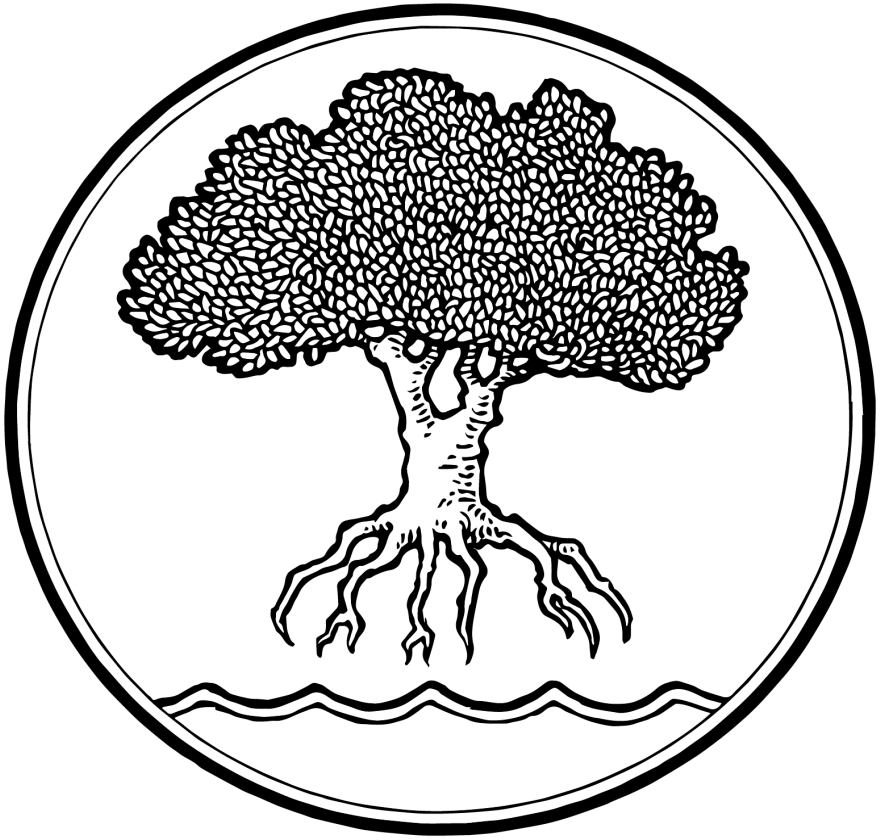




REFLECTIONS

**The Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost -
Saturday of the Last Week of the Church Year
November 2, 2025 - November 29, 2025**



NOVEMBER 2 - NOVEMBER 29

This season's Reflections were written by

*Rev. Darrin Sheek, pastor at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Anaheim, CA*

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

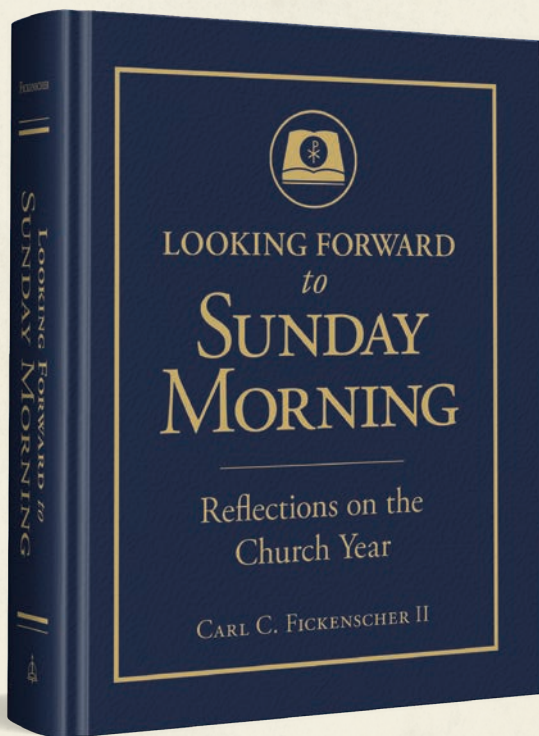
*Nov 23 is Jonah Clausen, seminary student at Concordia
Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne*

*M-Sat are Rev. Harrison Goodman, content executive for Higher
Things*

©2025 Higher Things, Inc., Lisbon, IA

Preview Each Sunday's Readings

with
CARL C. FICKENSCHER II



“The unity in Christ Jesus shared through centuries and around the world is the great virtue of liturgy, lectionary, and all those things proper.” (p. xix)

Looking Forward to Sunday Morning: Reflections on the Church Year outlines each Sunday's propers in the three-year lectionary and reveals thematic connections between them, helping you prepare your heart and mind for worship.

Order at cph.org



1.800.325.3040

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.

Twenty-First Sunday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 2, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 19:1-10

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

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

For whatever reason, Zacchaeus sought to see Jesus. And in an ironic turn of events, it is actually Jesus who seeks after Zacchaeus. He spots him up a Sycamore tree and calls out, "Hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." Jesus was going to have church with Zacchaeus. He joyfully received Jesus and welcomed him into his house to share a meal around his table while listening to His words.

What kind of people does Jesus gather around himself in church? Listen to the words of the grumbling crowd, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!" Jesus was going into Zacchaeus' house to have table fellowship with a sinner. This is exactly who our Lord seeks out and who He chooses to gather to Himself...sinners. Broken people, both young and old, rich and poor, the well-behaved and the despicable...all sinners, all in need of a savior, and Jesus seeks them out and gathers them around a table in a home.

Zacchaeus sought to find Jesus by climbing a tree, yet Jesus is the one who ended up seeking Zacchaeus and finding him because he was lost. The problem with being lost is that you cannot find your way home by yourself. A lost sheep is as good as dead. A lost coin is a dead asset, and a prodigal son has lost everything and has nothing...not even a bed to lie down at night. But this is why our Lord Jesus came, to seek and save those who are lost. This is why He climbed up the tree of a wooden cross to spill His precious blood for all those who are born lost. He seeks, He finds, He gathers, and He saves them. Those who were lost are found, and those who were dead are now alive. This is why our Lord walked through Jericho and had church with Zacchaeus.

This is also the reason it has pleased our Lord to gather you and others like me. He gathers the lost, the broken, the dying—real sinners—unto Himself to deliver His word and gifts of life and salvation to you. Once we were lost, and now we are found, and once Jesus finds you, there's no way He's letting you go.

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 of which we boast. (LSB 451:4)

Monday of the Twenty-First Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 3, 2025

Today's Reading: Isaiah 1:10-18

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

"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Have you ever put on clothes thinking they were clean only to find out they are not? What about getting dressed up in your nicest clothes for a special occasion, looking in the mirror, and then, to your complete horror, you see they have stains! I think the worst is being nicely dressed and then spilling something on your clothes, staining them, and there's nothing you can do about it.

The big problem with stains is that some of them become permanent. You can't get them out, no matter what soap you use and how hard you scrub. Sin is that way. It stains us. We are not aware how dirty and stained we are until we look into the mirror – the mirror of God's Word. Our first reaction may be to try to clean up the mess ourselves, scrubbing away, trying to make ourselves clean again. Or, like King David, we may try to cover them up. Maybe no one will notice, especially God. And like David, we discover that trying to hide our sins only makes matters worse.

David finally turned to the only one who could deal with his sin permanently, once and for all. "I acknowledge my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5).

God sent His prophet, Jeremiah, to His people whose hearts were filthy, stained with idolatry and all sorts of evil. "Come now," God says, "let us reason together." The Lord holds out an amazing promise; He will deal with their sins. He will not throw His people away or abandon them to the rag bin. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

God has washed you clean; no more stains, nothing to hide, nothing to cover up. He has washed you white in the blood of His Lamb, Jesus (Revelation 7:14). The stain of our sin is not permanent. God invites us to confess our sins, and He promises to wash us in the never-ending forgiveness of our Lord's precious blood. God did that in your Baptism, and those cleansing waters are still washing you clean. Now, there is real peace! There is real freedom, living under the cleansing flood of Christ!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me Savior, or I die. (LSB 761:3)

Tuesday of the Twenty-First Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 4, 2025

Today's Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5 (6-10) 11-12

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

"We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing." (2 Thessalonians 1:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Paul was persistent. He was a man on a mission, literally, and his mission plan was simple: go into a city and find a synagogue, open up the Scriptures, and preach Christ from them. Some would believe, some would want to hear more, and others would aggressively oppose Paul's message about Jesus. Paul would eventually be run out of town, which would propel him to the next city, and he would do it all over again – preach Christ crucified and risen. And you know what? The Word worked! People believed! A church began! The Gospel spread!

Paul visited Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, and it was ministry as usual. He entered the synagogue on three different Sabbaths, teaching from the Scriptures that Jesus, who was crucified and risen from the dead, is the Christ. Some believed, while others formed a mob and ran him out of town. The rioters justified their violent reaction by claiming, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also." Indeed, the gospel was having its way.

Even in the face of the uproar and despite Paul being run out of town, a church was born. God, by His grace, caused ears to hear the Good News of Jesus, and He granted hearts to believe. Paul would later marvel about this work of the Holy Spirit among them, "For you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia...your faith has gone forth everywhere" (1 Thess. 1:6a-8a). Years later, Paul would continue to give thanks to God for their growing faith and for the fruit of that faith, their increasing love for one another.

That same gospel word is still at work among us, turning the world on its head. God is still rich in his saving grace towards us sinners. The Holy Spirit is still at work within us, causing faith to grow and increasing our love for others. It is true, in spite of the opposition within and outside of us. God is true to His word; He is faithful in His promises –for this "we ought to give thanks to God." This is the testimony of His church. This is our story too!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Abide with me, O Savior, a firmer faith bestow; then I shall bid defiance to ev'ry evil foe. (LSB 587:2)

Wednesday of the Twenty-First Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 5, 2025

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 7:1-29

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

"So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you." (Jeremiah 7:27)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God called Jeremiah to speak some hard words to hardened hearts. God was persistent. He kept sending His messengers to His people, yet they did not listen. God called them to repentance, and they did not answer Him. Instead, they followed their own plans; they refused to listen. They followed their own stubborn hearts, and as God said, they "went backward not forward."

It is an easy trap to fall into, turning a deaf ear to the voice of God. There are so many voices competing with His; we are confronted with choices to make and directions to take, and like Judah, we are inclined to listen and follow the ones that seem to fit our desires and feel good to us. Perhaps the bigger temptation is to "hear" God's words and then pick and choose what we listen to; you know, selective hearing. In our minds, we think we are going forward, and yet in truth, we are going backward.

God is persistent. He is stubborn, too, more stubborn than we are. The Bible calls that particular characteristic of God "faithfulness." God is faithful even when His people are not. Notice what God continues to do, even when His own people refuse to listen to Him; He sends a preacher. "Speak all these words to them...you shall call to them." Yes, God knows the hardness of their hearts and the stubbornness of their ears, but He still speaks, and He still calls.

God put another word into Jeremiah's mouth to speak to his wayward, hard-of-hearing people, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness'" (Jeremiah 33:14-16).

God wasn't looking back but was looking forward to when He would send His Son to come and give hearing to deaf ears and cause hardened hearts to believe. By the word of Christ's cross, sinners are made righteous, sins are forgiven, and a new creation has begun. This word is for you. God is faithful!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Dying to the sin of Adam, rising to a life of grace; we are counted with the righteous, over us the cross You trace. (LSB 404:4)

Thursday of the Twenty-First Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 6, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: Table of Duties - To Wives

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

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

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God's gifts come in all sorts of packages. Think about Adam; the first gift God gave him was the gift of life. Adam was then given a garden to take care of, and from it, he received the gift of daily food. But then God gave Adam a very special gift fit just for him—a wife. God personally made her and then brought Eve to Adam. God blessed the gift of marriage, the gift of a husband, and the gift of a wife. It was very good.

On the sixth day of creation, God established the vocations of husband and wife. Each is a gift to the other to be cherished and loved. Each loving one another with the kind of love that is selfless and self-giving, the kind of love that has the other's best in mind. God was pleased, He was happy, and He blessed them.

So, when we hear the words, "wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord," they are an invitation to love another in the same self-giving manner that marked the first marriage of creation before the Fall. These words call out to love another with the same kind of love that we ourselves have been loved with.

After all, isn't this how Christ has loved us? Jesus humbled himself by becoming a man. Jesus submitted Himself to His Father's will even to the point of dying on a cross. Jesus loved us selflessly and sacrificially by laying down His life for us.

Out of this love that Jesus has for us, we are set free to love one another – wives are free to love their husbands. This sort of love is radical. It flies in the face of our current culture, but isn't that the nature of the Gospel? It offends our inherent tendencies to take care of ourselves first and try to get what we deserve. Grace throws us and the world on its head. It frees us from focusing on ourselves. It compels us to ask, "How can I serve another?" This is the kind of love God is working in us. This is the kind of love a God-given marriage is built upon. God is the giver of all good gifts, and the gift of a husband and a wife is most certainly a gift to be treasured. May our Lord grant us the grace and working of His Spirit to love one another as Christ has loved us.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Christ the Savior, Christ the Servant, Be Your life in us displayed. (LSB 847:1)

Friday of the Twenty-First Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 7, 2025

Today's Reading: Matthew 24:1-28

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 11:1-23; Jeremiah 12:1-19:15; Matthew 24:1-28

"But the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 24:13)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

One of the perks of being a disciple was that you could ask Jesus questions when you had some alone time with him. Jesus was sitting down on the Mount of Olives, which provided the opportunity for his disciples to ask a burning question about the end of the age and the sign of his return. Jesus tells of some very difficult times in the days ahead. There will be wars and rumors of wars; that's disturbing. Jesus goes on to talk of nations rising against nations, famines and earthquakes, not pleasant days to live in. And if that's not hard enough, Jesus describes the attacks that will come upon one's faith. Nations will hate those who bear Jesus' name; many will fall away from the faith due to false teachers and following those who falsely claim to be "the Christ." Believers will be betrayed, lawlessness will increase, and love will grow cold. Jesus paints a pretty dark picture, commenting, "If those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved."

The days that Jesus described sound all too familiar, don't they? Fighting, hatred, natural disasters, lack of daily necessities for many, attacks against the Christian faith, false teachers, these fit the times we are living in. In the midst of all this, Jesus holds out a promise, "The one who endures to the end will be saved." That's not a very comforting promise if enduring to the end depends on us. How can we be certain we will not be one of those who "fall away" or who are led astray by false messiahs?

The book of Hebrews (12:1-2) likens the days we live in to a race that we are running. Jesus himself entered the race by becoming a man. He ran the race and stayed the course, which led to a Roman cross. He endured the cross and its shame so that we might gain the prize of His salvation. So we run our race with endurance, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the founder and finisher of our faith. You see, enduring to the end doesn't depend on our running ability, but it depends on the one who has already run and has finished the race for you.

In this world, we will have tribulation, yet we run and endure with our faith fixed on Jesus. He is our faithful deliverer who keeps us in the race and causes us to endure in him.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

Saturday of the Twenty-First Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 8, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 22 - Psalm 115:2-4, 8, 17-18; antiphon: Psalm 115:11

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

*"You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield."
(Psalm 115:11)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"Stop! Don't do it!" Wouldn't you scream those words if someone you cared about was about to make a bad decision that you know they would regret later? Wouldn't it pain you to watch a person choose to believe a lie and then act on it, if you absolutely knew the truth of the matter and the consequences that would follow? Think about Adam and Eve standing at the base of the forbidden tree in the garden contemplating whether they should eat from it; as they reach out their hand to pluck a piece of fruit, don't you want to yell, "No! Don't do it!"

Too late. They trusted their eyes and listened to a lie. They didn't believe God's word, and they didn't fear the promised consequences. Isn't that our problem, too, along with this world we live in? We can't help it, as the apostle Paul writes, "all have turned aside...there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:12, 18). Our temptation is to rely on ourselves and believe we can manage our lives on our own. Even without realizing it, we are easily drawn to put our trust in those things that promise us happiness and success. We fear failure. We fear not being accepted. We fear being left behind and missing out. Like our first parents, we too are tempted to listen, to look, and to reach out our hand to grab onto a lie.

Psalm 115 pleads with us, "No, don't do it." Don't buy into the false gods of this world. They may seem to make promises, but they are all lies. There is only One who is trustworthy. There is only One who is committed to your good. He is the Lord God who made the heavens and the earth. The God who made you and keeps your life calls you to trust Him. He is both your help and your shield. The Lord knows what you need and is determined to care for you. The Lord knows those things that seek to attack and undermine your faith, so He wraps His shield about you. He promises never to forget you; no, He will bless you and shower His gracious love upon you.

All of this God gives to you in Christ. Jesus is your help and your shield. He is your present help in times of trouble. He is your rock and your hiding place. He is your rescuer and defender. He is God's Savior for you. Trust him.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

A mighty fortress is our God, a sword and shield victorious; he breaks the cruel oppressor's rod and wins salvation glorious. (LSB 657:1)

Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 9, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 20:27-40

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

"Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him." (Luke 20:38)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Dead men don't rise. That's what common sense will tell you. Dead is dead! That's what the Sadducees would have told you. Even though they were a Jewish sect, they did not believe in the afterlife and certainly not in the resurrection of the dead. As a matter of fact, they limited the authority of the Scriptures to the first five books of Moses; no resurrection there, so they thought.

Ironically, they ask a riddle-like question about the resurrection to the one who is "the Resurrection." Jesus takes the Sadducees right to the book of Exodus, where God declares to Moses, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Jesus masterfully demonstrated that God is the God of the living, not of the dead!

It is passages like this one that Jesus had in mind when he taught his disciples on the evening of his resurrection, opening their minds to understand the Scriptures that "the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise again from the dead" (Luke 24:44-46). Jesus' resurrection made the impossible now possible; the dead do rise again to life. Jesus is "the Life" for the dead that they may live! Jesus' resurrection conquered the grave for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and for you!

The tomb is still empty. Christ has been raised from the dead, and his resurrection means life for you. If Jesus is the "firstfruits of those who have died" (1 Corinthians 15:20), that means there are more fruits to follow. If Jesus is the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18), that means there are more sons and daughters to follow. It is actually God's will that you who look to Jesus with eyes of faith shall have eternal life and be raised on the Last Day (John 16:40).

Upon Jesus' answer to their question, the Jewish scholars said, "'Teacher, you have spoken well,' and they no longer dared to ask him any questions." Jesus has the last word, not death, not your sin, not your grave, nor your reason. Our Lord's cross declares to you that your sins are forgiven. His empty grave and resurrection proclaim to you that you, too, will one day rise and live with him forever.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Then by your resurrection you won for us reprieve – you opened heaven's kingdom to all who would believe (LSB 941:3)

Monday of the Twenty-Second Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 10, 2025

Today's Reading: Exodus 3:1-15

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

"God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the people of Israel: "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you."' (Exodus 3:15a)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We have a God who hears us; he never plugs his ears to our cries for help. We have a God who remembers; he never forgets but is faithful to keep his promises. We have a God who sees; he is intimately aware of the details of our lives. We have a God who knows; he is mindful of all we need, and he cares.

This is the God who promised Abraham that he would be a father of a great nation, God would give his offspring a land to possess, and through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Those promises sounded pretty good to Abraham, almost too good to be true. All Abraham had to do to be on the receiving end of God's incredible promises was to believe him, and Abraham did. Abraham's descendants became an exceedingly large population after settling in Egypt; however, they became entrapped under a new pharaoh and forced to serve as his slaves. This went on for some 400 years; the people "groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help." God heard, he remembered, he saw, and he knew (Exodus 2:23-25).

So what does God do? He sends a rescuer to deliver his people from their bondage. God calls to Moses from out of a burning bush to go and deliver his people from an impossible situation. Moses is God's mouthpiece to deliver his message; God will do the work of rescuing through him. Moses went, and God delivered. We, like Israel, find ourselves in an impossible situation. We are slaves as well, helplessly shackled by sin and death with no good way out. So, what does God do? He sends a rescuer to deliver us out of our bondage. God himself comes to save us. Jesus comes to set us free and lead us into the Promised Land of his eternal kingdom.

God hears our prayers and cries for help. He remembers his promises made to you, and he never forgets. God sees all, knows the things that weigh you down, and he continues to care for you. God sends a preacher to you to speak His Word for you that continues to set you free. "Your sins are forgiven." "You are my beloved child." "I will be with you to the end of the age." "I have redeemed you; you are mine."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

In the midst of utter woe When our sins oppress us, Where shall we for refuge go, Where for grace to bless us? To Thee, Lord Jesus, only! Thy precious blood was shed to win Full atonement for our sin. — Lord, preserve and keep us In the peace that faith can give. Have mercy, O Lord! (LSB 755:3)

Tuesday of the Twenty-Second Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 11, 2025

Today's Reading: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, 13-17

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

"To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 2:14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God has made a decision for you. Do you realize that? God has made a choice for you and has called you to Himself. Do you slow down to stop and take time to think about that? You are a miracle of God's divine grace. God came to you through his Word and by his Spirit. He spoke to you, and you listened. He called you, and you came. He gave you a promise, and you believed. God chose to set his love on you; you are a miracle of God's saving grace.

Not by the Law did God call you, but through His gospel. What does that mean? It means His decision for you is not based on your performance but upon His promise. God's decision for you is not conditional but unconditional. God didn't call you and say, "Come here, I've got a deal for you. I'll wipe the slate of your sin clean, I'll raise you from the dead, and I'll give you a permanent place in my incredible kingdom if you..." Nope! The law works that way, but not the gospel. You have been called by the gospel. You are a walking miracle of God's grace.

God chose you in Christ. That means it has pleased him to give you everything Jesus won for you through his life, death, and resurrection as pure gift. No conditions. No checklist. No performance test. It's all yours in Jesus: complete forgiveness, God fully pleased with you, a life where he is working his good works through you, and everlasting life in his eternal kingdom. That's the decision God made for you. That's what Jesus accomplished for you. You have been called to simply receive it by faith – trusting in God's wonderful promises to you, and even your faith is His miraculous gift.

God still calls you every day. When you wake up and open your eyes to a new day, God is calling you to rise and embrace the day, walking in His promises. He is at work in you and is keeping you in the very faith He has given you, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ! All gift; all for you. You are a miracle of God's amazing grace.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word." (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)

Wednesday of the Twenty-Second Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 12, 2025

Today's Reading: Matthew 26:1-19

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

"You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." (Matthew 26:2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The hour has come; the time is at hand. The Son of Man is hours away from his cross. Jesus knew this, yet his disciples refused to believe it. The Scriptures pointed to this, and this is the reason Jesus was born: to die that he might save his people from their sins.

News spread that Jesus was approaching Jerusalem, and the reception couldn't be more opposite, as opposite as faith and unbelief. When the chief priests and the elders of the people get wind that Jesus was coming near the city, guess what kind of welcome they are planning for him? They gather in the palace of Caiaphas, the High Priest, to plan how to secretly arrest Jesus and kill him. Isaiah's words about God's Messiah indeed are true: "He was despised and rejected by men." And yet God would use their scheming to accomplish his plan to save the world.

Jesus stops in Bethany, two miles outside Jerusalem, at the house of Simon. While Jesus is reclining at the table, a woman pours expensive ointment on his head. The disciples become irate, thinking that is a waste of money, but Jesus has a different response: "What she has done is a beautiful thing to me." He goes on to say, "She has done it to prepare me for burial." The "Anointed One" has been anointed! The Passover Lamb is ready for the slaughter.

"My time is at hand," Jesus said. He would not be deterred. He knew what lay ahead of him over the upcoming hours, and yet Christ suffered for you. He endured the cross and bore your sins upon the tree that "you might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:21-24).

Still to this day, Jesus, the Lamb of God, is rejected. Yet, the world's unbelief does not nullify what Christ accomplished on his cross. Jesus bore the iniquities of us all. So let us not be deterred to proclaim the Good News of Jesus, who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. There is no sin Jesus' blood did not cover. There is no sinner left out whom Christ did not die for. This is the awesome wonder of Christ's cross.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"See, the Lamb, so long expected, Comes with pardon down from heav'n. Let us haste, with tears of sorrow, One and all, to be forgiv'n." (345:3)

Thursday of the Twenty-Second Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 13, 2025

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

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

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

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Thank God for our parents. Without them, we wouldn't be here. It pleased God to continue his work of creation by giving you life through a mom and a dad. God continues to care, provide, and protect us through the parents he gives us. This is at least God's design and intention for the family, to see one another as a gift and to share life together in love.

This is the heart of the Fourth Commandment, where God instructs children to honor their father and mother. In his Small Catechism, Luther explains that rather than despising and angering our parents, children should honor, serve, obey, love, and cherish them. To see our parents as a gift from God causes hearts to cherish and love them. Love can't help but bear the fruit of willful service and obedience. Looking at one another through the lens of a God-given gift makes all the difference.

There is no "Commandment" for parents, though, is there? Yes, there are several places in Scripture where parents are instructed in how to raise and treat their children. Although the particular guidelines may differ, the lens prescription is still the same; see your children as a gift from God. When parents see their child as a gift from the hand of God, they see their role in a whole new light. Dads and moms become a portrait to their children of their heavenly Father, mirroring God's gracious love, his sacrificial care, tireless provision, and tender guidance and protection. This is the hands-on way of raising children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

The thing about parents is that they are sinners, too. I've never met a parent who doesn't have regrets or who hasn't wished they could do some things over. Parents need forgiveness, too, just like children. This is perhaps the most profound way a parent can teach their children the faith when a parent is on the receiving end of God's forgiving grace.

God loves to give gifts. He gave his most precious gift, his very own Son, to die for the sins of the world, and "the world" includes parents. God has given parents the gift of a family to love and to care for. Sharing life together in Christ makes all the difference.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"I the Lord will be your Father, Savior, Comforter, and Brother. Go, My children; I will keep you and give you peace." (922:4)

Friday of the Twenty-Second Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 14, 2025

Today's Reading: Matthew 26:36-56

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 29:1-19; Revelation 14:1-20; Matthew 26:36-56

"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" (Matthew 26:53-54)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus is praying, the disciples are sleeping, and Judas is coming, leading a great crowd carrying clubs and swords. It's happening; the hour is at hand. It feels like a climactic scene from a Hollywood movie, heading to a final confrontation between the good guys and the bad.

Jesus is not caught by surprise. He is in Gethsemane, praying fervently to his Father. He knows what is about to happen, and it is troubling his soul. Jesus prays, "Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me." Yet, Jesus knows this is his mission; this is why he was born; this is his destiny, so he continues to pray, "Not as I will, but as you will."

The great crowd finally arrives with swords in hand. Peter draws his sword and draws first blood, cutting off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Jesus charges Peter to put down his sword and says, "Do you not realize I can ask my Father and at once he will send more than twelve legions of angels?"

60,000 angels! Yes, that's what we want, don't we? A cosmic battle between good and evil. Jesus with his sleepy disciples against a huge sword-wielding crowd, but now with an army of angels coming down to wipe all those bad guys out. That would make for a great movie, but it is not part of the script. The Scriptures must be fulfilled. God has a different ending in mind.

The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. That's how the scene plays out, and all is going according to plan. Fast forward to a Roman cross outside of Jerusalem on a dark Friday. Jesus might have been betrayed, arrested, tried, and crucified by sinners, but it is for sinners that Jesus traveled the road to his cross. He carried their sins, your sins, and the sins of the entire world and nailed them to the tree. The one who knew no sin became sin that we might become the righteousness of God. This is the Father's will. This is what Jesus willingly endured, so that your life might have a beautiful climactic ending. Dressed in the robe of Christ's salvation, you are welcomed into the glories of heaven by the angelic hosts of heaven and into the open arms of God your Father. Now that's a movie worth seeing.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"From heaven's shining regions to greet me gladly come Your blessed angel legions to bid me welcome home." (674:2)

Saturday of the Twenty-Second Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 15, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 23 - Psalm 121:1-2, 5, 7-8; antiphon:

Luke 21:33

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

*"The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand."
(Psalm 121:5)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"The Lord is your keeper." Wow! Now that's a promise to grab onto. Not just any lord, but The Lord is your keeper, and his keeping covers your entire life, past, present, and future.

If we're honest, we often go through the day totally unaware of how the Lord is keeping us under his protective care. We can manage most of the daily stuff put before us. Yet, all it takes is an illness, a near-miss car accident, the death of someone we know, or money problems to shake us up and cause us to realize how fragile life is and how quickly we can find ourselves in a helpless situation.

The Lord is your keeper, whether you realize it or not. Psalm 121 is calling us to see that the Lord who made heaven and earth, who made you, is intimately involved in caring and providing for you. How can you be certain? He promised!

The Lord put his name on you when he washed you with his Word in the waters of your Baptism. There you were adopted into the family of God. Your life was joined to Jesus, who promised to be with you all of the days of your life to the end of the age. He is keeping you!

The Lord will keep you. That means you have a future. God promises it. He will keep you from all evil, so what have you to fear? "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). You have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is keeping you and your inheritance of eternal life safe and secure (Ephesians 1:13-14).

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in today and all the days unto eternity! Knowing you are being kept by the one who made you and all things, that means you are free to live each day without fear or doubt. Even if it seems the world and the entire universe are going up in smoke, remember, "Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words will not." His word and his promises are yours. The Lord is your keeper.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 16, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 21:5-28 (29-36)

Daily Lectionary: Jeremiah 31:1-17, 23-34; Revelation 16:1-21; Matthew 27:1-10

"[Jesus said,] 'And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'" (Luke 21:25-28)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

When you see these things: things of evil governments laying hands on Christians, Christians being persecuted for the holy Name; things of your own sin, your own failures; things of the frustration of living as a Christian, wishing you could do better each day, but seeing the hopelessness of it all as you find yourself once again, as yesterday and the day before, falling to doubt, to fear, to lust, to the desire to control others, or to any other temptation—when you see these things, Stand, lift up your heads, for you belong to Baptism. And Baptism is not the sinner showing allegiance to God. It's God saving the sinner. It's your Lord using his appointed means to work the forgiveness of sins, to rescue from death and the devil, and to give eternal life to all who have faith in the words and promises of God.

So despair not. Lift up your heads, for you belong to the life-giving water, rich in grace, a washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5) With each day, the world nears its final judgment. We see the signs all around.

Despair not. We continue to rejoice in serving neighbor, in opportunities to work for peace and good order, in words spoken in kindness to acclaim our Lord's gift of life, extolling his institutions of family and home, of marriage of man and woman, of property and possessions, our Lord's institutions so often rejected by our fallen world. For we know that these things instituted by the Lord are his way of providing for us and our neighbor on Earth. We see our sin, our failures, and we fear. Despair not. Hear your Lord's Gospel and rejoice in the life of Baptism to which you belong. We stand and lift up our heads in faith. Luke 21:28: [Jesus said,] "Now when these things begin to take place, stand and raise up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, Almighty and always-living God, You gave great and precious promises to people who trust You. Reign and lead our hearts and minds with Your Holy Spirit. Then we can continue to live forever in Your Son. Jesus lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday of the Twenty-Third Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 17, 2025

Today's Reading: Malachi 4:1-6

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

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." (Malachi 4:5-6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The prophet Malachi promises an Elijah. But what was Israel's problem that they needed an Elijah? Israel's great sin is that they were treating the Lord's altar as common. The Lord gathers Israel to his altar to receive the forgiveness of their sins, to be made holy by the Lord's institution of sacrifice. But Israel is treating his altar as common, even profane—they even call it not a holy Altar but a defiled table! (See Malachi 1:7, 1:12) Because they treat it not as the holy Altar where the Lord comes to them with blessing, but as a defiled table for empty religious rituals, Israel has been bringing not the proper, appointed sacrificial animals, but ... trash. (See Malachi 1:7, 1:13-14)

When she has despised the Lord's Altar, denigrating it as a common table, where has Israel left herself to go to receive the forgiveness of sins? What hope is there for the sinner separated from the Altar where God has placed his holy Name (Malachi 1:11)? Enter Malachi. He decrees the promise to save the sinner from the deserved decree of utter destruction (Malachi 4:16). It is the promise of an Elijah: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes."

Elijah? Elijah was, of course, in Israel some 450 years before Malachi's time. But Malachi is promising there will be another prophet who will stand in the office of Elijah. This prophet will do the "Elijah job" of bringing salvation for the sinner. As we know, that new Elijah is John the Baptist (Matthew 11:12-14), who, after baptizing Jesus in the Jordan, then declares: Jesus is the Lamb of God who is bearing the sin of the world! (see John 1:29)

John, the new Elijah, has announced the greatest news of all. Jesus bears the sin of the world, every sinner of every generation! Your sin and mine. And where we, in our sin, have forgotten the Lord's Name and treated the gifts of holiness as common, we hear the voice of Jesus, and we know that his table is not common, not to be despised, but is nothing less than the holy gift of the Blood to forgive our sins.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, where we have treated your gifts as common, where we have forgotten your Name bestowed upon us in Baptism, forgive. Gather us again to hear your Gospel; restore us as your holy people. For you alone, O Lamb of God, are the forgiver of sins, the Savior of the world. Amen.

Tuesday of the Twenty-Third Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 18, 2025

Today's Reading: 2 Thessalonians 3:(1-5) 6-13

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

"May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ... For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies."
(2 Thessalonians 3: 6, 11)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"Idle hands ... devil's workshop"—we don't want to be caught being idle.

So the Apostle instructs us to keep away from those walking in idleness. But Paul's actual word here in the Greek addresses something more than just laziness. In Greek, it's disordered, the same root word as properly ordering things. Scripture uses this word for the institutions the Lord put in place for us in creation—institutions such as marriage and home, neighbor and society, possessions and property, all given in the "orders of creation." Paul knows as well as we do that the Church lives in a sinfully disordered world. "Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from any brother who is walking outside of order and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ... For we hear that some among you walk in disorder, not busy at work, but busybodies." (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 11)

In these last Sundays of the Church year, we review how the Church is given to live in these latter days while waiting for our Lord's return to judge the living and the dead. In this disordered world, the Lord's institutions (life, marriage of man and woman, life and family and home, neighbor and society, possessions and property) will remain under attack. So the Apostle encourages the Church. But this disordering is not just our world. It's us, our own sinful flesh. Realizing this, we have one place to turn. 2 Thessalonians 3:5: "May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ."

Where we're unfaithful to Christ, he's steadfast and faithful to us. Until that day when he comes again to judge the living and the dead, as we live in this disordered world and our own disordered lives, we turn to him, for he is faithful to his promise: "But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one." (2 Thessalonians 3:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, you remain faithful to your promise. In our disordered world, we pray for our neighbor, that your institutions of family and home, of marriage of man and woman, of possessions and wealth, may be upheld for our neighbor's benefit. And we give you thanks that you have instituted for us your gift of Baptism. Keep us in Baptism's forgiveness of all sins and promise of life everlasting. Amen.

Wednesday of the Twenty-Third Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 19, 2025

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 38:1-28

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

"So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud." (Jeremiah 38:6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Put yourself in Jeremiah's shoes. Wait, maybe don't do that. Jeremiah is standing in mud. At the bottom of a cistern. Waiting to die. Jeremiah could've avoided the cistern treatment if only he had agreed to go along with the current wisdom, if only he had spoken what was popular. He didn't. Now he's waiting to die, sunk in the cistern's mud.

It can be hard to turn our backs on the worldly temptations of prestige, popularity, or power. When our world pressures us to bow down to the predominant ideology or current movements, the reasonable response can seem to be "Go along to get along." The world's recognition is a siren song. The prophet Jeremiah did not go along to get along. Rather than seek the king's favor and secure friendship with the public, Jeremiah did the opposite. He spoke the Word the Lord had given him, even when everyone wanted to hear a different word, and found himself standing in the cistern mud, waiting to die.

Of course, we know Jeremiah was rescued. The Lord was not ready to have his Word shut down. The Lord was about the business of giving the gift of repentance, rescue, and salvation to his people, and Jeremiah was his appointed mouthpiece. But the worldly lesson was clear: the easiest path would've been for Jeremiah to speak words acceptable to the world, and to go to sleep at night in his own comfortable bed with the approval of the king, not sinking in mud. Many generations later, around 1230 A.D., St. Elizabeth of Hungary is quoted as saying, "How could I bear a crown of gold when the Lord bears a crown of thorns? And bears it for me!" That's the suffering of every person in our world, including Jeremiah, whose faith is in the promised Christ.

The preaching of the cross turns us away from the siren song of worldly prestige, popularity, or power. It turns us to the Word of Jesus, the Gospel of our redemption.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

By all Your saints in warfare, For all Your saints at rest, Your holy name, O Jesus, Forevermore be blest! For You have won the battle That they might wear the crown; And now they shine in glory Reflected from Your throne. We praise you for the prophet Who spoke your word at cost, He stood in the cistern mud—foreshadow of your cross. From the mouth of Jeremiah, we heard your word impart Your Gospel of redemption To cleanse the sinful heart. (LSB 517:1, verse for Jeremiah)

Thursday of the Twenty-Third Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 20, 2025

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

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

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and your mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—' that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life in the Earth.' Eph. 6:1-3" (Catechism, Table of Duties: To Children)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

How does the Lord take care of you in this world—not just in your life of faith where you are justified by your Lord's Word, but in your earthly life, where you need food and drink and home and safety?

The Lord sets, for the benefit of children, parents. Mom and Dad. The son or daughter, then, is given to receive all good gifts of family and childhood from his or her parents. And where the parent needs help in caring for a child, perhaps a teacher to teach algebra or a doctor to diagnose a fever, the parent brings in a teacher or doctor or whatever other profession so that the teacher or doctor (or whomever) is acting by the authority and in the stead of the mom and dad.

Mom and Dad are the Lord's instruments. They are standing in the Lord's stead to provide for the children. So obedience to parents is not just some ritualistic keeping of the law; it's much more. When we are young, respect and obedience are our recognition that we receive every good gift from our Lord, including all the gifts of "daily bread," through our parents. They are the Lord's servants, his vessels.

This, of course, often goes poorly in our sinful world. A parent may die; a family may be torn by divorce; or a parent does his or her parenting poorly (which is true to some extent for every parent, except, of course, God the Father). Yet, in all of this, even when we find them in their weakness, we give thanks for parents, for they stand as God's instruments to care for, protect, teach, encourage, comfort, and sustain the children. And we pray to our Father in Heaven that we may be forgiving of our parents where they do poorly, and happily obedient to them, hearing them with ears of respect and thankfulness.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*You are our holy Lord, The all-subduing Word, Healer of strife. Yourself
You did abase That from sin's deep disgrace You so might save our race
And give us life. O ever be our guide, Our shepherd and our pride, Our
staff and song. Jesus, O Christ of God, By your enduring Word, Lead us
where You have trod; Make our faith strong. So now, and till we die,
Sound we Your praises high And joyful sing: Infants, and all the throng,
Who to the Church belong, Unite to swell the song To Christ, our king!
(LSB 864:2,4,5)*

Friday of the Twenty-Third Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 21, 2025

Today's Reading: Daniel 2:1-23

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

"Daniel answered and said: 'Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter.'" (Daniel 2:20-23)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Look around in the world and try to figure out what God is doing. A flood hits Florida, or in a foreign country, a dictator is overthrown—how are we to see God's hand in this? Even in our personal lives, a friend gets laid off at work, or another friend gets a great, high-paying job—can we see how God is working in this? The Prophet Daniel reveals that God's hand is not absent from our world's affairs. It's God who sets up kings (or presidents, or dictators), and it is God who tears them down (Daniel 2:21). Our problem is that, while God uses events and persons of this world to work all things for the good of his people (Romans 8:26-30), we cannot know how God is doing this. His hand is there, but what's it doing?

Even though King Nebuchadnezzar could not know it, and even while he was the captor of the Lord's people, the Lord was using him to benefit the Lord's people! By Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord kept his people intact so that generations later from Israel's lineage, the Lord himself would come in the flesh as the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world—including Nebuchadnezzar's sin and yours and mine.

Because the Lord used people such as Nebuchadnezzar (and for that matter, later Judas) to keep a remnant of his people and to bring forth the salvation of the cross, we may give thanks that while we cannot know how, God's hand is, indeed, working all things together for good for those called by the Gospel, so that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (cf. Romans 8:37-39).

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Blessed be your Name, O God. All wisdom and might is yours. You change the times and seasons, you remove kings and set them up, though we are not given to know how. To you, O God, I give thanks and praise, for you make known the wisdom of the cross to people of every nation, and by the preaching of your Word, you reveal the justification of the sinner by the blood of your Son, the Christ from the lineage of Israel. Amen.

Saturday of the Twenty-Third Week After Pentecost

NOVEMBER 22, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 24 - Psalm 134; antiphon: Psalm 33:8
Daily Lectionary: Daniel 2:24-49; Revelation 19:1-21

"Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord! May the Lord bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth!... Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!" (Psalm 138:1-3, Psalm 33:8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Psalm 138:3 gives three locations: 1) Zion, 2) Heaven, 3) Earth.

These are places, not just ideas or concepts—they're proper nouns. Proper nouns are capitalized; ideas and concepts are not. Thus, Zion, the city of David, Heaven, the location of standing at the face of God (it's the eternal Throne, Revelation 19:4). Heaven's not geographically located, as if hiding behind the Sun; it's where the angels and the living ones stand at the face of God (e.g., Revelation 19:4-6). Earth is, of course, a planet, like Mars or Jupiter; it's the planet where the Lord placed us, where we live out our lives in service to neighbor. Strangely, we seem afraid to give the proper nouns "Heaven" and Earth" their proper capitalizations. Maybe we're a little afraid, so we cower and spell "Heaven" as "heaven," treating it not as a place, but an idea or concept, thus "heaven." (Most modern translations of Scripture do this even with Earth, as if there's one planet named Jupiter, another named Earth.) Zion is the city of David; Heaven is at the face of the Lord; Earth is our planet. What do the three have to do with each other? We brought Earth, the place of our creation and life, into sin. So on Earth, the Lord appointed a location to place his Name: Zion. Wherever the Lord places His Name, He is coming to bestow forgiveness upon the sinner.

For the Israelites, Zion is the holy place (Psalm 138:2), the location of the Temple. When Jesus comes, He says, "Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it up" (John 2:19). In this way, Jesus' Body now stands as the Temple of God—the body torn down at the cross, raised up in three days in the resurrection. Now Jesus brings you to Mount Zion, the city of the Living God. It's the Church, the assembled saints (Hebrews 12:22). It's where Jesus is distributing the riches of the New Testament in his Blood (Hebrews 12:24). Zion is wherever Jesus is having his Gospel proclaimed on Earth, his Sacraments administered, and his people assembled so that they would hear the Name of the Living God proclaimed from Heaven.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus, gather us to your Mt. Zion, the assembly of your saints. Let us hear your Word of Gospel. In the eating and drinking of your Body and Blood, forgive our sins, letting us receive the benefits of your cross, which is life and salvation. Amen.

Last Sunday of the Church Year

NOVEMBER 23, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 23:27-43

Daily Lectionary: Daniel 3:1-30; Revelation 20:1-15

"One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.'" (Luke 23:39-43)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The thief on the cross shows that in someone's last moments, they are the most honest with themselves. Crucifixion gave someone a lot of time to reflect on their life as they suffocated to death, their sins exposed before every person who witnessed the event and to themselves. The first thief thought that the kingdom of Christ was of this world. He had a prosperity Gospel that proclaimed that if he believed in Jesus, all of his problems would go away. He wanted a savior who brought down the heavenly armies and not only lowered him from the cross but also brought down the Roman Empire. This view of Jesus misses the purpose of his first coming. The second thief was aware of his sin and why he was hoisted up to die.

This second sinner was exposed and had nothing to hide behind. He knew he needed a savior and, more importantly, who was his savior. He had faith that Jesus had something better than this life of sin, and he believed that Jesus was the only way to get there. We have the same faith as the second thief because we also know that we offer nothing to our savior, but we believe that he will have mercy on us as he did to that fellow believer.

We have the assurance that we will see Jesus in Paradise when we receive his name in Baptism. We are no better than the thief who was crucified for his crimes. Like the thief, we are given faith, and that faith is sustained until God takes us home. We have continual assurance of what Jesus does for us when we receive him through his Word and the Sacraments. So on our deathbeds, as our weak bodies draw our last feeble breaths, we can look back to the promises of God and be confident that we will be with Jesus in Paradise.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, You reign among us by the preaching of Your cross. Forgive Your people their offenses that we, being governed by Your bountiful goodness, may enter at last into Your eternal Paradise; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Monday of the Last Week of the Church Year

NOVEMBER 24, 2025

Today's Reading: Malachi 3:13-18

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

"You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?'" (Malachi 3:14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

It doesn't seem to be going any better for the faithful than they were when Malachi wrote. We aren't marked as the richest or most successful. We aren't the healthiest. We don't avoid natural disasters. It hurts down here for believer and unbeliever alike. Even the people in Malachi's day noticed and dared to ask. What's the point of all this? So the prophet responds. "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him." It's not just, "Hey, one day you'll go to heaven and they won't, so you're way better off." That's shallow at best, and pretty ugly at worst.

First of all, who do you think seems to shine the sun on the good and the evil alike? It's God who gives even the unbelievers everything they have. It's Him who seems to set up a system where even the wicked receive daily bread the same as the faithful. It's almost like He wants sinners to receive good gifts. It's almost like He loves us all enough to die for the entire world. Evil people have stuff because God atones for all. Bleeds for all our sin. That's why the faithful have anything, too. Why do you think God giving you lots of stuff is somehow a great witness for Him and not just...like...really nice for you? The cross where God is even willing to die for His enemies makes a far better claim to His love.

If you want to see the difference between the wicked and the righteous, don't look to how much they have. Don't even look to what they're doing. Look to the Lord, who forgives, saves, and names righteous. Yours is the God who insists on giving good gifts to those who don't deserve them. He insists there be order we haven't built, daily bread we haven't earned, all so that there would be space for us to hear His word that promises even more to us. Forgiveness of sins. Life. Salvation. All of us are born evil. And by the word and sacraments, you believe. Others are brought to faith, too. And if heaven happens to get a little more crowded, you can do more than just lament the fact that someone had nice things and salvation. You can rejoice with all the angels in heaven when one sinner repents.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Even so, Lord, quickly come To Thy final harvest home; Gather Thou Thy people in, Free from sorrow, free from sin, There, forever purified, In Thy garner to abide: Come with all Thine angels, come, Raise the glorious harvest home. (LSB 892:4)

Tuesday of the Last Week of the Church Year

NOVEMBER 25, 2025

Today's Reading: Colossians 1:13-20

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

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." (Colossians 1:15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

This is what God looks like. Jesus. And you'll only see it here. On account of the "image of the invisible God" part. We rush to creation to find evidence of God, but can't see anything, even if we know that even there Christ was working. Psalm 19 is right. Creation shows there is a God. It doesn't reveal Him fully. You can argue about how complex a bird's wing is. There is plenty out there to support the notion of intelligent design. But even then, what intelligence? It's why everyone can look at the same bird, the same mountain range at sunset, and come up with different ideas about how we got here.

Here's the thing, though. The chief work of God isn't creating. It's saving. This is the place you see God clearest. It looks like this. "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). The cross He bore to redeem creation. Which is grander, making what can be broken, or redeeming something in a way that it can't be lost? It isn't just intelligence that shaped creation, but love. Mercy grand enough to see the depths to which we've fallen in sin, the darkness we get lost in, the pain we feel, and assume it unto Himself. God was made man that He would take upon Himself the fullness of our sin and bring it to nothing upon the cross. He did this for you. And it's finished. Now. You live in the kingdom of the Son. On the Last Day, that kingdom will look like the resurrection. A new creation, free from darkness and sin and pain and death. But Colossians tells us that He has already transferred us. Already delivered us.

And again, you'll only see it here. On the cross. Not in creation. Because that part still looks pretty dark. So we look to the light of the world, Jesus, who darkness cannot overcome, who has borne death and left it broken and defeated. Even if you still live in the land of darkness, you live in the kingdom of the Son, who cannot die again. That means the darkness can assault you, but never own you. The creation can fall apart, but you'll just rise again. And if that ever gets hard to see, look to the cross, and know it stands.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Praise be to Christ in whom we see The image of the Father shown, The firstborn Son revealed and known, The truth and grace of deity; Through whom creation came to birth, Whose fingers set the stars in place, The unseen pow'rs, and this small earth, The furthest bounds of time and space. (LSB 538:1)

Wednesday of the Last Week of the Church Year

NOVEMBER 26, 2025

Today's Reading: Revelation 22:1-21

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

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates." (Revelation 22:14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Bible ends with hope. Christ will return soon. The faithful pray, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus," and the grace of the Lord Jesus is with them all. If there's that much hope, it can endure even when the evildoer still does evil. The filthy will still be filthy. The righteous still do right, and the holy still are holy. Don't worry. Hope. And in hope, live. It's going to look messy. As we live closer each day to the last when Christ returns, the evil and the holy will live alongside one another. It will look so messy that at times, we'll lose sight of who is who. We find ourselves in plenty of filth, committing plenty of sin, and arguing about the right context of it all so we can appear righteous. Every war is fought so that the winner can proclaim their deeds righteous at the end and vilify the loser. Every sinner knows the pattern of self-justification. People blame others. People excuse themselves. So do you. Everyone will just keep doing what we're doing until the end. But the Lord sees through the mess as to who is who. Not by your excuses. Not by your self-justifications. By His water. By His grace. By His Baptism.

You who have been baptized, who have washed your robes, have the right to the Tree of Life. Even your sin can't take that right from you. For Jesus has taken that sin away through your Baptism. You are holy. Jesus makes you that way through your Baptism. Let the one who is holy still be holy. It's just who you are. Even when you fall into sin. Daily, you are washed clean again. That's why, in faith, you worship Christ. Keep doing what you're doing. Take your sin to Jesus. Let the one who is thirsty take the water of life without price. Rejoice in your Baptism. Live in hope. The end will be soon. But even while it's messy, never worry about who you are. You are baptized.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Spirit, water, blood entreating, Working faith and its completing In the One whose death-defeating Life has come, with life for all. (LSB 597:5)

Thanksgiving Day

NOVEMBER 27, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 17:11-19

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

*"[the lepers] lifted up their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.'"
(Luke 17:13)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Today, we celebrate the blessed and historic feast of American Thanksgiving and try to keep the sarcasm off our faces. Pilgrims and Indians ate together, got along perfectly, and avoided arguing about politics. If you sprinkle some Jesus on it, there's a sermon in there about who you're thankful to. The problem is, I'm bad at it. All I can do is hang onto the losses. The what could have beens. I can come up with something to say at the table, but my heart just isn't in it most years.

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me a long list of stuff I can't list here because of word counts. This is most certainly true. Still, it's easier to find two things missing than all the ones there. That's why trying to be more thankful doesn't work for long. We don't need Thanksgiving sermons here. We need Jesus healing the least of these. Us.

This is more than just a reminder to look on the bright side. Leprosy sermons aren't about feeling better with your lot in life; they're about Jesus helping people who can't help themselves. He's not with the worthy, but the outcasts, the unclean, and even helps those who don't know what thankfulness really is. Even the nine who fail to return are still healed. Because Christ isn't in it for the thank yous. He did it because He loves them. He bears the cross for them. And He loves you. It isn't measured in how many things you can list at the table to give thanks for. It's measured in the cross.

Only Samaritan was truly thankful because thankfulness isn't halfhearted praise, but going back to the source for more. True thankfulness is getting seconds because that means more to whoever cooked for you all day than anything else. Go to the Thanksgiving Meal. The Eucharist. Communion. Then, go back for more. Thanksgiving is just returning to it over and over, heaping everything else that wasn't enough on a pile, and rejoicing in forgiveness and mercy for it all.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Even so, Lord, quickly come To Thy final harvest home; Gather Thou Thy people in, Free from sorrow, free from sin, There, forever purified, In Thy garner to abide: Come with all Thine angels, come, Raise the glorious harvest home. (LSB 892:4)

Friday of the Last Week of the Church Year

NOVEMBER 28, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: Table of Duties - To Workers of All Kinds
Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 2:1-22; Isaiah 3:1-4:6; 1 Peter 1:13-25

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

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The language here is...challenging. Slave. Obey. Earthly masters. Just as you would obey Christ. First of all, slaves. Second of all, I'm not even great at obeying Christ in the first place, let alone sinners like every earthly master. I'm not going to parse the word slave and come up with a definition that's more palatable. I'm not going to wax eloquent on the working class that can't escape poverty. Almost all of you have someone in charge of you. That's plenty to talk about already. When one sinner has power over another, that doesn't naturally produce a sense of peace. Those kinds of power dynamics are easy to abuse.

But Luther sees only gift. Vocation isn't just "thou shalt not rage against the machine." The gift of vocation sees God behind all things. Even sinners who are your boss. Ephesians says to serve them as if you were serving Christ. Because Christ works through your neighbor. Now there are two things to talk about. First, if your boss abuses you, that's always bad. That's never good. God is not pleased by this sin. You can tell, not because He gives you the boss, but because He gives your boss the same Ten Commandments. Second, you can expect God to work good through your boss anyway. Think about it, as sinful as all of us are, and as prone as those power dynamics are to abuse, we have not descended into anarchy. God brings more good from these relationships than we have any right to deserve, but we can expect them anyway because He is gracious.

When it comes to your boss, recognize that God wants to care for you through them. Your role as a worker, in whatever phraseology you use, is challenging. Because all of us, in an uneven power dynamic, would rather be God than the Christian. Repent, and recognize just how much good we receive because God, who is powerful, is merciful to us. He even wants to use your boss to make sure you're provided for. It won't be perfect this side of glory, but we can dare to hope because God, who knows your boss too, dares to promise good here.

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)

Saturday of the Last Week of the Church Year

NOVEMBER 29, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Advent 1 - Psalm 25:4-5, 21-22; antiphon: Psalm 25:1-3a

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 5:1-25; Amos 1:1-9:15; 1 Peter 2:1-12

"Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles." (Psalm 25:22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Advent strikes a truer chord in the Psalms. We wait for the God who has made great promises. Let me not be put to shame. By the devil, who prowls about like a lion seeking to devour me. By the world, who finds little worth in everything I call precious. By myself, because if I'm being honest, the devil and the world will probably ignore me, except for the fact that I take shelter under a God whose law I make a mockery of. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles. Even when his troubles are himself.

Advent is a season of penitential hope. And we treat those two things like oil and water. Real hope has no shame. The truly penitent are too downcast to dare to hope. To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul anyway. My escape from shame isn't myself. It's my God. It's yours. He advents to take away your sin, to bear your shame, and promises to return in glory at last to put right everything shameful that the devil, the world, and my own sinful flesh can do wrong. So we wait in penitent hope. That's the right kind. We won't be lost to dwelling in our shame. We'll take it to the Jesus who advents to bear it upon a cross, who advents to meet us at the altar with forgiveness for all of our sins, and who advents at last to free us from this vicious cycle of daily dying and rising to sin. On the Last Day, we'll only rise.

Instead of a focus only on what's wrong, Advent says God will show up to be what's right. Our Redeemer. He invites everyone with shame. Bring the shame from all you've done. All the shame from what's been done to you. All the shame the world heaps on you, and all the devil can stir up, too. Gather it up and take it to where God advents to join you to Himself at His table, where He feeds you with His Body and Blood and joins you to angelic hosts and all the company of heaven who sing hymns just because they see you with them at the feast. The mark of freedom from shame isn't a perfect life. It's one of waiting for the God who takes shame away. Indeed, none who wait for Christ shall be put to shame.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Come, Thou precious Ransom, come, Only hope for sinful mortals!
Come, O Savior of the world! Open are to Thee all portals. Come, Thy
beauty let us see; Anxiously we wait for Thee. (LSB 350:1)*

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Morning and Evening Prayers by Lutheran Service Builder © 2023 Concordia Publishing House.

Higher Things Reflections are free, like the Gospel! They may be reproduced for congregational, personal, and other non-commercial use. Please use the following attribution: "Daily Reflections are provided by Higher Things. www.higherthings.org. Used with permission."

Higher Things exists and grows on the basis of donations and free-will offerings from congregations and individuals. All donations are tax-deductible. If you wish to contribute to the work of Higher Things, please send your donation to:

**Higher Things, Inc.
P.O. Box 175
Lisbon, IA 52253**

(Donations are also accepted at www.higherthings.org/giving via credit card or Venmo @HigherThings)

Visit our website at www.higherthings.org to read, listen to, or subscribe to Reflections each day.

