

REFLECTIONS

**The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost -
The Eighth Saturday after Pentecost
July 13, 2025 - August 9, 2025**



JULY 13 - AUGUST 9

This season's Reflections were written by

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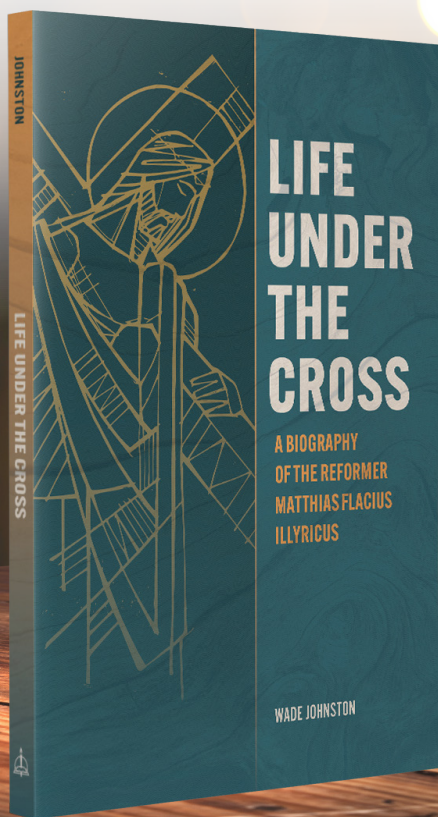
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A Short Form for Daily Reflection

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.

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

JULY 13, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Daily Lectionary: Judges 13:1-25; Ruth 1:1-4:22; Galatians 2:1-21

"And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'" (Luke 10:25)

In the Name ✙ of Jesus. Amen.

Do you see it? Do you see how the lawyer already misstepped?

I suppose we could start with how he **dares** to question Jesus, or that he wants to 'put him to the test.' But let's talk about the biggest misstep of all—the one that all sinners make (including you and me).

The lawyer's question asks, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He, a sinner, thinks he can achieve eternal life. He, a sinner, thinks he can work hard enough or do enough to 'earn' it.

The reality is, there is no amount of work that any sinner can do to get eternal life. This lawyer forgot, and we sinners routinely (daily) forget, that we are completely tainted with original sin. We have a condition. We have a death sentence. We have an incurable infection. No amount of work, attempts, or restarts is going to cure it.

Even before the lawyer asked this question, he had it wrong. When we look at grace, mercy, forgiveness, or eternal life as 'achievable' or earned by our works, we have it wrong. We want a way to save ourselves; we, like the lawyer, want to justify ourselves and our good works. We want to control our destiny.

Inheritances are received, usually by an heir, after someone's death. Through the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, His heirs, including you, receive eternal life. In Baptism, Jesus drowned the Old Adam and created a New Man; He killed the root of the original sin infection. In Baptism, He claims you as His. In Baptism, you receive forgiveness, life, rescue, and eternal life. You receive it! You don't work for it! It is a Gift and it is yours!

Dear redeemed sinner, the next time you might want to work for your salvation, or ask God for a chance to 'work for your eternal life,' repent. Make the sign of the cross. Remember your Baptism. Go to church and hear the Gospel. Receive Jesus' Body and Blood given and shed for you. You are a Beloved child of God, named as one of His heirs; all that He has, He gives freely to you.

In the Name ✙ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, in your deep compassion You rescue us from whatever may hurt us. Teach us to love You above all things and to love our neighbors as ourselves; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (LSB Collect of the Day)

Monday of the Fifth Week After Pentecost

JULY 14, 2025

Today's Reading: Leviticus (18:1-5) 19:9-18

Daily Lectionary: Judges 14:1-20; Galatians 3:1-22

"You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God." (Leviticus 19:10b)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

As you read these verses in Leviticus, perhaps you (like me) nod your head along with God's commands: "Yes - that is absolutely the right thing to do! Leave some for the poor. Tell the truth. Pay fair wages. Great rules, I concur!" These rules (The Commandments) are great on paper. They are absolutely the right way to engage with those around us. Well, until I am one of the poor, or the outsider, or the deaf, or the blind... then I would rather be in control, thank you. I can *handle* this. I don't need your or anyone's help; I Am. Fine.

Do you ever find yourself automatically assuming the role of the 'doer'? You have, you don't need. You understand, you aren't confused. You give, needy ones receive. And yet, can you honestly say that you have never been the one in need? That you have never been the one 'on the outside'?

Why is it so hard for us to admit that we are dependent and poor and lost and in need?

God is giving rules to His people to curb their sinfulness, yet He is also showing mercy. The Ten Commandments are indeed gifts; these are listed in Leviticus and show us the vocational roles and the boundaries that we have with one another. Also, though, they connect to Who God is: "I am the LORD your God." We have this God! We have this merciful, loving, providing, forgiving God! Even when I won't admit my need, He fills it. Even when I think I am 'in charge,' He shows me I am not. How do I know? In Baptism, God takes the dead man and breathes new life. On Good Friday, Jesus declared, "It is finished" as He died the sinners' death to redeem all of the world. Every Sunday, in the Divine Service, we hear, "I forgive you in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Sometimes, you might get to be the 'doer' who serves their neighbor and gives of what you have; thanks be to God. And sometimes, you will be the poor and the outsider in need of relief, sustenance, love, and forgiveness, and others will care for you; also, thanks be to God. In both cases, though, you are covered by and made new through your Savior Jesus; you are connected to our merciful and gracious God. Thanks be to God.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Oh, how great is Your compassion, Faithful Father, God of grace, That with all our fallen race In our depth of degradation You had mercy So that we Might be saved eternally! (LSB 559: 1)

Tuesday of the Fifth Week After Pentecost

JULY 15, 2025

Today's Reading: Colossians 1:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Judges 15:1-16:3; Galatians 3:23-4:11

"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13-14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"The domain of darkness." What a chilling description. To be where there is no light. To be where there is no hope. To be where there is no life. What a horrible place to find oneself. The depth of evil and depravity would have no end.

On our own, that is our only place to be. In the darkness is where sin, the devil, and death abide. As sinners, infected with the depraved Old Adam, we do not have or even want anything but darkness. And yet, there is great joy, hope, relief, and comfort in the rest of these verses: we have been transferred out! We have been snatched out of this hopeless, dark place and brought to the place with The Light!

Before we get too proud about 'transferring ourselves out,' we remember that we were rescued from the darkness. We did not work for, assist with, or participate in being moved. This is a Gift. This new life, this 'change of address,' this forgiveness of sins came to us in water and The Word. It comes to us in the announced Absolution— our sins are forgiven. It comes to us in the Body and Blood of His Beloved Son. We rest and are covered by Jesus. We were transferred out of the darkness and into the Light by the only hope there is: Jesus, the Son of God, the Incarnate Word, the Savior of the World.

God had a plan even before the foundation of the world to rescue and redeem you. He did not spare His Only Son, but sent Him into the darkness to bring you out of it. You now abide in the kingdom of God. You now live in The Light. You have been rescued, redeemed, named, and kept in Jesus. You, dear Baptized Child of God, are loved, forgiven, and given mercy.

There will be moments of darkness in your life. For you still live in this sinful, broken world. You still daily battle the Old Adam even as the New Man, given to you in Baptism, desires the Light. And yet, even in these moments, you do not belong, nor do you live in the domain of darkness. You belong to the Light; you have been purchased and won by the Son of God. Even in moments of trial, cling to that hope. You are safe and redeemed in God's kingdom.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*As true as God's own Word is true, Not earth nor hell's satanic crew
Against us shall prevail. Their might? A joke, A mere facade! God is with us
and we with God Our vict'ry cannot fail. (LSB 666:3)*

Wednesday of the Fifth Week After Pentecost

JULY 16, 2025

Today's Reading: Galatians 4:12-31

Daily Lectionary: Judges 16:4-30; Judges 17:1-21:25; Galatians 4:12-31

"Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Good news is fun to share. Compliments are fun to give. People tend to enjoy having you around when you say something nice or positive. And yet, it seems that when times of trials, sin, or struggles come along... people are less likely to enjoy hearing about that. "Don't connect God's Name to things He hasn't said or hasn't promised." "Stop hurting your neighbor." "Gossiping is lying." "A baby is a gift from God." "Marriage is a reflection of Jesus and His Church." It seems as though the saying "don't blame the messenger" does not apply when speaking what someone doesn't want to hear.

Paul, in this letter to churches in Galatia, is wondering at their treatment of him and his words; he suggests that they are seeing him as an 'enemy' now. What changed? Well, sin taints everything. The recipients of this letter, and we today, do not like hearing messages that hurt our feelings or speak against our favorite sins. And yet, look at what Paul says is the 'reason' the Galatians are treating him as an enemy... he is telling them the truth! But, what is The Truth?

The Truth is you are not enough on your own; you are sinful, dead, and selfish. The Truth is, you are lost. And yet, there is more! The Truth is that you were rescued from your sinfulness and selfishness. The Truth is that in Baptism, you were brought to life, covered by Jesus, forgiven, and redeemed. The Truth is that you have a Savior, Jesus, Who paid for all of your sins and covers all of your hurts. The Truth is you are enough in Christ; You are in God's family and are loved.

So, why is this message (The Truth) not well received? We sinners love control and really would prefer to live by our own works. We, like the Galatians, want to mix a little of our own efforts with the Gospel of Jesus. We want to define, adjust, or decide what is right or wrong.

Repent, dear forgiven sinner. The Truth of your sinfulness and your rescue is what we daily cling to and confess. Receive the message of your 'sinner status' with humility and rejoice that it is for sinners that Jesus died and rose again. Rest in your Baptism. Receive Jesus' Body and Blood. Hear the Truth with joy. And when you are sharing the Truth with those around you, whether they receive or reject it, know that The Truth rests on Jesus and not on us (or others). It is with great assurance that we live in grace and speak to others with hope.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

He canceled my offenses, Delivered me from death; He is the Lord who cleanses My soul from sin through faith. In Him I can be cheerful, Courageous on my way; In Him I am not fearful Of God's great Judgment Day. (LSB 724:3)

Thursday of the Fifth Week After Pentecost

JULY 17, 2025

**Today's Reading: Catechism: The Sacrament of Holy Baptism - Third
Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 1:1-20; Galatians 5:1-26**

How can water do such great things? Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. (The Sacrament of Holy Baptism - Third)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Have you ever stopped to think about how intricately and delicately God created and sustains His creation and everything within it? Take water, for example. While I am not very smart in science, I remember that H₂O means two hydrogen atoms with one oxygen atom. Any other combination is not water. It seems so simple, boring even. And yet, it is incredibly delicate and necessary that those two elements be present for something to be water.

God has put unfathomable depth into the Gift of Baptism. Consider just the words quoted above; Baptism is water and God's Word. We just discussed what makes water water. And we know that it is God Who created water, including the element of water. In Baptism, God is using a tangible element that He created for His creation. And, the power of Baptism is the Word of God. Who is the Word of God? St. John tells us that Jesus is the Word of God. So, we learn that Baptism is the combination of His created element, water, with the 2nd person of the Trinity: Jesus. We have the Father and the Son present in this. And yet! The explanation continues— it is the faith that trusts that Jesus (this word of God) is in the water! How are we given faith to believe and receive? Through the power of the Holy Spirit! Do you see it? In this simple, boring Gift, God gives us Himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You matter. You have great value. You belong. How do I know? In Baptism, God names you as His Own: He marks you with His Name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He sustains you in this identity. He continues to give you what you need for this body and life. In the Divine Service, you receive the words of Absolution: you are forgiven. In the Lord's Supper, you receive Jesus' Body and Blood for you. You have been redeemed, adopted, and covered with Christ.

Water seems pretty boring. Baptism can look pretty boring. And yet, consider the intricacies and the intentionality with which God gives His Gifts— to you. He created and sustained the world— for you. He sent His perfect Son to die and rise again— for you. He gives you the Holy Spirit to create faith that clings to and rests in His hope. Take comfort in this promise for you.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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

Friday of the Fifth Week After Pentecost

JULY 18, 2025

Today's Reading: Galatians 6:1-18

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 1:21-2:17; Galatians 6:1-18

"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:1-2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

This is a tough requirement. This is a 'daily failure' level of task. Well, not the first part. I would be all too happy to catch someone doing the wrong thing. That part is easy. Judging others, especially if they are doing worse actions than I am, is sinfully satisfying. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.

The tough part? Restoring him in a spirit of gentleness. Gentleness? Where's the fun in that? I would much rather judge from my morally superior position and deign to offer guidance. And being reminded to watch myself against temptation? That doesn't seem necessary— remember, I am the one judging... I'm above all that sin stuff. But then it continues to the impossible... bear one another's burdens? Fulfill the law of Christ? I don't want to be known like 'she is.' I don't want to be caught spending time around 'him.' And yet.

Dear redeemed sinner, these words are a gift. They remind us, who love to focus on ourselves, that we are actually here for one another— we are here for our neighbors. A friend or family member may be caught in sin; these words remind us that we get to love them and teach them as Jesus does for us. Jesus went to the cross, without sin, and paid for the sin of the whole world. He defeated sin, death, and the devil by rising again. That is the message we get to share. We tell the truth, sin is sin, and yet we do it as a fellow forgiven sinner.

Community, family, and relationships with others are Gifts from a loving God. Interacting with sinners is hard, and yet it is a joyful burden. We get to live redeemed and forgiven. We get to be reminded that we are part of God's family. God has more grace than you have sin; you get to be the one He uses to share that grace and mercy with others around you. Rejoice in your vocations even as your Lord and Savior rejoices that you are His Child. Share His mercy, grace, forgiveness, and love; not as a work, but as an outpouring of what you have received in your Baptism, in the Words of Absolution, in the Lord's Supper, and through God's daily care of you.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God would not have the sinner die; His Son with saving grace is nigh; His Spirit in the Word declares How we in Christ are heaven's heirs. (LSB 571:3)

Saturday of the Fifth Week After Pentecost

JULY 19, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 6 - Psalm 119:57-60, 64; antiphon: Psalm 119:105

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 2:18-36; Acts 15:22-41

"I entreat your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise." (Psalm 119:58)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Have you ever been given a weird gift? Like a dead bird by your dog? A rock from a younger sibling? A feather from a toddler? Maybe a sloppy kiss from a baby? You understand the sentiment... but what are you going to do with a dead bird? You are probably going to wipe the slobber off your face after that messy kiss. And yet, you can't help but be grateful; you know that the gift was given with love.

I imagine myself as the dog or the sloppy baby giving myself up to God: Here I am! I'm a mess. I'm covered in sin, guilt, and shame. This hour/day/week/month/year/existence has been... rough. What is worse, though, is that I am not a cute little toddler giving something out of love— I am a dead enemy of God. Before Baptism, I am unable to come to Him (dead things can only be dead), let alone give Him a gift. And yet, along with the Psalmist, I am fervently asking Him for His favor.

It is the second part of this verse that is such tremendous comfort; in our prayers, we get to point to the promises that God Himself has made. In the Garden of Eden, He promised a Savior, and He kept that promise. On the cross, Jesus said, "It is finished," and it was. In our Baptism, He promises forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation— and they are ours. He promises to give us the Holy Spirit to create faith within us, and we have Him. In the Lord's Supper, He promises to feed and nourish us in His grace, and we receive the Bread of Life. When we pray, He promises to hear us— and He does. So, when I come to him as a mess, I can remember and be comforted by His promises.

It's true. We come to God as broken sinners, day after day and week after week, and He meets us with forgiveness, mercy, and grace. We come to Him as beggars, and He treats us as His Beloved Children. He is gracious. He does remember His promises. And what's more? He forgets our sins! He covers our shame, guilt, and deadness—Jesus paid for that; it is gone. He keeps His promises and gives us His favor abundantly.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Wait, then, in quiet confidence, Your anxious thoughts at rest. God knows your needs before you ask And works for what is best. (LSB 771:3)

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

JULY 20, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 10:38-42

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 3:1-21; Acts 16:1-22

"... Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.'" (Luke 10:40-42)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

You have been anxious and troubled about many things, distracted with much serving (and so have I). But Jesus' concern isn't serving, it's distraction; distraction from the one thing that is needful (necessary). Serving your neighbors (family, friends, classmates, coworkers, etc.) is a good and necessary aspect of your vocation as Christians. The Table of Duties in the Small Catechism gives examples of what this means. In this fallen world, there is always work to do for the good of others. There is nothing wrong (and everything right) with service to family, friends, community, and church. Martha's desire to serve, in and of itself, was not wrong – in fact, it was completely right.

Martha was not wrong in her desire to serve, but in her troubled heart, trusting in her service to Jesus more than Him as her one thing needful. Her anxiety over loving and serving her neighbors (Jesus and others gathered) distracted her from the true purpose of Jesus' presence. She had not grasped that Jesus came for her. Jesus "...came not to be served, but to serve..." (Matthew 28:20). While the one thing needful was right there at hand, Martha felt that serving Him was more important than being served by Him. Mary chose what is better when one is in the presence of Christ: she sat at His feet and received what He came to give.

Martha's complaint to Jesus was rebuked not because He didn't appreciate Martha's service, but because Martha erred in thinking that Mary was wrong in her desire to be served by Him before serving. Both Martha and Mary represent critical aspects of living out your Baptism, loving God and loving neighbor (see Luke 10:27). But take care that your much serving doesn't become more important than your being much served by Christ Himself. The former emanates from the law, which cannot save, but only curbs, accuses, and guides (necessary as that is). The latter is the Gospel itself, emanating from Christ our Savior, being necessary for salvation (John 6:27, Romans 5:21, Jude 1:21). It is the much-suffering of Christ (His crucifixion!) that saves you, and it will not be taken away! (See Small Catechism, Explanation to the 2nd Article, 2nd Paragraph)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, grant us the Spirit to hear Your Word and know the one thing needful that by Your Word and Spirit we may live according to Your will; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, LSB)

Monday of the Sixth Week After Pentecost

JULY 21, 2025

Today's Reading: Genesis 18:1-10a (10b-14)

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 4:1-22; Acts 17:1-34; Acts 16:23-40

"[Abraham] ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, 'O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant.' ... The LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.'" (Genesis 18:2b-3, 13-14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Who is serving whom? Genesis 18:1-14 is a beautiful example of the relationship between faith and works. It shows the fruits of faith in God's promise sprouting forth and bearing fruit in the works of Abraham. Ordinarily, upon seeing the approach of sojourners, one as wealthy as Abraham would have given instructions to his servants and let them do the work involved with hospitality. But Abraham himself runs to them, begging them to be his guests, insisting that their presence would be to his benefit ("if I have found favor in your sight ..."). He invites them to rest in a place of comfort, shaded by trees, and provides for them. He himself chose the calf (among his best!) and has it served lavishly with milk and curds. He requests Sarah to make bread from fine flour in amounts (3 seahs = 42lbs), allowing for such an abundance of bread that it will not run out. Abraham's hospitality toward his visitors is extravagant. What motivates Abraham to be of such high service to these sojourners? Whether or not he knows them to be God from the outset, it is God who motivates his generous service. Even before God's promise to him of a son is given a second time (thus emphasizing its certainty and importance) Abraham's faith has blossomed from its first pronouncement (Genesis 17:16), and his faith bears fruit in this lavish service which calls to mind Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40)

Who is serving whom? As lavish as Abraham's hospitality is, that of his visitor (God Himself) is greater. In the context of this extraordinary meal, God reiterates His promise to Abraham of a son, which foreshadows the Son who will be the fulfillment of the promised offspring of the woman, promised since Genesis 3. We are sojourners in this fallen world. It is God (incarnate) Himself who runs to us, begging us to be His guests, insisting that our presence among Him would be to our eternal benefit, and serving us – inviting us to rest in a place of comfort shaded by His countenance. He Himself prepares the meal by His crucified body and shed blood, a lavish meal with such an abundance of His mercy, it will never run out.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

There dwells the Lord our king, the Lord our righteousness, triumphant o'er the world and sin, the Prince of Peace. On Zion's sacred height His kingdom He maintains, and glorious with His saints in light forever reigns. (LSB 798:7)

St. Mary Magdalene

JULY 22, 2025

Today's Reading: John 20:1-2, 10-18

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 5:1-6:3, 10-16; Acts 18:1-11, 23-28

"Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned and said to him in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher)." (John 20:15-16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Mary Magdalene knew the suffering of demon possession and the joyous relief of being healed from them, and she was a loyal follower of Jesus (Luke 8:2-3). From our text in John 20, we know that she knew the pain of losing a dear loved one to death; a trial with which everyone can (or one day will) identify. When a loved one dies, it never feels right; it is difficult to accept that we can no longer hear that voice or see that face. This was Mary's struggle as she stood outside of Jesus' empty tomb. She had witnessed every last horrific moment of His death right up until His last breath. She knew He was dead, but she struggled to accept it. It wasn't right, and even worse, now His body was gone! She didn't know what to do, so she just stood there and started to cry. Death wounds those it takes from us, and it wounds us who are left behind. This was Mary's experience as she sobbed, looking back into the tomb. But something was different now. There were angels there, and though Mary's sorrow could never shake or destroy their joy, they were concerned for her. "Woman," they ask, "why are you weeping?" She replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." (John 20:13). Worse than Jesus' death was not being able to tend to His body as tradition dictated. Mary's grief is so deep that even a conversation with angels isn't bewildering. So, she straightens up, and turns ... and almost runs into the One who had never been far from her, even in her grief, even as she didn't recognize Him. Finally, her eyes are open to Him as He says one word; He calls her by name, "Mary." "I have called you by name, you are mine," declares the Lord." (Isaiah 43:1). "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27). Imagine Mary's heart racing at the sound of her name spoken by the risen Christ. She stares in joy, rising like a flood and cries, "Rabboni!" It was really Him! Beyond all hope, it was the flesh and blood, wounds still visible but transfigured, shining in glory, Jesus! Her Jesus. The joys were only beginning. Jesus sends Mary, first to His apostles, with the message that He lives. Death was not the end of Him; thus, it will not be the end of Mary, nor of the disciples, nor will death be the end of you. Mary was the first witness to Jesus's changing forever how we live, grieve, and die. Death still hurts us and separates us from loved ones, but Jesus has made it something we need never fear!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We sing Your praise for Mary who came at Easter dawn to look for Jesus' body and found her Lord was gone. But, as with joy she saw Him in resurrection light, may we by faith behold Him, the Day who ends our night! (LSB 855:11)

Wednesday of the Sixth Week After Pentecost

JULY 23, 2025

Today's Reading: Colossians 1:21-29

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 6:19-7:17; Acts 19:23-21:14; Acts 19:1-22

"And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister." (Colossians 1:21-23)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Being reconciled to God in Christ's death is not a metaphor. His body of flesh was nailed solidly to the rough wood. His broken body bled to death. In this, you were reconciled to God. Like the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, by your sin, you were hostile in mind and doing evil deeds, alienated from your eternal Father. Sin is what broke the relationship ("Sin breaks stuff!" -Rev. Harrison Goodman), and sin is what kept it broken. You could not repair your relationship with God any more than the Prodigal Son could have restored his relationship to his father (the best he could hope for of his own accord was slavery to his father's household). The best you could do of your own accord is slavery to sin, and you were already there. But, like the Prodigal Son, your eternal father has restored you to Himself, making you an heir to His household, restoring you by His mercy. More than the fattened calf's broken body merely signifying the reconciliation of the prodigal to His father, Christ's broken body of flesh is your reconciliation to your heavenly Father! "Not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death," (SC, 2nd Art) you, dear sinner, are presented, "holy and blameless and above reproach before (God)." (Col 1:22)

Begun (and continuing) in your Baptism, and by Christ's work through His Church, you are kept stable and steadfast in this Gospel which you have heard and continue to hear. This is why you can, with Paul, rejoice in the sufferings inherent in the Christian life. The devil plants seeds of ungodly desire into your hearts and minds, making idols for you of the cares and goods of this fallen world. He tempts you to believe that suffering from any lack of earthly pleasure or treasure is cause for lament. In fact, while God's created gifts do serve you in this life, the only lamentable suffering would be a life lived apart from Christ. But you have the riches of "Christ in you;" the "hope of glory" (Col 1:27) and a mystery made clear in the light of God's Revelation in Christ.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

What is the world to me, with all its vaunted pleasure When You, and You alone, Lord Jesus, are my treasure! You only, dearest Lord, my soul's delight shall be; You are my peace, my rest. What is the world to me! (LSB 730:1)

Thursday of the Sixth Week After Pentecost

JULY 24, 2025

**Today's Reading: Catechism: The Sacrament of Holy Baptism - Fourth
Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 8:1-22; Acts 21:15-36**

"We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Romans 6:4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

It's like a murder mystery! What killed the old man? Faith did! Faith looks to Christ and what He has done in His death and resurrection. Faith has no use for what the old man thinks he can do. The problem is, some semblance of the old man still has control of your will, and still thinks he has something to do with pleasing God. This struggle between God given faith and the will of our old sinful self continues for as long as we live. Luther reminds us, "The Christian life is nothing else but a daily baptism, and continuing ever after. For we must keep at it without ceasing, always purging whatever pertains to the old Adam, so that whatever belongs to the new creature may come forth ... our Baptism is the very root of the Gospel in our lives." (LC, 4) What killed the old man? The Word of God and the water did! The pouring of water over your brow, "In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit," and the old man was dead as a doornail! Through Baptism, the old man was crucified with Christ – the whole body of sin with Adam, the head was drowned out. Only the lie of Satan makes the old sinful self appear alive to your heart and mind. Who killed the old man? Jesus did! Each nail that pierced the flesh of Christ likewise pierced the old sinful self. The old man is dead and buried with Christ in Baptism. Christ Himself was raised from the dead. For you, however, a grave with your name on it awaits. Will the risen Christ leave you there for dead? Certainly not! Baptism into Christ means Baptism into His death. Not any old ordinary death, but a death like His. Baptism into Christ means burial with Christ. Not any old ordinary burial, but a burial like His, from which the dead come back to life! Baptism into Christ means that you will be raised with Him! Not any old ordinary resurrection, but a glorious resurrection like His. United with Christ, you walk in newness of life. Within that newness of life, the Holy Spirit works. He works through the Church of God, His Word, and sacraments, expelling the last recesses of that old sinful self. The attacks of Satan via that old man continue. But make no mistake; you are covered with Christ so that the attacks you experience from that dead old man (propped up by Satan) do you no real harm. They are nothing more than the feeble, futile assaults of a dead old man controlled by an angry, frustrated, defeated, dying devil. You are baptized, you are loved, you are Christ's and His alone.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

There is nothing worth comparing to this lifelong comfort sure! Open-eyed my grave is staring: even there I'll sleep secure. Though my flesh awaits its raising, still my soul continues praising: I am baptized into Christ; I'm a child of paradise! (LSB 594 v.5)

St. James the Elder, Apostle

JULY 25, 2025

Today's Reading: Mark 10:35-45

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 9:1-27; Acts 21:37-22:16

"For whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:43b-45)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

When James and his brother John ask to sit beside Jesus as He enters His glory, they don't realize that Jesus will enter that glory with hands and feet nailed to the rough wood of a cross, and so will the two who are granted to sit at his right and left (the two thieves), all three lifted up before the people as worthless transgressors.

If only James and John knew what they were asking – what was to come – they might flee from Jesus too soon, before being witness to His suffering and death. Every day we are reminded of what it means to live by God's grace. Every time we suffer any trial, every thorn piercing our side, we are reminded, "My grace is sufficient for you." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

James and John will indeed know what it means to drink from the same cup as Jesus; to be baptized with His Baptism. For John, exile and isolation from his people. For his brother, James (the one being honored this day), death by the sword of Herod (Acts 12:1-2). But even before they drink from that cup, the trials of taking up one's cross and following Christ will teach them what it is to live by God's grace.

Who is the greatest? The greatest in the kingdom of heaven is The One who came not to be served, but to serve. The greatest is The One who, "though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave." (Philippians 2:6-7)

When you are tempted to think yourself greater than others, look to Jesus and be humbled by His greatness. When you worry about who might be greater than you, take comfort in the greatness of Jesus. Be drawn into His greatness, proclaim His Gospel, serve your neighbors when they need you, and allow others to serve you when your need is greatest.

Rejoice that you are baptized with the same Baptism as Jesus. Gladly drink from the same cup as Jesus, which has become for you the cup of salvation. In it, you have a seat of honor awaiting you at the table of the marriage feast of the lamb, whose kingdom has no end.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, for James we praise You, who fell to Herod's sword; He drank the cup of suffering and thus fulfilled Your word. Lord, curb our vain impatience for glory and for fame, Equip us for such sufferings as glorify Your name. (LSB 518:21)

Saturday of the Sixth Week After Pentecost

JULY 26, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 7 - Psalm 119:145-149; antiphon: Psalm 50:15

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 10:1-27; Acts 22:17-29

"Hear my voice according to your steadfast love; O LORD, according to your justice give me life." (Psalm 119:149)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

What is God's justice, and how does one gain life from it? The Psalmist would seem to know the answer, and God grant that we would come to know the same. But we must be on guard! For when we, or those dear to us, are hurt by another, or when we have worked hard toward some great accomplishment where others have not, we crave the kind of justice which reigns in this fallen world; justice which dictates that everyone get what they deserve. We desire to see payment commensurate with the amount and quality of one's work, and punishment of wrongdoers befitting the harshness of their crime. A desire for such justice in this world is not wrong. The Scripture speaks often of curbing evil and promoting good (e.g., Leviticus 19:15, Proverbs 18:5, Is 1:17, Amos 5:15, Romans 13:1-7). However, may God preserve us from coveting such justice against any wrongdoer's status in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus makes the danger of this clear when he says, "... with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." (Matthew 7:2) In God's kingdom, nobody gets what they deserve. In God's vineyard, the worker who labored but an hour receives the same pay as he who toiled the whole day. In God's household, finding one lost coin or sheep is celebrated with absurd lavishness, and the wretched, ungrateful, rebellious, wasteful son, who deserves nothing more than enslavement, is welcomed home and restored as an heir. In God's kingdom, he who is so indebted to the king that he cannot possibly atone for it in a lifetime is completely forgiven of it. Yet, anyone who would exact punishment rather than bestow mercy upon one indebted to them cannot abide in God's kingdom, where nobody gets what they deserve. What is God's justice, and how does one gain life from it? The answer to both questions is the same. God's justice is the broken body of Christ nailed to the course wood of the cross. God's justice is the blood and water flowing from the spear-gouge in Christ's side, pouring into the font of your Baptism and into the cup of the New Testament for the forgiveness of sins. To look for justice anywhere but Christ crucified is to look for justice to be visited upon oneself. And you can't handle the justice that God gives any more than those whom you are tempted to condemn. Look to Christ crucified and see God's justice such that you, and even those by whom you have been harmed, are given life from the author of life; life where all conflict, division, pain, and sin are put to death forever.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Since Christ has full atonement made and brought to us salvation, Each Christian therefore may be glad and build on this foundation. Your grace alone, dear Lord, I plead, Your death is now my life indeed, For You have paid my ransom. (LSB 555:6)

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

JULY 27, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 11:1-13

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 12:1-25; Acts 22:30-23:11

"Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'" (Luke 11:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

When you learned your ABCs, someone took a crayon and showed you how to draw the letters. When you learned how to tie your shoe, someone taught you, "Over, under, around and through, Meet Mr. Bunny Rabbit, pull and through." When you learned to drive, a parent or instructor taught you where your hands go on the steering wheel. As we grow up, life is full of moments where we are taught.

The same is true in our lives as God's children. We are always learning. And our Lord is always patiently teaching us. When Jesus' disciples saw him praying, what did they do? They said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray." And what did Jesus do? Did he let them fumble around trying to figure it out on their own? No. Did he send them a link to a YouTube video? No. Jesus patiently taught them how to pray first by praying with them. Then, he taught them how to pray by giving them the words to use.

Jesus teaches his disciples, past and present, how to pray by giving us the prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. It's short. Easy to memorize. It has everything we could possibly pray for all in one place. And best of all, it's God's word. Jesus knows that we don't always know what we should pray for, and that quite often, if we're honest, we don't always pray for the things we should, and that sometimes we're simply at a loss for words.

This is another reason why Jesus teaches us and gives us the Lord's Prayer. Every word of the Lord's Prayer is given by Jesus to you. Every word of the Lord's Prayer points you back to Jesus and his love and grace for you. Praying for daily bread or any physical need? It's God's gracious provision that gives you all you need. Ever find yourself struggling to forgive someone who has sinned against you? The Lord's Prayer gives you forgiveness and helps you to forgive others, too. Ever wrestled with your own sin and temptation? Jesus teaches us to pray for deliverance from the Evil One in the Lord's Prayer. And the same Lord Jesus who teaches us to pray, promises to hear our prayers, answer them in his good and gracious will, and deliver you from every evil in body and soul. This is why, as God's children, there is always more to learn whenever we pray, "Our Father."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Our Father, who from heav'n above Bids all of us to live in love As members of one family And pray to You in unity, Teach us no thoughtless words to say But from our inmost hearts to pray. (LSB 766:1)

Monday of the Seventh Week After Pentecost

JULY 28, 2025

Today's Reading: Genesis 18:(17-19) 20-33

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 13:1-18; Acts 23:12-35

"Then Abraham drew near and said, 'Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?'" (Genesis 18:23)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Watch any police TV show or courtroom drama, and sooner or later you'll hear the phrase, "If you do not have, or cannot afford a lawyer, the court will appoint one to represent you." The defendant is then given an intercessor to act on their behalf. In the Roman tribunal, citizens had the right to appeal to another magistrate who would intercede on their behalf. But neither Hollywood nor the Roman Empire invented the idea of an intercessor. This idea of intercession is as old as the book of Genesis. There's a long list of God-appointed intercessors in the story of the Scriptures, for example: the Prophets, the Judges, Nathan, Samuel, the Levitical Priests, Joshua, and Moses.

One of the first intercessors we meet in the Bible is none other than Abraham. The Lord and judge himself had seen what sinful corruption had done to Sodom. His verdict was in. Guilty as charged. Sentenced to death. And even though no one in Sodom made an appeal, an intercessor was appointed all the same. That intercessor was Abraham. Genesis says, "Abraham stood before God," and "drew near to God." Abraham interceded for Sodom. He pleaded to God on behalf of any righteous that might be left in the Old Testament sin-city.

Abraham tries to make a plea deal with God on behalf of Sodom. Suppose fifty righteous people are there, will you not spare the city? What about forty-five? Forty? Thirty? Twenty? Ten? God the Judge is lenient - patient with sin - to a point. "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it." Tragically, we know how the story of Sodom ended, in destruction, although not before God rescued Lot, Abraham's nephew. Abraham may have been one of the earliest intercessors in the Bible, but he is not the last, nor even the greatest. Abraham's intercession saved Lot and his family, but Abraham's greatest son, our Lord Jesus, came to intercede on behalf of the whole world. He came to save not ten, twenty, thirty, forty, or even fifty righteous, but lay down his life for the unrighteous and by his righteous intercession, declare righteous all who believe in him. Abraham made intercession for one city, while Jesus made intercession for the life of the world and for all who believe in him. And not only does the Father appoint his Son as your intercessor, the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son is also appointed to intervene on your behalf, interceding for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:27).

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The God of Abr'ham praise, Whose all sufficient grace Shall guide me all my pilgrim days In all my ways. He deigns to call me friend; He calls Himself my God. And He shall save me to the end Through Jesus' blood. (LSB 798:3)

Tuesday of the Seventh Week After Pentecost

JULY 29, 2025

Today's Reading: Colossians 2:6-15 (16-19)

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 14:47-15:9; Acts 24:1-23

"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross." (Colossians 2:13-14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

As you approach the first drop-off on one of my favorite Disneyland rides, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the animated skull and crossbones overhead roar out those famous, ominous words: "Dead men tell no tales."

According to St. Paul, there's something else dead men don't do - in fact, cannot do, and are unable and incapable of doing - and that's saving themselves. This is the reality of sin and our sinful flesh. Apart from Jesus, we're all the walking dead. We don't lie on the ground yelling out, "I'm not quite dead yet!" Not at all, says St. Paul. Apart from Jesus, we are dead in our trespasses.

But did you notice what verb tense Paul uses to talk about our sin and death? Listen to it again. You who were dead. Past tense. It's true. Apart from Jesus, we were all dead men walking. But that's not the whole story. Something else happened in the past that changed our past, present, and future.

It just so happens that God loves taking things that are lifeless and bringing them back to new, filling them with new life, and making them alive again. Remember the darkness and void of creation? God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. Remember Sarah and Hannah's barren wombs? God gave them both life where there was no life, and Isaac and Samuel were born. Remember Lazarus, dead in the tomb for four days? Jesus spoke the words: "Lazarus, arise!" And he walked out of his tomb. He was made alive again.

So it is for us in our Baptism. We were all dead as a doornail in our trespasses and sin. But God made us alive together in Jesus. Want to guess how he did that? That's right, by going into death on the cross and entering the lifeless place of the tomb, and then, by rising again in resurrected new life on the third day. And in your Baptism, you are buried with Christ and raised with Christ. Apart from Jesus, we're dead, and we tell no tales. But in Jesus, we are made alive, and we sing for joy in Jesus, crucified and risen.

After all, he's the one dead man - and risen from the dead man - who does tell tales. And the tale he tells is true. He is crucified and risen for you.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We thank You Christ; new life is ours, New light, new hope, new strength, new pow'rs. This grace our ev'ry way attend Until we reach our journey's end. (LSB 562:6)

Wednesday of the Seventh Week After Pentecost

JULY 30, 2025

Today's Reading: 1 Samuel 15:10-35

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 15:10-35; Acts 24:24-25:12

"Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the Lord.'" (1 Samuel 15:24-25)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Saul had sinned. He had failed to hear and heed the Lord's words when facing God's enemies. And Saul's sins had consequences. Because he rejected the Lord, the Lord would remove him from the throne, and eventually give the throne to David. When Saul sinned, God sent him a preacher to hold up the mirror of God's law and show Saul his sins. Samuel was the preacher God sent to Saul.

God does the same for us, too. We sin. So often we fail to hear and heed God's word. So often we give in to God's enemies of sin, death, and the devil. Quite often, our sinful actions - though forgiven and absolved in Jesus and by your pastor - have consequences in this life too. God sends us preachers as well, to hold up the mirror of God's law and show us our sin - they're not Old Testament prophets like Samuel, but they do speak God's word like he did. God gives us pastors to preach God's word, to show us our sin, and to give us pardon.

And that's one of the great differences between us and Saul. Saul was rejected from being king of Israel. But so that we would never be rejected, the true King of Israel, the Son of David, Jesus, was born, lived, suffered, died, and rose from the dead so that we would never be rejected. On the cross, he was forsaken and cut off so that in our sin we would never be forsaken or cut off from God's presence. He suffered his passion on the cross so that he would pardon our sin.

For all the times we've failed to hear and heed God's word, Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father's will and did that for you. For all the times we've transgressed God's Commandments, Jesus kept every one of them for you. All God's commands are fulfilled in Jesus. He perfectly feared, loved, and trusted the Father, and he did that for you, too. All the punishment for sin, Jesus took on himself. Even sin itself, he bore for you on the throne of the cross, under the crown of thorns, all so that he could crown you with glory, grace, and goodness, now and forever.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, may Your wounded hand impart Your healing to my broken heart; Your love alone can form in me A heart that serves You joyfully. (LSB 616:3)

Thursday of the Seventh Week After Pentecost

JULY 31, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: What is Confession?

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 16:1-23; Acts 25:13-27

Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven. (Explanation of What Is Confession, Luther's Small Catechism)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

One of the simplest ways that we learn to do things, for example, learn our ABCs and count our 123s, is when someone says them and then turns to us and says, "Now it's your turn. Repeat after me."

Something like that happens when we come to God's gift of confessing our sins. When we open the Catechism and God's Word, one of the first things we learn is that there's a problem within each of us. We all have sin. Capital "S" sin. And we commit sins because of our sinful flesh - what Luther calls our Old Adam. So the Commandments teach us the truth, echoing God's word of law throughout the Scriptures. And what do they say? They say, "You are a sinner." And what do we say back? Yes, you're right. I am a sinner. Lord, have mercy on me, a poor, sinful being.

This is one of the things that happens whenever we confess our sins. We are simply saying back what God's Word says about our capital "S" sin and all our little (and not so little) sins we commit because of our sinful flesh.

Thankfully, this isn't the only thing that happens when we confess our sins. As St. John reminds us, when we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The same Lord who, by the working of the Holy Spirit, convicts us of our sin and moves us to confess that sin is the same Lord who, by his Son, Jesus, also forgives sin, both Capital S sin and all our sins.

And because God is a gracious giver and an abundant forgiver, he gives His Gifts of forgiveness in more than one way. He washes away our sin in Baptism. He feeds us with forgiveness in the Lord's Supper. He speaks his forgiveness in his word. And he sends pastors as his messengers to deliver Good News: I forgive you all your sin. And that is the good news that Absolution brings: forgiveness of all your sin. And should you ever doubt God's forgiveness, or worry that your sin is too great, simply repeat the words your pastor says on Sunday, or ask him to repeat them for you: I forgive you all your sins, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, on You I cast my burden - Sink it in the deepest sea! Let me know Your gracious pardon, Cleanse me from iniquity. Let Your Spirit leave me never; Make me only Yours forever. (LSB 608:4)

Friday of the Seventh Week After Pentecost

AUGUST 1, 2025

Today's Reading: 1 Samuel 17:1-19

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 17:1-19; Acts 26:1-23

"David was the youngest. The three eldest followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem." (1 Samuel 17:14-15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God has a pattern of doing things in ways we least expect. Back in Genesis, who did God choose to be the bearer of the promise despite his not-so-brotherly love and deception? Not the older brother Esau, whom we'd expect, but instead, the younger, trickster brother, Jacob. And when it came time for Jacob to bless his twelve sons, who received the blessing that would carry on the promise of the coming Seed? Not the firstborn Reuben, like we would expect, but the fourth in line, Judah.

Fast forward several hundred years later and a few more branches down the Messianic family tree, and you'll find God doing the same unexpected thing, choosing the same unlikely people to carry out his plan of salvation. This time, in 1 Samuel, it's David who was chosen by God, first to destroy Goliath, and then, later on, to become king. When God sent Samuel to anoint a new king, once again, he did something unexpected. God didn't choose the oldest son of Jesse, but the youngest. A shepherd boy. Taking no armor with him into battle - an unexpected military maneuver, and using a rather unlikely - but deadly - weapon, David struck down Goliath. And later on, this unlikely shepherd boy became the shepherd king of Israel. And yet, God's unexpected ways of accomplishing his salvation don't stop with David. David's Son and David's Lord carries on in the ancient tradition as God in the flesh continues to do unlikely things in unexpected ways, many of which mirror the first David. Jesus, the Son of David, is born in the city of David, Bethlehem. Jesus, like David, is anointed, not by Samuel, but by water and the appearance of the Holy Spirit, and the voice of the Father in the Jordan River. Jesus, like David says in Psalm 23, truly is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus, like David, slays his enemies in the most unlikely and unexpected way. Not with five smooth stones, but with four nails, a wooden cross, and one stone rolled away on the third day.

Jesus, the Son of David, continues his unexpected ways of bringing salvation to you as well. He takes ordinary water and washes away sin. He speaks his word and forgiveness through fellow sinners. He puts his Body and Blood in bread and wine, where the cup of his grace overflows. God's pattern of doing things may be unexpected, but his ways are full of grace, mercy, and goodness which follow us all the days of our lives.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Hail! Hosanna, David's Son! Jesus, hear our supplication! Let Thy kingdom, scepter, crown, Bring us blessing and salvation, That forever we may sing; Hail! Hosanna to our King. (LSB 350:4)

Saturday of the Seventh Week After Pentecost

AUGUST 2, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 8 - Psalm 49:7-8, 13-14a, 15; antiphon: Psalm 49:1-2

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 17:20-47; Acts 26:24-27:8

"But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me." (Psalm 49:15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

In *Perelandra*, the second book in C.S. Lewis's *Space Trilogy*, the main character is sent to the planet Perelandra (what we call Venus) to save that planet from the kind of temptation and Fall that happened on the silent planet (what we call Earth). As the story begins, the man is sealed into and later arrives on Perelandra in a coffin-like spacecraft. And who exactly is this character who flies through the celestial vault in a casket, only to arrive at an unfallen planet and rescue it? A most fitting name: Ransom.

The story Lewis tells us of Ransom's cosmic adventure and rescue of Perelandra is a beautiful picture of the true story of ransom in our own world. What the Psalmist sings about in Psalm 49 is God's rescuing and redeeming work of ransom. If God were to come to earth, we might imagine that he would do so in some spectacular way, perhaps a spaceship that would put the Millennium Falcon or the U.S.S. Enterprise to shame. Perhaps God would come faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. But Look! Behold! Not up, but down.

Our Ransom comes from above, but is found below. So don't look up at the stars through a telescope, but look through your ears to the manger. God, our Ransom, comes to save us, not in a spacecraft, but wrapped in swaddling cloths and cooing and wiggling in the arms of the Virgin Mary. His name is Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. His name is Ransom, for he will pay for your sins with every drop of his blood on the cross.

What the Psalmist sings - God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol - takes place in the manger of Bethlehem and the cross outside Jerusalem. After all, God's work of Ransom doesn't happen once upon a time, or in a galaxy far, far away. But in the days of Caesar, when all the Roman world was taxed and when Quirinius was governor of Syria, and when Pilate washed his hands. And the good news is this: your ransom is no science fiction story; it's a fact. Under the darkness of a noonday night sky, Jesus gave his life as a ransom for you. And three days later, he walked out of the cold, dark expanse of the tomb to bring you new life.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Since Christ has full atonement made And brought to us salvation Each Christian therefore may be glad And build on this foundation. Your grace alone, dear Lord, I plead, Your death is now my life indeed, For You have paid my ransom. (LSB 555:6)

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

AUGUST 3, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 12:13-21

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 17:48-18:9; Acts 27:9-26

"And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground." (1 Samuel 17:49)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

When we picture God going into his armory to find the right weapons to fight for and rescue his people, we might picture something like John Wick's request for guns...lots and lots of guns—or Iron Man climbing into the Hulkbuster or Batman going into the Batcave and hopping into the Batwing. But God's weaponry quite often looks different than how we would imagine it, and his way of fighting his enemies is even more unexpected.

The story of David is a classic example. Saul's men try to outfit him with the latest armor, sword, and shield like he's gearing up to play Call of Duty. But God has something better in mind. Rocks. That's right. David takes five smooth stones and his sling onto the battlefield where Goliath rages, taunts, and defies God. But no sooner does Goliath, the enemy of God's people, issue a challenge than God throws down a gauntlet of his own, launched straight from the arm of his servant, David. That's one small stone for David, one giant slayed by a stone to the noggin.

This isn't the last time God would defeat his enemies with unlikely weaponry, nor is it the last time God would use a rock to hurl defeat at his enemies. David's Son and David's Lord, Jesus, works with the same battle tactic in the New Testament as he did in the Old. He wraps himself not in the finest bronze armor, but in human flesh. He wields the sword of his word against Satan in the wilderness. Then, in the climactic battle on Golgotha, he slays the dragon, not with five stones, but with wood and nail and blood and death. Jesus overcomes death by death, letting death overcome him. Jesus battles and wins the victory over our sin by becoming sin for us. Jesus, the Son of David, slays Goliath by hurling the stone of his empty tomb wide open in resurrected victory three days later.

But the Lord doesn't stop there. He marches straight into this fallen world to arm you for your daily battle against the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh. And once again, he equips you with the most unlikely, yet the most powerful of weapons, his word, his robe of righteousness, his forgiveness, Baptism, and Body and Blood. And in these Gifts, given to you by our Lord and Commander-in-Chief of the heavenly armies, you stand firm and victorious.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Amen, Lord Jesus, grant our prayer; Great Captain now Thine arm make bare, Fight for us once again! So shall Thy saints and martyrs raise A mighty chorus to Thy praise Forevermore Amen. (LSB 666:4)

Monday of the Eighth Week After Pentecost

AUGUST 4, 2025

Today's Reading: Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-26

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 18:10-30; Acts 27:27-44

"There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?" (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

C.S. Lewis once said, "God likes matter; he invented it." And once you open up the Bible, it doesn't take you long to discover exactly how true that is. God is a God of means. God gave Adam and Eve every tree of the garden to eat, except for the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Even in their sin, guilt, and shame, God used something else of his creation—the skin of a sacrificed animal—to clothe them. God sent the animals two by two to Noah, who built an ark. God fed manna and quail to Israel in the wilderness. God gave atonement and forgiveness through the flesh and blood and sacrifices of the tabernacle and temple. God is a God of means who loves to use the matter he created to bless and serve his creatures with his good Gifts.

Solomon knows that God is a God of means. Although God is heavenly, high, and holy, he also loves his creation, comes down to his creatures, and uses the stuff of his creation to bless his people in body and soul. Food. Drink. Rest. These simple, ordinary, daily things are gifts from God's hand. This is what we pray for in the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: give us this day our daily bread. So, when you eat breakfast, second breakfast, lunch, or dinner, this is from the hand of God. When you put on your socks or sport mode your Crocs, this is from the hand of God.

But that's not all that comes from God's hand. God is a God of means at his table as well. God takes his extraordinary grace and mercy and gives it to us in the ordinariness of water, human speech, a piece of bread, and a cup of wine. God still likes matter, and he uses it to bring you the Gifts that matter the most: forgiveness, grace, mercy, peace, and joy. The water poured over your head at Baptism was from the hand of God. The words of Good News given to you in Scripture and Absolution are from the hand of God. The bread and cup placed in your hand, Jesus declares is his Body and Blood for you; this, too, is from the hand of God. After all of that, what else is there to do but to eat, drink, and rejoice in the labors of Christ for you.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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

Tuesday of the Eighth Week After Pentecost

AUGUST 5, 2025

Today's Reading: Colossians 3:1-11

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 19:1-24; Acts 28:1-15

*"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."
(Colossians 3:3-4)*

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Springtime rolls around on the calendar, and you take a handful of pumpkin seeds, dig a hole in the garden, drop the seeds in the earth, and bury them. It's a funeral of sorts. The seed dies in the earth, but there's life hidden in the seed as well. Before long, the seed sprouts, vines grow, leaves burst out, and that first orange pumpkin appears.

This annual gardening pattern is a picture of what Paul teaches us in Colossians. Being the Master Gardener that he is, God likes to hide things as well, burying them in the ordinary things of life. On Sunday morning your pastor—and fellow sinner/saint—stands before the congregation uses ordinary human words, sentences, and grammar, and yet hidden in those words is a gracious declaration of Good News: "In the stead and by the command of my Lord I forgive you all your sin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Later on in the Divine Service, you approach the altar, kneel, open your mouth, and reach out your hand to receive a plain, ordinary wafer of bread, and you drink from a cup full of wine. And yet, hidden in these earthly things is more than meets the eye: Jesus' Body and Blood and his promise of forgiveness. The same is true in Holy Baptism. The pastor takes good old H2O from a faucet, pours it in a bowl, splashes and empties it over your head. And hidden in and with the water is God's promise, pardon, and peace.

Through these gifts of words, water, bread, and wine, God is hiding his goodness and grace for you in the ordinary gifts of creation, and in turn, he ensures that your life is like that pumpkin seed you plant in the garden. Your life is hidden with Christ. In Holy Baptism, he buries you with Christ and raises you to new life in Christ, so that one day, when the Gardener returns on the Last Day, he'll do for you what he did in his own resurrection on the third day. Like the seed that is tossed in the earth and later gives life, when Christ our Lord returns, he who is the firstfruits and the firstborn from the dead will return to bring you new life and bring you into the new creation.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Death has lost its old dominion, Let the world rejoice and shout! Christ, the firstborn of the living, Gives us life and leads us out. Let us thank our God, who causes Hope to spring up from the ground; Christ is risen, Christ is giving Life eternal, life profound. (LSB 479:3)

Wednesday of the Eighth Week After Pentecost

AUGUST 6, 2025

Today's Reading: Acts 28:16-31

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 20:1-23; Acts 28:16-31

"From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets." (Acts 28:23)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Martin Luther once said, "Anywhere you cut the pages of Scripture it bleeds the blood of Christ." That means when we open up the Old Testament, we don't have to search for Jesus like one of those "Where's Waldo" books or strain our eyes to see him like looking at some kind of optical illusion. It's not just that the Old Testament tells us about Jesus here and there, as if Jesus is a marmot or a prairie dog, poking his head up now and then. Jesus isn't just in the Old Testament. Jesus is the Old Testament. Luther is simply echoing what Jesus says in Luke 24:44.

"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

When the apostles teach and preach the gospel in the book of Acts, they turn to the Old Testament to show how the same Lord who appeared in many and various ways throughout the Torah of Moses and the prophets has now appeared in the flesh. This is Paul's strategy as he catechizes the Jews in Rome as well. Being a good apologist, and knowing his audience, Paul goes to the Old Testament to argue, persuade, and convince his Jewish hearers that Jesus is the Christ. When Paul says, like he does in Romans, that Jesus is Lord, he's saying that the Lord of the Old Testament is the same Lord who became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary. The same Lord who met Abraham under the oaks of Mamre is the same Lord who was born under the Law to redeem us under the Law and to become the curse for us by dying on the tree. The same Lord who met Moses in the burning bush now meets us by becoming one with us, Immanuel, God with us. The same Lord who appeared and spoke to the prophets has now appeared as the Word made flesh.

And this same Lord who is present in the books of Moses and the prophets is now the same Lord present for you in all the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation. And the prophets, apostles, and evangelists continue to bear witness to Christ crucified and risen for you.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

If Christ had not been raised from death Our faith would be in vain, Our preaching but a waste of breath, Our sin and guilt remain. But now the Lord is ris'n indeed; He rules in earth and heav'n: His gospel meets a world of need- In Christ we are forgiv'n. (LSB 486:3)

Thursday of the Eighth Week After Pentecost

AUGUST 7, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: What Sins Should We Confess?

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 20:24-42; 1 Samuel 21:1-23:29; 1 Corinthians 1:1-25

Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts. (Explanation of What Sins Should We Confess?, Luther's Small Catechism)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

There's an old expression used when someone gets stuck on the same topic and says the same thing over and over again; they're a broken record, we say. This is a perfect picture—or should we say, soundtrack—of Christ's Church. God calls his church to be a broken record. Not the kind that blasts an annoying earworm of a song into your head, but a blessed broken record playing the same thing over and over again. And what is that theme song? The record the church is called to keep spinning is the constant refrain of God's steadfast love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

This is why Martin Luther once called the Church a mouth-house of forgiveness. The Church is a megaphone of God's grace and mercy. The Church stands in the wasteland of this fallen world like John the Baptist stood in the Jordan River announcing the Good News: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

This is why Christ builds his Church. You can find entertainment anywhere in the world. You can find social clubs and hobby groups all over social media. There are many good gifts God gives outside of his church, but the one thing we cannot find anywhere else is God's word and sacraments, his Gifts of forgiveness for you. For this reason, Christ built his Church and founded it on forgiveness. For you! His forgiveness won for you on the cross and given to you in Baptism, Absolution, the Gospel, and the Supper.

After all, there are only two places where our sin can rest: on our shoulders or on Jesus'. And this is why he came, so that all our sin would rest on his shoulders on the cross. This is also why he gives us his Gifts of confession and forgiveness, and why the Church is a broken record, announcing God's forgiveness on repeat until Jesus returns. In the meantime, Jesus sends pastors to hear our confession and forgive our sin, every Sunday in Divine Service, and privately when guilt gnaws at you, or a particular sin sticks with you like that annoying pebble stuck in your shoe. And when we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just, will forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

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)

Friday of the Eighth Week After Pentecost

AUGUST 8, 2025

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:16

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 24:1-22; 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:16

"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Remember Gideon? God sends him to deliver Israel from the Midianites. He tells twenty-two thousand Israelites to take a hike back home, leaving only ten thousand. Still too many. God tells Gideon's men to go down to the creek for a drink. The ones who drink like dogs, lapping the water—those are the ones who are staying. All three hundred of them matched up against the hordes of Midianites. And if that isn't wild enough, they head out to battle with torches and clay jars and not a sword in sight. How weak. How foolish. And yet, the Lord brings victory and delivers Israel. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

Remember Elijah? God sends him up to the top of Mt. Carmel to engage in a little prophetic duel with the prophets of Baal. Once again, God's people are in a jam. Wicked Ahab and the infamous Jezebel are making an idolatrous mess of Israel. So, God does what he does best: he delivers his people, but he does it in a rather strange way. Elijah digs trenches. Baptizes the entire place, soaks the whole thing. Not once. Not twice. Three times. You can imagine the prophets of Baal having a good laugh. Look at Elijah. So weak. Such a fool. And yet, Yahweh sent fire down on the altar, and the prophets of Baal came to a brutal end. And once again, God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

Remember Jesus' life? God chooses what is foolish in the world—an unwed, Virgin, a backwater little town, a lowly manger, a life of itinerant preaching, and a ragtag bunch of fishermen, a zealot, and a tax collector—to deliver and declare his salvation. And then, in the greatest of all displays of weakness and foolishness, God in the flesh goes and suffers a shameful death on the cursed tree of the cross. Once again, God delivers, rescues, and saves in the most unlikely way. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. Why does God work this way? So that our hope and confidence rest in his outrageous grace and not in our own strength or wisdom.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Here we have a firm foundation, Here the refuge of the lost: Christ, the Rock of our salvation, Is the name by which we boast; Lamb of God, for sinners wounded, Sacrifice to cancel guilt! None shall ever be confounded Who on Him their hope have built. (LSB 451:4)

Saturday of the Eighth Week After Pentecost

AUGUST 9, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 9 - Psalm 147:8-11; antiphon: Psalm 147:7

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 25:1-22; 1 Corinthians 3:1-23

"His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love." (Psalm 147:10-11)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Racing fans delight in the fastest car and the winning driver. Hockey fans delight in the forward with the best plays, most goals, and fastest time down the ice. Baseball fans delight in the swiftness of a base runner rounding third and heading for home plate. Now, when it comes to God, we expect him to play by our rules of the game. Only, he doesn't. God doesn't take a page out of our playbook. No. He writes a completely new book with completely different rules, ones based not on our righteousness and strength, but on his. Life is lived not on our goodness and power, but in his grace and mercy.

What brings God joy and delight? Psalm 147 reminds us that it's not our strength, not our wisdom, not our goodness—not our anything—that causes God to delight in us. No. What brings God delight is when we hope—not in ourselves—but in his steadfast love. What brings the Lord pleasure is when we see that of ourselves we have no strength, but that all our strength is in the steadfast love of Jesus, crucified and risen. What brings the Lord great joy is when we delight in his work for us, not our own work for him. What puts a big smile across God's face is when we look to him for righteousness instead of relying on our own self-righteousness.

This is what it means to fear the Lord. Not that God is going to dive out from behind the bushes and jump scare us like some kind of cheap horror movie, but that he who could destroy us in our sin instead delivers us from sin. That we trust in him who chases us down like a sheepdog with his steadfast love, all the days of our lives. That he who could condemn us for our trespasses says in Christ, there is no condemnation. That he who could sentence us to eternal punishment takes all sin, all death, all punishment of the Law upon himself. In all of this, the Father delights in His Son, and through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, the Father delights in you as well.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Almighty Father, in Your Son, You loved us when not yet begun
Was this old earth's foundation! Your Son has ransomed us in love
To live in Him here and above: This is Your great salvation.
Alleluia! Christ the living, To us giving Life forever,
Keeps us Yours and fails us never! (LSB 395:4)*



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