tells how a mustard seed grows. Yes, it looks insignificant, but it gets big enough for the birds to live in it and for them to be sustained by it. This cross is the same. Despite its lowly appearance, or actually even by it, Jesus accomplishes the greatest of things: the salvation of the world. By the seed of His body falling to the ground, the tree that grows in His resurrection provides for the needs of the many.

You see, this is how God works. The little bit looks insignificant, but through its insignificant appearance, God is bringing about great works. Even today, through the lowly waters poured on a baby, or the bread and wine of His Supper, there He is bringing the cross and resurrection to His people and sustaining them in His eternal love. It doesn't seem like much, but again, this is how God works. This means that when you see the things that don't look like victories, you can trust that somehow God is still working good things through it. Think of it: the cross is the worst possible thing— the death of the perfect Man, God in the flesh. But through it, God accomplished the greatest possible thing: the salvation of mankind. If He can do it there, He can do it in the worst things in Your life too. In fact, He promises that He will.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Heavenly Father, when we see the lowly things of this world and Your Kingdom, bless us to see them with the eyes of faith and trust in Your promises knowing that through these You accomplish the greatest things, most of all our salvation. Amen.

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 24, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Easter 6 - Psalm 55:4, 16-18; antiphon: Psalm 55:22
Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 26:21-33, 39-44; Numbers 1:1-2:34; Luke 14:1-24

"Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved." (Psalm 55:22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

In the days of yore, before all farming was done by machines, the farmers used to attach their tools to cows or oxen to do the hard work of plowing their fields and getting them ready for planting. If you've ever helped to plant a garden, you likely know why. Getting the ground ready for seeds is not easy work. You have to get the rocks out. You have to smooth the ground to be relatively flat. You have to dig the holes for the seeds. You have to cover the seeds back over once they're sown so that they are protected from the scorching of the sun and the animals who would eat them for food. It's back-breaking labor. It's burdensome. You can see why these farmers passed the burden to their animals. It made things a lot easier.

You likely know burdens in your own life. You perhaps know that burden of manual labor. You perhaps know the burden of unending homework, responsibilities, obligations, and more. Additionally, you likely know the burden of Your sinful conscience. You remember that thought you had that was contrary to God's will. You remember the slander you spoke against someone nearby you. You remember the harm you did to those whom you should have helped. All of this is burdensome, let alone the burdens we know of the sicknesses and sorrows from living in this broken and sin-fallen world.

God has asked you to let Him bear this burden for you. "Cast your burdens on me," He says. Jesus tells you that you are to come to Him, heavy laden, and He will give you rest. He takes the yoke of Your troubles, and He promises that He makes them easier. This is true most of all of that burdened conscience. He assures you that He has yoked that burden to His cross and buried it in His tomb. This means that as He has raised you as His own in Baptism, you no longer bear it all. It's gone as far as the East is from the West. You are now righteous in Him. So, as Your burden is cast upon Him, as You are righteous in Christ, He will not let you fall.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Blessed God, You are our strength and care in every circumstance. As we are burdened with the hardships of this life and our own sin, bless us to cast those burdens upon You that we would be confirmed as Your people forever.

Sixth Sunday of Easter

MAY 25, 2025

Today's Reading: John 16:23-33

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 3:1-16, 39-48; Numbers 4:1-8:4; Luke 14:25-15:10

"[Jesus said,] 'I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.'" (John 16:33)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The next time you are in church, count how many times the word "peace" is spoken or sung. I think you'll be surprised. "Peace" is all over the Divine Service! "In peace let us pray to the Lord..."; "Glory be to God on high and on earth peace;" "Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, grant us your peace;" "The peace of the Lord be with you always;" "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace."

It's even the last word you hear as the Lord places His name upon you in the benediction and sends you back out into the world: "The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."

Why? Because in the world, you will have tribulation...people will sin against you...you will be mocked for your faith..., and your sin will cause problems. But take heart—Jesus has overcome the world.

In the midst of tribulation, amid the chaos of a broken, bent, corrupt life...Jesus gives you peace. Does that mean that life gets easy? Does it mean we won't have arguments with our family and friends? No. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation." But take heart: Jesus has overcome the world.

Jesus has suffered the wrath that we deserve because of our sins. He has paid the price for your friends that hurt you. He brings forgiveness and wholeness.

The peace that Jesus talks about is not a worldly peace. It's not an absence of tribulation. It's a peace that takes our broken world and broken lives and makes them whole with His forgiveness. This is why we come back to church week after week.

In the world, we will have tribulation, but in the Divine Service, Jesus comes to you to give you peace. He is the Savior who comes, takes on our flesh, and brings His peace to the earth. He is the Lamb of God who gives you peace. He comes to you in, with, and under the bread and wine of His Supper and greets you with the same greeting He gave to His Disciples in the Upper Room on Easter Evening: "Peace be with you."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday of the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 26, 2025

Today's Reading: Acts 16:9-15

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 8:5-26; Luke 15:11-32

"One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." (Acts 16:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Have you ever been locked out? Maybe you left the keys in your car, pressed the button on the door, and then shut it, immediately having panic spread from your head to your heart. Perhaps you came home earlier than expected, and no one was home to let you in. Perhaps you arrived at work and realized you had left your keys back at home. What do you do?

You look for a way to break in! Maybe someone left a window down or the back door unlocked. Or, you keep pulling the same locked door handle, foolishly thinking that it will open up this time. It doesn't work. What you need is the thing you do not have: the key.

Lydia's heart was closed. The Lord had the key. "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." What did she hear? She heard about Jesus and His death and resurrection. She heard about the Gift of Baptism. She heard about how her sins were forgiven and how Jesus had broken down the gates of Hell to rescue those like her who were held captive.

We are at the end of the Easter Season and the Festival Half of the Church Year. Way back in Advent, at the start of the year, we prayed: "O Key of David and scepter of the house of Israel, You open and no one can close, You close and no one can open: Come and rescue the prisoners who are in darkness and the shadow of death" (O Antiphon for December 20th). Jesus heard your prayer.

He has opened your ears, heart, and mind to hear and pay attention to His Word. When you were baptized, Jesus broke open your sin-locked heart and caused you to have faith in His promise. When He comes again, He will open up your grave on the Day of Resurrection.

Locks can't keep Jesus out. He appeared to the Disciples in the Upper Room on Easter Evening, even though the doors were locked. He is in, with, and under the bread and the wine, with His very Body and Blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, open now my heart to hear, And through Your Word to me draw near; Let me Your Word e'er pure retain; Let me Your child and heir remain. (LSB 908:1)

Tuesday of the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 27, 2025

Today's Reading: Revelation 21:9-14, 21-27

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 9:1-23; Luke 16:1-18

"And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there." (Revelation 21:23-25)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"Katy, bar the door!"

Where does that phrase come from? No one really knows. If you want, you can try to follow that rabbit hole, but it's probably not worth it. It is fun to say, though: "Katy, bar the door!" What does it mean? Danger is coming! Shut the gates! Lock the doors! Doom is impending!

Why do we shut gates? To keep the bad things out! The gates are shut at night when darkness rules. We batten down the hatches on the ship when the storm is coming. We tie down the tent when the wind picks up. We secure things so they aren't destroyed. We shut and lock the gates at night to keep the cold, the dark, and the scary things out.

But the gates will not need to be shut any longer. That's what St. John tells us as he sees a picture of the New Creation. There, he sees a city with wide open gates that will never be shut because "there will be no night there." No night, no darkness, no cold, no scary things. "Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4) The former things have passed away. They are gone. That's the promise. That's why Jesus died. That's why Jesus was raised. That's why Jesus ascended. That's why Jesus will come again.

The hatches won't need to be battened down. Katy won't need to bar the door! The gates will be open. Sin, death, and the devil will no longer be a threat. Doesn't that sound wonderful? No darkness that will cause us to stumble when we walk. No terrors of the night. No devil prowling around like a lion seeking to devour. No sin crouching at our door.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Wide Open Stand the gates adorned with pearl, While round God's golden throne
The choirs of saints in endless circles curl, And joyous praise the Son!
They watch Him now descending To visit waiting earth. The Lord of Life unending
Brings dying hope new birth! (LSB 639:1)*

Wednesday of the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 28, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Lord's Prayer - The Fifth Petition
Daily Lectionary: Numbers 10:11-36; Luke 16:19-31

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

What does this mean? We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Why should God give us what we've prayed for? So far in the Lord's Prayer, we've asked for God's Name to be hallowed in our life, His Kingdom to come to us, His will to be done to us, and for all the stuff that the 4th Petition asks for when we ask for daily bread. Why should God give us these things? We're just going to misuse them! Why should God give them to us? We don't deserve them.

You don't give a perfectly cooked steak to a toddler. They won't appreciate it! You don't give a brand-new car to a 16-year-old. They'll just misuse it! You don't give a raise to the worker who takes extra long breaks and is always on their phones. He doesn't deserve it!

So why do we think God will give us what we ask for? We'll just misuse His name as we don't live Holy lives according to it. We won't appreciate the gifts of His Kingdom. We don't deserve His Will to be done in our lives. So, why would God give them to us?

"For the sake of Jesus Christ..."

When we come before God each week, we ask for forgiveness. We don't say, "I'll try harder." We don't say, "I did better this week." We say, "for the sake of Christ." And the Lord hears that prayer and gives us what we don't deserve or appreciate fully and what we will just misuse.

Just as God deals with us, we can deal with others. Why should we forgive the friend who sins against us? Why should we help our brother who didn't help us? Why should we give things to others? Because God has looked past our sin and given us what we need and more.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore, That they may trouble us no more; We too, will gladly those forgive Who hurt us by the way they live. Help us in our community To serve each other willingly. (LSB 766:6)

Ascension Day

MAY 29, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 24:44-53

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 11:1-23, 31-35; Luke 17:1-19

"And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven." (Luke 24:50-51)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Think about those hands. Hands that were knit together in the womb of St. Mary. Hands that pressed up against that womb as they grew. Hands that grasped His mother's finger as she cradled Him in her arms. Hands that held St. Joseph's fingers as He learned to walk. Hands that did chores around the house.

Hands that reached out to touch the lepers, the blind, the deaf, and the mute. Hands that reached out to grab Peter as he sank into the water. Hands that stopped a funeral procession in its tracks, touching the coffin of a young man and then taking that young man and giving him back to His mother. Hands that blessed the little children.

Hands that overturned the tables in the Temple. Hands that dipped a towel in the water and washed the feet of His disciples that would run away, or, even worse, deny Him that night. Hands that broke bread and said, "Take and eat." Hands that raised the cup and said, "Take and drink."

Hands that were pierced with nails. Hands that went limp in death. Hands that were laid in a grave. Hands that were shown to the Disciples on Easter Evening and to Thomas the next week.

Now, as Jesus ascends into heaven, those nail-scarred hands are raised and lifted in blessing. Those hands were taken into heaven and seated at the Right Hand of the Father. Those hands, hands of the One who is True God and True Man, have a place in heaven.

Those same hands now come to you in blessing. They work through the hands of your pastor who baptized you, who forgives, who delivers the Body and Blood of Jesus to you each week, and who raises His hands in blessing and says, "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord makes His face shine upon you be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Crown Him the Lord of love. Behold His hands and side, Rich wounds, yet visible above, In beauty glorified. No angels in the sky Can fully bear that sight, But downward bend their wond'ring eyes At mysteries so bright. (LSB 525:3)

Friday of the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 30, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Easter 7 - Psalm 61:3, 5-8; antiphon: Psalm 61:1
Daily Lectionary: Numbers 11:24-29; 12:1-16; Luke 17:20-37

"So will I ever sing praises to your name, as I perform my vows day after day." (Psalm 61:8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

If you've gone through the Rite of Confirmation, you've made some vows. If you haven't, you're likely preparing to. During the Rite, the Pastor asks: "Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully? Do you intend to live according to the Word of God and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death? Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?"

Those are not simple questions. These vows are made to God. Solomon warns us in Ecclesiastes 5:4-6, "When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, 'My vow was a mistake.'"

Vows aren't something to say because someone else wants you to say them. Making vows that you don't intend to keep is a dangerous habit to get into. When you go through the Rite of Confirmation, you vow that you intend to be in church to hear God's Word, that you intend to live your life outside of church according to that Word, and that you will continue in this way to your death, even if someone were to kill you for it!

So, what did, or what will you vow? "I do, by the grace of God." Left on our own, we would fall away at the first sign of discomfort. But you are not on your own. The Lord who comes to you through His Word and Sacraments will continue to strengthen you in your faith as you go through life. This is why we don't want to stop hearing it! If you want to fulfill these vows, don't forget to do what David says, "So will I ever sing praises to your name, as I perform my vows day after day." As you fulfill that first vow, to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully, He will cause you to live according to that Word and to continue in that Word. Listen to Solomon, and do not delay in fulfilling it!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, I my vows to Thee renew; Disperse my sins as morning dew; Guard my first steps of thought and will And with Thyself my spirit fill. (LSB 868:4)

The Visitation

MAY 31, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 1:39-45 (46-56)

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 13:1-3, 17-33; Luke 18:1-17

"In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb." (Luke 1:39-41)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"With haste." That means she went quickly. Mary didn't dawdle. She didn't waste her time. She got out of town and went to see her cousin. How long did it take? It was about 90 miles of a journey, so even going at a slow pace, she would have gotten there in a few days of travel. Even if she had taken a few days to pack and prepare for the journey, she would have gotten there about a week after the Angel Gabriel had visited her.

So, with the Little Lord Jesus (one week from conception!) in her womb, Mary greets Elizabeth. At the sound of her greeting, St. John (six months from conception) leaps within his mother's womb because he is in the presence of His Lord! How big was Jesus at that time? Well, at four weeks, a baby is about .04 inches and .04 ounces. So, at one week? Not big at all! But there was God in the flesh, and John worships Him.

The One who is mighty makes Himself weak. He scatters the proud but lifts the lowly. As He came to the lowly Virgin Mary, He still comes down to us, filling the hungry with His Body and Blood and clothing us with His righteousness.

Your Savior is not a Savior who reigns from high above. He is a Savior who comes down to us. He is not a Savior who doesn't understand you or get what it's like to be in your place. Jesus knows you. He knows your pain and your weakness. He knows what it is like to grow up, to learn to read, to get hurt by nature and hurt by people, even close friends. He knows what it's like to be a child in the womb. He knows what it is like to be an infant, a toddler, a teenager. He knows what it's like to die and to rise again.

Jesus comes for you. He comes to die that you might live.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Before he yet was born, He leaped in joyful meeting, Confessing Him as Lord Whose mother he was greeting. By Jordan's rolling stream, A new Elijah bold, He testified of Him Of whom the prophets told. (LSB 346:2)

Seventh Sunday of Easter

JUNE 1, 2025

Today's Reading: John 17:20-26

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 14:1-25; Luke 18:18-34

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word." (John 17:20)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

To me, these are some of the most amazing (and humbling!) words uttered by God in the entire Bible. In what we call the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prays these words in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before He dies. And just look at what Jesus is praying for before He goes off to be tortured and die. He prays for "all who believe will believe in Me." That means He was praying for you!

Jesus was about to be betrayed by one of His closest companions and abandoned by the rest. He would be arrested and beaten and face unimaginable physical pain. He was going to bear the weight of every sin from every sinner. He was going to face the terrors of Hell itself as His own Father would forsake Him on the cross. Jesus knew that He had to face all these terrible things in the next few hours, and still, He took the time to think about and pray for you! Wow!

And what did Jesus ask the Father on your behalf? He prayed that you would be one with Him along with all the other believers so that you would always be with Him. Jesus wants to be with you always, in this life and in eternity!

Have things at home or at school ever been so messed up that you've felt like God has forgotten about you? Have you ever felt so ashamed or guilty about a sin that you've doubted if God could really ever love you? Do you ever wonder how you're going to make it through another day? When these doubts and fears come, just look at this Highly Priestly prayer again! Jesus didn't forget about you, even in His own most desperate hour! And He never ever wants to be apart from you.

In fact, Jesus wants to be with you so much that He didn't stop at simply praying for it. He did what was necessary to make it happen. He willingly and gladly suffered, died, and rose again to defeat sin, death, and the devil for you. Then He sent out His apostles and built His Church so that He might come to you today in His Word and with His very Body and Blood to forgive, strengthen, and preserve you in the faith so that you would remain in Him and with Him forever. All this means that you can live (and die) in the confidence that you will always be with Christ, our Lord.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

For us He prayed; for us He taught; For us His daily works He wrought, By words and signs and actions thus Still seeking not Himself but us. (LSB 544:4)

Monday of the Seventh Week of Easter

JUNE 2, 2025

Today's Reading: Acts 1:12-26

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 14:26-45; Numbers 15:1-41; Luke 18:35-19:10

"So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." (Acts 1:21-22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

After Judas' betrayal and gruesome death, his spot among the apostles was empty. It didn't take long for the remaining eleven to recognize that this spot needed to be filled. After all, Jesus chose twelve for a reason.

I'm sure there were many different qualifications that the remaining eleven considered when the time came to select someone to fill that vacant spot, qualifications like those that St. Paul would later mention in his letters to Timothy and Titus (able to teach, above reproach, respectable, and so on; see 1 Timothy 3 or Titus 1). And yet, Peter points out one qualification that stood out among all the others. The man who would fill Judas' place among the Apostles needed to be an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry. It had to be someone who, like them, saw Jesus be baptized, heard Him preach, watched Him cast out demons and heal diseases, and most importantly, saw Jesus alive after His crucifixion.

Why was this so important to Peter? Why couldn't a more recent convert to the faith take Judas' place? To put it briefly, Peter wanted you to know the things you've learned about Jesus, especially His resurrection, actually happened! As Peter would later write, these things are not "cleverly devised myths" (2 Peter 1:16). Those who first shared the Good News and then wrote it down for later generations, like us, saw Jesus do everything that was necessary for our salvation with their own eyes.

And that means that you can be absolutely sure that Jesus has accomplished everything that was needed for your redemption. Whenever the devil, the world, or your own sinful nature tempt you to doubt the things you've learned about Jesus, remember that multitudes of people saw it all happen. Your faith in Christ is not founded on made-up stories or on events that may or may not have happened. Your faith is founded on the historical events of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection for sinners.

So, you can be certain that Jesus was baptized into your sins, that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for those sins, and that He rose again from the dead, defeating death and assuring you that the Father has accepted His sacrifice on your behalf. And if you can be sure of all that, you can also be sure that you will be raised with Christ to life everlasting.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We know that Christ is raised and dies no more. Embraced by death, He broke its fearful hold; And our despair He turned to blazing joy. Alleluia! (LSB 603:1)

Tuesday of the Seventh Week of Easter

JUNE 3, 2025

Today's Reading: Revelation 22:1-6 (7-11) 12-20

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 16:1-22; Luke 19:11-28

"No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him." (Revelation 22:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

When you think about heaven, what are the things you look forward to the most? Is it having your resurrected body? Maybe it's being reunited with your believing family and friends for all eternity. I, for one, am looking forward to that feast of rich food that God promises to Isaiah (Isaiah 25:6)!

Or maybe you look forward to not having the things that will be missing. When St. John was given his vision of heaven, he saw that there was nothing "accursed" there. There won't be anybody in heaven who hates you. You won't have all those terrible thoughts or do or say wicked things because your sinful nature will be gone, along with all other temptations. There won't be any sickness or disease or danger. No sin of any kind!

These are certainly all wonderful things to look forward to. But St. John reminds us today that there's one thing (or one Person, rather) in heaven that should be our main hope. "The throne of God and of the Lamb" will be there. God the Father will be there. The Holy Spirit will be there. And Jesus will be there. God isn't some kind of door prize that comes along with heaven; He is what it's all about.

Besides, what could be better than basking forever in the presence of the God who made you and loved you so much that He took on your flesh, suffered and died for you, and then came to you in the Word and Sacrament to grant you saving faith? Remember the 1st Commandment? "You shall have no other gods." Hidden in this commandment is a wonderful promise. When you have the Triune God as your Lord, you have everything you could ever need and more! You don't need any other gods. There is nothing better than being in the gracious presence of God.

Thankfully, we don't have to wait until heaven to enjoy the blessings of God's presence! Even now, God comes to us through His Means Of Grace, the Word and Sacraments to bless us. He comes to us to give us everything that we need to join Him in heaven. That would include especially the forgiveness of sins won by Jesus. But God also comes to us to give us the fruits of the Spirit, like patience, strength, repentance, and every Gift that we might need as we wait for the day that God gathers us to heaven.

There truly is nothing better than being in God's presence—now and forever!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Christ, do Thou my soul prepare for that bright home of love. That I may see Thee and adore with all Thy saints above. (LSB 673:6)

Wednesday of the Seventh Week of Easter

JUNE 4, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 19:29-48

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 16:23-40; Luke 19:29-48

"Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes," (Luke 19:42)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The people of Judea were welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem with shouts of joy, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:38). The people were excited because they expected Jesus to bring them peace. But while they were shouting for joy, Jesus was weeping for them. He wept because even though the people were expecting peace, many of them weren't going to get it.

Why? Because they didn't know the "things that make for peace." You see, the Jews were only looking for worldly peace. They were longing for a new king like David, who would free them from Roman oppression. And they had hoped that Jesus was that guy. But He wasn't. At least not in the way they thought. Jesus didn't come to be an earthly king, to rule in an earthly kingdom and bring a worldly type of peace.

Jesus came to bring us the "peace that passes all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). That is, peace with God. And just what are the things that make for this peace? The death and resurrection of Jesus, of course! Through Jesus, for the sake of His innocent suffering and death, we are reconciled to our heavenly Father, and we live with the hope of everlasting life in the Father's kingdom. That hope cannot be taken from us, no matter what happens in this life.

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem to win that peace for us, He knew that many of the Jews He encountered that day weren't going to receive it. They rejected Him because they were so obsessed with earthly things that they didn't want the peace that He brought.

We've got to be careful that we don't do the same thing. God has given us so many wonderful gifts, such as our families and friends, money, the ability to play sports, and the intelligence to get into a great college. While these can all be great blessings from God, we shouldn't think that these blessings are the source of our peace, at least not true, lasting peace. Sadly, friends can betray us; money can be taken from us. Popularity, looks, and health will all fade away.

True peace only comes from Jesus. Thankfully, He wants you to have it, and He offers you what you need to have it. He gives you His Word along with His crucified and risen Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. When you receive the Word and Sacrament in faith, you receive the things that make for peace.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Thy work alone, O Christ, Can ease this weight of sin; Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, Can give me peace within. (LSB 567:3)

Thursday of the Seventh Week of Easter

JUNE 5, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Lord's Prayer - The Sixth Petition
Daily Lectionary: Numbers 16:41-17:13; Numbers 18:1-19:22; Luke 20:1-18

"Lead us not into temptation." (The Lord's Prayer - The Sixth Petition)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God doesn't tempt us. Why would He? He doesn't want us to sin. He suffered and died to free us from the power of sin and its consequences. He clearly doesn't want us to sin.

As obvious as this seems, it's still important to be reminded of this. If God did tempt us, then we'd try to blame Him every time we mess up and sin. That's what Adam did. "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she deceived me and I ate" (Genesis 3:12). As if God were somehow responsible for their disobedience. How crazy!

God tempts no one. He doesn't get any of the blame for our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. We get the blame. "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire" (James 1:14). Our own sinful hearts tempt us to doubt God's Word and disobey His commands because that Old Adam is diametrically opposed to the things of God.

Of course, the devil and the sinful world play a part, too. The devil is all too familiar with your sinful desires, and he will inflame those desires by urging and enticing you to follow your Old Adam instead of God. The world who hates God is also there, beckoning us to join them in loving ourselves and the world more than God. They surround us with sights, sounds, and opportunities that our sinful nature would love to partake of.

We might say that temptations to sin come from everywhere but God! This is why Jesus teaches us to pray this petition. He knows that these temptations constantly surround us. He knows because He was "tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrew 4:15). During His earthly life, Jesus was tempted by the devil and the world, too. He knows how strong temptation can be. And He alone knows what is needed for us to overcome it.

So Jesus teaches and invites us to pray to the Father in His name, asking that God would lead us through temptation when it comes and keep us from falling. And with this invitation is the promise that He will send us aid. He promises to instruct us in His Word, to strengthen us with His Spirit, and to guard us with His holy angels. And, thankfully, He also promises to forgive us when we fail, graciously keep us as His beloved children, and grant us the final victory over sin on the Last Day.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, who tempts no one to sin, guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our own sinful natures may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair, or other great shame and vice. And when we are attacked by these things, we pray that You would grant us to overcome them and win the victory; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Friday of the Seventh Week of Easter

JUNE 6, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost - Psalm 104:24, 27-28, 30; antiphon: Liturgical Text

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 20:1-21; Luke 20:19-44

"Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love. Alleluia." (Liturgical text)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

What's in your heart? If you're honest with yourself, most of it's not pretty! There's a good chance there's some anger toward your parents or teachers in there. Probably also some jealousy toward your friends or classmates who have newer cars, or bigger homes, or are smarter or more athletic than you. And I'm sure if you dug deep, you could find much uglier stuff than that.

Not that this should surprise us. God's Word has plenty to say about our sinful hearts. Do you remember what God said before He told Noah to build the ark? "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Or how about Jesus, when He said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander," (Matthew 15:19)? There's plenty of sin in each of our hearts.

Thankfully, God has promised to put something else into our hearts. "And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them" (Ezekiel 11:19). That new spirit God promises to put in our hearts is none other than His own Holy Spirit!

This is why Pentecost is such a big deal! The Father and the Son send forth the Holy Spirit so that God Himself can come and fill our hearts, just as we pray in the Introit for the day. Here, we learn that all three Persons of the Trinity work in perfect harmony and unity to grant us salvation. The Father sends His only-begotten Son. The Son lives, dies, and rises for our salvation. And the Father and Son send us the Spirit through Jesus' Word and Sacraments to create and sustain faith in our hearts, a faith which clings to the promise of forgiveness in Jesus.

So even though our hearts are filled with sin and will be as long as we live, we don't despair. The Holy Spirit resides in our hearts, too! This means that we live as redeemed children of God, knowing that Christ has washed away our sin and won't count them against us.

And if that weren't enough, the Holy Spirit changes our sinful hearts as He dwells in them. By His power, we learn to truly love. "We love God because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). And, because we learn to love God, we also begin to love one another (1 John 4:7). No wonder the Church prays, "Come, Holy Spirit!"

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord, with all your graces now outpoured On each believer's mind and heart; Your fervent love to them impart. (LSB 497:1)

Pentecost Eve

JUNE 7, 2025

Today's Reading: John 14:8-21

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 20:22-21:9; Luke 20:45-21:19

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever." (John 14:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Holy Spirit is God, as much as the Father is God and the Son is God. We confess this truth every time we speak one of the Creeds. But if the Spirit is God, why don't we give as much attention to the Holy Spirit as we do to the Father and the Son?

On the one hand, we probably should spend more time thinking about the Holy Spirit and praising Him for all that He does for us. Not only is He God, but we would be lost without the Holy Spirit. Luther reminds us in the Small Catechism that we "cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him." It is the Holy Spirit who grants us saving faith in Jesus.

St. Paul also reminds us that it is only by the Holy Spirit that we can do good works, pleasing in God's sight. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control," (Galatians 5:22-23). We literally could not be holy to God without the work of the Holy Spirit.

But on the other hand, Jesus reminds us that in a way, this is what the Holy Spirit wants. Jesus calls the Spirit the "Helper." The Holy Spirit acts as our helper by pointing us to Jesus. He directs our attention to Christ because it is Jesus alone who takes on our sinful flesh and suffers and dies for us. The Spirit teaches us all these things about Christ and brings them to our remembrance (John 14:26) by inspiring the prophets and apostles to write the Scriptures for us, and by working through the preaching of God's Word. That is how saving faith is created and sustained in us.

Jesus, in turn, leads us to the Father (John 14:6) and shows us the Father's face (John 14:9). That is salvation. The faith of a Christian, the faith that is created by the work of the Holy Spirit, is always centered around Jesus Christ, our Lord.

It is certainly good and right to praise God, the Holy Spirit, and acknowledge His work among us. And the best way to do that is to direct our eyes to Jesus and believe in Him.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and ever-living God, You fulfilled Your promise by sending the gift of the Holy Spirit to unite disciples of all nations in the cross and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ. By the preaching of the Gospel spread this gift to the ends of the earth; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Pentecost Eve)

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