

Clergy of the ELDoNA, affiliated congregations and missions, and sister churches

Rt. Rev. James Heiser

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

Good Shepherd L.C., Tony, WI; Alpha & Omega Lutheran Mission, Winter, WI; Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI; Peace L.C., Ironwood, MI

Rev. Ernest Bernet

Discipleship L. C., Mineral Wells, TX

Rev. David Carver

St. Paul L. C., Taylorsville, NC

Rev. Jerald Dulas

Sts. Peter & Paul L. C., Simpsonville, SC; All Saints Lutheran Mission, Myrtle Beach, SC; St. Michael & All Angels Lutheran Mission, Martinez, GA

Rev. Douglas Handrich

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Michael Henson

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL; Port Charlotte Lutheran Mission, Port Charlotte, FL; Memphis Lutheran Mission, Lakeland, TN

Rev. Daniel Mensing

Faith Lutheran Church, Beaverton, OR

Rev. Randy Moll

Good Shepherd L.C., Rogers, AR

Rev. Mark Mueller

Redeemer L. C., Cambridge, MN

Rev. John Rutowicz

St. Boniface Lutheran Church, Niles, MI

Rev. Paul Rydecki

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Las Cruces, NM; Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Mission, Silver City, NM

Rev. Josiah Scheck

Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

Rev. Eric Stefanski

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR; Emmanuel Lutheran Mission, Conway, AR

Rev. Joshua Sullivan

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Kerrville, TX; Faith Lutheran Mission, Leander, TX

Rev. Timothy Tolar

St. Luke Lutheran Church, Kenai, AK
Homer Lutheran Mission, Homer, AK

Rev. Brandon Warr

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

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Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Martin Jackson

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Rev. Carlos Marin

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Medellin, Colombia

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



APRIL 4–MAY 1, 2021

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NORTH AMERICA**

The Calendar

April 4	<i>Easter—The Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord</i>	TLH 195
April 11	<i>Easter 1—Quasimodogeniti</i>	TLH 208
April 18	<i>Easter 2—Mericordias Domini</i>	TLH 436
April 19 (M)	Philip Melanchthon, Confessor (White)	
April 25	<i>Easter 3—Jubilate/St. Mark, Evangelist</i>	TLH 268

(All pastors and deacons of the diocese have received the Diocesan Calendar and Office Hymns for 2021 by the Festival of the Circumcision. If you would like a complete list, see your pastor, or contact the diocesan office via email at info@eldona.org)

ST. IGNATIUS LUTHERAN SEMINARY the Spring Quarter resumes April 19. (The break is so lengthy because the instructors and seminarians will participate in the Colloquium and Synod.) The Spring Quarter concludes May 28. Summer Intensives begin June 7.

2021 COLLOQUIUM AND SYNOD is still scheduled to take place at Salem Lutheran Church (Malone, TX) the week of April 12–16; the current circumstances regarding the pandemic do not seem likely to lead to new actions by the Texas governor which would preclude meeting this year. The Colloquium begins with a Vespers on Monday the 12th; the Colloquium will continue through Tuesday and Wednesday, with the Synod scheduled for Thursday and Friday.

SATURDAY, MAY 1: REV. 7:9-17 FEST. OF ST. PHILIP & ST. JAMES

Remembering the saints who have gone before us in the Church should stir our faithful humility. Thousands of years have passed before our short time, and a vast multitude of people—faithful and unfaithful—have lived and died. Some, like the blessed Apostles Philip and James, have played major roles in the story of God’s Kingdom; while others, like many of us, serve in smaller parts. None of us has the right to be vain or puffed up. We are made saints only by the grace of God, and our work as His people has value only because of Jesus Christ’s divine work for our salvation.

The chosen disciples who would become our Lord’s Apostles had their own moments of being dim or vain, but Christ still exalted them to places of glory because they were part of His will. We are always tempted by Satan to exalt ourselves and seek glory, often taking him up on his twisted offers and bowing down before his corrupt will. But that throne of glory is deadly, and it is nothing like what our Lord shows us in His Word in Revelation. All the company of heaven is brought to their knees, with faces on the ground, because all the faithful are rightly humbled before the profound presence of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

Prayer: Almighty God, whom to know is everlasting life, grant unto us that, as Thy Son gave knowledge of life eternal to Thine Apostles Philip and James by revealing Himself to them as the only Way to Thee, we may by a true and living faith ever know Him as our only Savior; through the same, Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9 our Lord said, “My strength is made perfect in weakness.” This story from John’s Gospel shows Jesus using the weakness of death and the dullness of His disciples to teach holy, perfect wisdom.

The darkness of our fleshly minds would have us second-guess God, but then assume we are right and lean on our own understanding. The Light of Christ teaches us to trust in Him and do as He commands. Too often we want to argue or rationalize, rather than just do that which needs to be done. It is good for us to be discerning and reasonable as much as we can, but that reason must be used in service to God’s work, not for purposes of serving ourselves.

God will not command us to do evil. However, the bigger picture isn’t always easy to understand. That is why faith and His Word teach us to obey authorities and not be self-willed or rebellious. As we know from the familiar verse, Romans 8:28, “...all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Our Lord sets things in order and directs them. Even when we cannot see or understand how it will all work out, observing His commands and trusting in Him is the faithful thing to do.

Prayer: Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Easter Sunday

Chapter IX.

Of the Descent of Christ to Hell.

There has also been a controversy among some theologians, who have subscribed to the Augsburg Confession concerning the following article: When, and in what manner, the Lord Christ, according to our simple Christian faith, descended to hell, whether this was done before or after His death? Also, whether it occurred according to the soul alone, or according to the divinity alone, or in body and soul, spiritually and bodily? Also, whether this article belongs to the passion or to the glorious victory and triumph of Christ?

But since this article ... cannot be comprehended by the senses or by the reason, but must be grasped alone by faith, it is our unanimous advice that there should be no disputation concerning it, but that it should be believed and taught only in the simplest manner; according as Dr. Luther of blessed memory, in his sermon at Torgau in the year 1533, has, in a very Christian manner, explained this article, separated from it all useless, unnecessary questions, and admonished all godly Christians to Christian simplicity of faith.

For it is sufficient that we know that Christ descended to hell, destroyed hell for all believers, and delivered them from the power of death and of the devil, from eternal condemnation [and even] from the jaws of hell. But how this occurred, we should reserve until the other world, where not only this point, but also still others, will be revealed which we here simply believe and cannot comprehend with our blind reason.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

There cannot be a Christian alive who wouldn't long to be one of these disciples walking with Jesus. What a blessing, even not knowing it was Him, to have Jesus, "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, [expound] to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Talk about one thorough catechism class!

"Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight." After one of the most thorough catechesis lessons to possibly ever take place—even though their hearts burned within them while Jesus opened the Scriptures to them on the road—it was in the taking, blessing, and breaking of the bread that their eyes were finally opened.

It is not a surprise why a pastor's catechesis class (aiming at 1st Communion, Confirmation, or adult membership) always concludes with the study of the Lord's Supper. Jesus, instituting such a sacred meal, created the ultimate way of knowing exactly what His Body and Blood bought, and continually brings: the forgiveness of sins! This is truly a most blessed way of having one's eyes opened to God's grace through Christ Jesus!

Prayer: Almighty God, who through Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech Thee that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Today's reading also makes the comparison between those who are the Lord's and those who wickedly resist Him. The contrast is a summary of why Scripture teaches the examples of good, pious behavior in the previous verses. In the vocations that God establishes for His people we have specific ways that we can show love and serve His holy will.

People talk about their vague notions of love and piety, but God gives us many clear commands in His Word that often get ignored. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not just talk about ideas concerning righteousness and forgiveness; He manifested these in all that He did. He teaches us to do likewise. Those who do evil are those who continue to act as enemies of the Lord. His face is against them because they mock and detract from His commands.

Even children of God stumble and fall in this way. We talk about faithful teaching, strive for right practice, and desire to serve in love, but we still fail to actually do what is good according to His will. Thanks be to God that He continues to remind us with His Word and the work of His Church, so that we may be strengthened by His Spirit, repent of our failings, and endeavor to love as He commands us!

Prayer: Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“The hand of the Lord shall be known to His servants, and His indignation to His enemies.”

We do not merit the benevolent hand of the Lord because we are better than His enemies. We know that He is good and forgiving because faith makes us able to know it! His Holy Spirit creates faith in us so that we may see the hand of Almighty God in all things and rejoice in His mercy. The Lord is still kind to His enemies. They still receive food and clothing and many other blessings. The difference is that they have no faith. They resist His Spirit so that they take His creation for granted and attribute its goodness to wrong sources. God has a right to be indignant against those who ignore and reject Him.

However, His faithful people should never forget that we were once His enemies. We are His servants by His grace, not by our own virtue. So the work of the Church continues to be preaching, teaching, faithfully partaking of the Sacraments, loving, and serving, so that others may be blessed by His Word and Spirit. Through His Church He continues to extend His hand, because He desires that other enemies might become children of His Kingdom and be saved!

Prayer: Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

There is a practice that pastors can do when visiting the flock entrusted to their care at the hospital, or in nursing homes, or simply at homes. Upon entering the room or the house, no matter the situation, the pastor greets the people with the words “Peace be unto you.” Sound familiar? It is not a coincidence that these are similar words to what Jesus spoke when He visits His disciples who were hiding for fear in the upper room. Just as Jesus is the bringer of peace between sinful man and God, so pastors, who go at His bidding and represent Him in the Office that He instituted, bring that same peace with them. Faithful pastors are equipped with the most powerful, and peaceful, thing in the universe: God’s Holy Scripture, which points to Christ Jesus.

Life can certainly weigh us down with its tribulations in this fallen world. We Christians, however, rejoice that God has opened our understanding so that we might comprehend His Holy Scriptures. The necessity for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day is a message of rescue, so repentance and remission of sins has been (and continues to be) preached to us in His name to bring that salvation. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Almighty God, who through Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech Thee that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

What a great reminder God displays for forgetful, fallen mankind. Once before the disciples toiled all night and caught no fish (Luke 5), and now once again they work a whole night with nothing—human effort alone proves fruitless. But with the Lord’s Word the net gets filled on both accounts. The first time Peter doesn’t know what the Lord brings with His all-powerful Word, so he bows in disgrace and rightfully pleads for mercy. The second time he knows that the Lord’s all-powerful Word doesn’t just bring the truth of His Law, it fills the nets and, more importantly, it carries the promise of forgiveness—and Peter yearns for it.

Just as we “cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, sanctified and preserved us in the true faith,” so we should know that it is God and His all-powerful Word that is the determiner and supplier of all things needful. Being drawn by faith to His Word and Sacrament ministry, and thankfully knowing what the Lord is delivering, the New Man in us, like Peter, yearns to receive what Christ brings—forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Prayer: Almighty God, who through Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech Thee that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

This familiar illustration from our Lord Jesus makes the point that faith trusts in His Words, not our own understanding. Faith does not just grab the Word of God and then assure us that we have it all figured out. His Holy Spirit teaches us to remember that we are weak in our sinfulness and our eyes are darkened by unrighteousness. So, while we are to strive for growth and understanding, we are also taught to be humble and repent in all those times when the clear Word of Christ’s commands are different from our assumptions about what the Scriptures say.

Our broken society is working overtime to teach people that they should fill the world with their opinions. Whether it is about consumer goods, politics, pop culture, or even one another, we are taught that we have a right to judge and comment on everything. The devil wants us to think that we all have the vocation of “expert critic” concerning all things. But God would have us be still and trust in His holy commands. He teaches us to love and serve according to our clear vocations. He teaches us to hear Jesus Christ over all. Rather than subject things to our old wicked inclinations, we are to trust in our Lord for His judgment and His mercy!

Prayer: Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Satan has always taught man to be prideful and self-willed. God, on the other hand, has always taught us to be humble. Pride takes the little bit of knowledge or little bit of power that each of us has and twists it for sinful use. We are tempted to think we are smarter, better, or more powerful than others because we have words or abilities that others don't have at the moment.

Faithful humility remembers that all good power and all good knowledge come only from the Lord. These things are gifts that He gives according to His divine grace so that we may serve in our given place and time. We have no right to doubt God or exalt ourselves over others. Our problems are not the only problems that matter, and our talents are not the only assets that are serving His will. As God's Word in 1 Corinthians 13 reminds us, apart from love born from faith, our powers are as nothing.

When God rebukes His people He is trying to teach us faithful humility; and when He teaches us humility He is making us to reflect His beloved Son. As Christ is reflected in our loving service we are blessed by the holy light and wisdom that is given to us in the glorious Gospel of our crucified and risen Savior!

Prayer: Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

A blessed reversal of messages takes place in this event. The Roman guards were placed at the tomb to confirm the death of Jesus, to keep His followers away, and to display the reign of the worldly Roman empire as all-powerful. They may have been able to hold back men, but they could not guard it against the truly all-powerful Christ in His resurrection through the closed tomb.

Down comes an angel sent by God; rocking the earth like a superhero's purposeful hard landing depicted in movies today. God's truth has entered the scene, the Roman message of death is replaced with God's messenger of Good News, a welcoming message of life and reconciliation through Christ Jesus that needed to be spread as soon as possible, and as far as possible. And so it did.

That same earth-shattering news is brought to your ears through God's Divine Service to you each week. Is an earthquake needed to substantiate God at work? Not at all! God effectively does what He says through simple words, water, bread and wine, thanks to His all-powerful Word that endures forever. He is still spreading His message of life and reconciliation through those means—and rejoicing, we are to be recipients!

Prayer: Almighty God, who through Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech Thee that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father...” The “yet” in this sentence from Jesus carries so much weight. It is as if He is saying to Mary, “It’s not in this physical way that you are to cling to Me, but I have instituted other ways in which you may cling all the more.”

Luther was keenly aware of Christ’s point to Mary, which is why he wrote: “If now I seek the forgiveness of sins, I do not run to the cross, for I will not find it given there. Nor must I hold to the suffering of Christ, as Dr. Karlstadt trifles, in knowledge or remembrance, for I will not find it there either. But I will find in the sacrament or gospel the word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross.” (LW 40, p. 213-214)

Rejoice, indeed, dear saints of God that you have been brought to know where to run in your time of need for the forgiveness of sins. You cannot go to the place where He won it on the cross, but He distributes such forgiveness through His Word and Sacraments. Cling to Him there as much as possible.

Prayer: Almighty God, who through Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech Thee that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

cross cannot be wanting. And let no one think that he shall have peace; but he must risk whatever he has upon earth—possessions, honor, house and estate, wife and child, body and life. That hurts indeed our flesh and the old Adam. For the test is to be steadfast and to suffer with patience whatever afflictions befall us, and to yield whatever is taken from us.

Therefore there is just as much need, as in everything else, that we pray without ceasing: “Dear Father, Thy will be done, not the will of the devil and of our enemies, nor of anything that would persecute and destroy Thy holy Word, or hinder Thy kingdom; and grant that we may bear with patience and may overcome in whatever it be our lot to suffer on account of this Thy will, so that our poor flesh may not yield or fall away from weakness or indolence.”

In these three petitions we find expressed in the simplest manner the need which pertains to God Himself, yet all for our sakes. For whatever we pray concerns only us, namely, as we have said, that the will of God, which must be done without us, may also be done in us. For as His name must be hallowed and His kingdom come without our prayer, so also His will must be done and succeed, although the devil with all his adherents raise a tumult and rage in fury, and undertake to utterly exterminate the Gospel. But for our own sake we must pray that, even against their fury, His will be also done without hindrance in us, that they may accomplish nothing, and we remain firm against all violence and persecution, and submit to the will of God.

Such prayer must indeed be our protection and defense now, to repel and overcome all that the devil, pope, bishops, tyrants and heretics can do against our Gospel. Let them rage all together and attempt their utmost, and deliberate and resolve how they may destroy and exterminate us, that their will and counsel may prevail. One or two Christians with this petition alone shall be our wall against them, upon which they shall dash themselves to pieces. This consolation and confidence we have, that the will and purpose of the devil and of all our enemies must fail and come to naught, however proud, secure and powerful they know themselves to be. For if their will were not broken and frustrated, the kingdom of God could not abide upon the earth or His name be hallowed.

—The Large Catechism, the Lord’s Prayer

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Jubilate Sunday

The Third Petition. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Thus far we have prayed that God's name be honored by us, and that His kingdom prevail among us; in which two points is comprehended all that pertains to the honor of God and to our salvation, that we come into the ownership of God and all His possessions. But the great need is, that we cling firmly to them, and do not suffer ourselves to be torn therefrom. For as in a good government it is not only necessary that there be those who build and govern well, but also those who make defense, afford protection and maintain it in security; so here also, although we have prayed for the things of the greatest need, viz. for the Gospel, faith and the Holy Ghost, that He may govern and redeem us from the power of the devil, we must also pray that His will be done. For if we are to abide therein, there will be wonderful encounters, so that, on account of them, we must suffer many thrusts and blows from everything that ventures to oppose and prevent the fulfillment of the two petitions that precede.

For no one believes how the devil opposes and exerts all his powers against them, and cannot suffer that anyone teach or believe aright. And it hurts him beyond measure to suffer his lies and abominations, that have been honored under the most specious pretexts of the divine Name, to be exposed, and that he be disgraced, and besides be driven out of the heart, and suffer such a breach to be made in his kingdom. Therefore, with all his power and might he chafes and rages as a fierce enemy, and marshals all his subjects, and enlists the world and our own flesh as his allies. For our flesh is in itself indolent and inclined to evil, even though we have accepted and believe the Word of God. The world, too, is perverse and wicked; this he incites against us in various ways, and kindles and adds fuel, that he may hinder and drive us back, cause us to fall and again bring us under his power. That is all his will, mind and thought, for which he strives day and night, and never rests a moment, but employs all arts, malicious devices, ways and means which he can invent.

We therefore who would be Christians must surely reckon upon having the devil with all his angels, together with the world, as our enemies, who will bring every possible misfortune and grief upon us. For where the Word of God is preached, accepted or believed, and produces fruit, there the holy

SATURDAY, APRIL 10: MATTHEW 28:16-20 EASTER SATURDAY

What a perfect text to conclude the first week after celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord! The risen Christ Jesus commissions His Apostles to take His disciple-making Word to all nations out in the world. What a daunting task it would be if they thought that it was left up to them. That, however, is not how God works His plan of salvation!

Take note of the words given to the Apostles prior to the Great Commission: "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth.'" Those are purposefully spoken first to bring immense comfort to the Apostles. Why so comforting? Because it relieves them from wondering about any kind of strength in and of themselves when it comes to the spreading of Christ's Church on earth.

The risen One, who has been given authority over heaven and earth, began a commission for His Church, and that same authority has sustained it, as well. What a joy that twenty centuries later, at His authoritative doing, you have been blessed to be adopted into it. May the rejoicing abound all the more throughout this Eastertide. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Hallelujah!

Prayer: Almighty God, who through Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech Thee that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Quasimodogeniti Sunday

Article V.

That we may obtain this faith, the Office of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justified those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others, who think that the Holy Ghost cometh to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

Article XXV.

Confession in our churches is not abolished; for it is not usual to give the Body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are most carefully taught concerning the faith and assurance of absolution, about which, before this time, there was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by His command. The power of the Keys is commended, and we show what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences; that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from Heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.

Aforetime, satisfactions were immoderately extolled; of faith and the merit of Christ, and the righteousness of faith, no mention was made; wherefore, on this point, our churches are by no means to be blamed. For this even our adversaries must needs concede to us, that the doctrine concerning repentance has been most diligently treated and laid open by our teachers.

But of Confession, they teach, that an enumeration of sins is not necessary, and that consciences be not burdened with anxiety to enumerate all sins, for it is impossible to recount all sins, as the Psalm testifies [19:13]: "Who can understand his errors?" Also Jeremiah [17:9]: "The heart is deceitful, who can know it?" But if no sins were forgiven, except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see, nor can remember.

—The Augsburg Confession

SATURDAY, APRIL 24: HEB. 13:7-21 MISERICORDIAS DOMINI

"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your soul, as those who must give account."

Jesus Christ is the Great Shepherd of the sheep, but He also establishes the others who lead, rule, and tend His flocks. The Word of God makes it clear that husbands are to be obeyed "just as the Church is subject to Christ" (Ephesians 5:22-24). Governing authorities are "appointed by God" (Romans 13:1-2). For those who lead and those who obey, there is a serious responsibility in these roles because our faith is reflected in how we act. Leaders do not have the right to abuse this power from the Lord. But those under authority do not have the right to disobey because they don't like how the leader is doing things. Everyone is accountable to Almighty God.

We need the blood of Christ to forgive us because we are all wayward sheep. The order and authorities He establishes are not our salvation or perfection, they are means through which He continues to teach us about our need for repentance and forgiveness from Him! Leaders will fail, and followers will be negligent, but our Lord still calls us to observe all that He commands through them because it is truly profitable for our faith in Him!

Prayer: God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

False teachers and bad shepherds are dangerous because they commit their unrighteous acts in the name of the Lord. If they were just coming as unrighteous men, doing nasty and hateful things, they would be easy to avoid. But men who ignore the righteousness of God's whole council and yet say "This is the Lord's will" leave the flock confused. They feed God's people, but they feed them out of their own self-will, not out of the holy judgment and divine mercy that Christ commands. So the Lord rightly says to such negligent shepherds, "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them."

Faithful shepherds strive to feed the saints of God's flock with the righteousness that only comes from Christ Jesus. Our Lord was strong in His rebukes against faithless hypocrisy, but He was also patient and merciful with those who trusted in Him. Through the history of the Church there are copious examples of failure to one extreme or the other. Israel had negligent holy men and harsh kings; the church of the Papists lost sight of the true Gospel, and many modern Protestant bodies neglect the discipline of God's Law.

The true Church and faithful undershepherds cling to the Word of God and are made strong in Christ's commands. The people may stumble, but by God's Spirit they repent. They may have to endure problems, but their fear is taken away by faith and hope that is focused on Christ crucified.

Prayer: God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The justification of God's people is the glory of God Himself—a vindication of His just and holy name. Dr. Luther explains in the Small Catechism concerning the Lord's Prayer, "God's name is indeed holy in itself; but we pray that it may be holy among us also." From an outside perspective, the sanctity (or lack thereof) of God's name was judged by the holiness or wickedness of His people. The prophet Ezekiel tells us that His reputation among the heathen nations had been ruined because of Israel's sinfulness: they gave in to the desires of the flesh, broke the Lord's commandments, and even worshipped false gods. If the people were so immoral, what did that say about their God? But God would not let His name be so profaned. He would sanctify it by sanctifying the people. He would wash them, cleanse them, and renew their minds and hearts to follow His commandments. He did this, not for their sake, but for His own name's sake.

When the Lord justifies us sinners, He reveals Himself as just, as St. Paul writes: "...that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). Our Christian lives not only say something about us, but also about our God. Therefore, as Jesus teaches us, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In the Old Testament, circumcision made you a participant in God's covenant with the people. It made you a beneficiary of God's promise to Abraham, but also bound you to the Law of Moses. The Gentiles were outside of these blessings and duties, "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). But in Christ Jesus, according to the New Covenant established by His death and resurrection, there is no distinction between Jew or Gentile, between male or female, between servant and master. All are made holy. They form one body under one Head.

We Christians have been brought into the New Covenant by being baptized into Christ the Mediator. By His grace we have all of the blessings, and none of the curses. Jesus bore the curse of the Law to make us free—not from the Law itself, but from its curse. We are now alive to God, as alive as Christ is from the dead, and free to walk in the light of His holy commandments. We lack nothing because Christ has supplied us with everything: regeneration and renewal, victory over death, and especially the forgiveness of sins. Now in this new life we must daily fight against our sinful flesh so that we do not fall back into the grave out of which God has raised us up.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones..."

People can be hard to love. Even if those people are saints in the Church, some are just harder to be patient with than others. But our Lord Jesus does not give us the right to despise one another. We may get angry if they do evil; we may get frustrated when they make the same mistakes over and over; but we do not have the right to be unmerciful or hateful toward each other.

Christ has shown each of us more patience and mercy than we can truly appreciate. All of us who are faithful members of the Church have been forgiven much, and so we are called to love and serve according to that great gift. Furthermore, those who are not part of the Church need our love and patience so that God may work through us to save them as well! No matter how hard it is to love some people, we must keep our Lord's teachings in perspective, because He loves them and wants to bring them to salvation. The Gospel of Jesus Christ and His love for the world is more important than our own feelings.

Prayer: God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Beasts” that would devour the flocks of God are wicked men who are self-willed. The history of the Church is plagued with examples of sinful undershepherds who are more interested in vain displays and easy money than in truly caring for the people of the flock. Sometimes it seems like there are more thieves and robbers than there are faithful servants. But God promises that He will bring His saints to a day when we will not have to deal with “beasts” or any of the other problems that come to the Church in this world.

We have no promise that the work of Christ’s flock will be easy or peaceful now. Our Lord tells us that men will be weak, and sin, and need to be forgiven. He assures us that there will be struggles and tribulations. There will be problems. To think it should be easy and glorious now is to forget much of what God has shown us throughout His Word. But we do have His promise that there will be a day when we are delivered from all the difficulties and sin. Both the Old Testament and the New assure us of this glorious hope.

In the meantime, we are called to serve, love, and be patient, because God desires that people continue to hear His call to repent and be forgiven on account of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ!

Prayer: God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Being purified by obeying the Truth means nothing else than believing the Gospel. The Gospel is, by its very nature, a promise. Promises call for faith (see Apology, Art. IV (II). 50). Obedience to the Gospel is not a matter of works, but of faith—faith worked in the heart by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit purifies our hearts by faith, through which our sins are forgiven and not imputed (Acts 15:9). By giving us this faith, the Spirit revives us, regenerates us, makes us born again. As new life springs up after the winter frost, so new life begins in us. That planting which comes alive in our hearts is the seed of God’s holy Word—a seed that will not die in the heat of summer, nor the cold of winter, but which abides forever. May we always hold fast to the faithful preaching of this Word of Life!

As that seed grows in us, it must bear fruit. “The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth” (Ephesians 5:9). Chiefly among these fruits is love: love for God our Savior, and love for our Christian brothers and sisters. We must prove ourselves alive by these fruits. Show forth how His Word has taken root in you. Show your neighbor how God’s love is reflected in your behavior. Show to yourself that you are truly born again from the dead.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Like any of us would be, the Disciples were afraid following the death of their Lord. Now that the Shepherd had been dispatched, what was next for the sheep? Were they appointed for slaughter? Had Christ failed to be what He said He was? What message could console their quaking? “Peace to you!” That is the message Christ brings to His disciples, “...peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Peace comes from the forgiveness of our sins, earned at the cross, proved by the resurrection, and given through the Ministry of Reconciliation.

Christ commissioned His Apostles with the duty to exercise the Power of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. That power is opening the kingdom by remitting sins unto the penitent, and closing the kingdom by retaining the sins of the impenitent. Through the Holy Ministry the Lord offers, gives, and seals to us the blessings He obtained by His suffering, death, and resurrection. Forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation come to us through the Means of Grace: the Gospel and the Holy Sacraments. This Ministry is meant to console our quaking when we feel convicted by the Law. Our hearts can take comfort at the words of absolution proclaimed by our pastors, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us Himself.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Our Lord graciously affirmed St. Peter three times, which stands in contrast to the three times that Peter denied Jesus. Simon Peter, son of Jonah, made big promises about following the Christ, but when challenged, Peter failed miserably. Men stumble and fall. Sometimes we fall in very bad, very profound ways. But Christ still calls us back to His way and desires to restore us in grace and forgiveness.

Undershepherds are still regular men. They sin, but Christ can still call them back to proper faith and love so that they may feed the other lambs with the very same mercy that the Lord showed them. Pastors are called to be living examples of the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Tending the Lord’s flocks and feeding His lambs is a vocation that brings many temptations and difficulties, and no pastor does it perfectly. Pastors and hearers alike should always remember to pray for help, patience, and forgiveness, because all of us who live and serve in the fellowship of God’s Church are His lambs, and we are only sustained through the grace and forgiveness of our crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ!

Prayer: God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The voice of Christ, our Good Shepherd, is the holy Word of the Scriptures. And that voice is clearly and powerfully carried on in the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran teaching. Today we commemorate Philip Melanchthon, so we also remember the immensely valuable role that he served in authoring our confessional documents and in teaching the true faith in our Lord's Church.

The devil constantly entices men to be thieves and robbers, to think and do unrighteous things. Teachers and leaders in the Church throughout the centuries drifted from the voice of Christ and acted like villains. But God also continued to use men to confess the true Word so that His people could be called back to faithfulness and obedience. The Lutheran confessors served in this way, and all who continue to believe, teach, and confess in word and deed the doctrine of the Book of Concord still serve to carry forth the voice of our Lord!

God graciously keeps speaking to us in His Law and Gospel. His Word does not change with the passage of time. His voice is sure and constant. The Good Shepherd calls us to repent of our many sins, but He also continues to graciously call us in the Church to believe in the forgiveness that comes only through Christ crucified and to receive the blessed Sacraments that keep us as His beloved lambs.

Prayer: God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son didst raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Every time we look at the crucifix of our Lord we should be reminded of our Baptism. Our Baptism connects us in such a wonderful, mysterious, and supernatural way to the cross and sepulcher of our crucified and risen Savior. By Baptism we are, in a way, plugged into His suffering, death, and resurrection so that we should look at the cross as our crucifixion, and the open tomb as our new life from the dead. How is this possible? Have we actually atoned for our own sins? Have we conquered death by our power or might? No! But by Baptism we put on Christ who has done these things for us. We are Baptized into Him, and in Him we own the events of Holy Week as though they happened to us.

Now, being spiritually risen from the dead, having our sins forgiven through the laver, let us not return to the tomb and once again wrap ourselves up in the burial shroud. Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, alive to God with a desire to live each and every day in the light of Christ's glorious resurrection! The Baptized of the Lord have a bright future to look forward to: not only are they risen spiritually through faith, but on the Last Day they will rise physically with their glorified bodies and, like their Savior, be received into the everlasting glory of the Father.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Law of Moses served a hard purpose. St. Paul says, “the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father” (Galatians 4:1-2). The strict education of the Law teaches the holy will of the Father, but it also teaches something more. While the Law does not preach Christ’s forgiveness, it does point to Christ. A true understanding of Moses points people to the realization that, because of their sins, they cannot fulfill the Law of Moses. They need to be delivered from their sins so that they can inherit the blessings of their heavenly Father.

In Christ we find that deliverance. In Christ we find our adoption as the children of God. And in Christ we find the inheritance that we have desired. “You are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Galatians 4:7). To make us His sons, God gave us His Son—a true Child of Israel who would fulfill the Law of Moses, endure its curse, and earn for us its blessings. May the Spirit of this Son always cry out within us, “Abba, Father!”

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Misericordias Domini Sunday

Article XIV.

Of Ecclesiastical Order, [the Lutherans] teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.

Article XV.

Of Rites and Usages in the Church, they teach, that those ought to be observed which may be observed without sin, and which are profitable unto tranquility and good order in the Church, as particular holydays, festivals, and the like.

Nevertheless, concerning such things, let men be admonished that consciences are not to be burdened, as though such observance was necessary to salvation. They are admonished also that human traditions instituted to propitiate God, to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are opposed to the Gospel and the doctrine of faith. Wherefore vows and traditions concerning meats and days, etc., instituted to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.—The Augsburg Confession

Article IV. Of the Papacy.

That the Pope is not, according to divine law or according to the Word of God, the head of all Christendom (for this name belongs to Jesus Christ solely and alone), but is only the bishop and pastor of the Church at Rome, and of those who voluntarily or through a human creature (that is a political magistrate) attach themselves to him, not to be under him as a lord, but with him as brethren and associates, as Christians; as the ancient councils and the age of St. Cyprian show.

But today none of the bishops venture to address the Pope as brother; but they must call him most gracious lord, even though they be kings or emperors. Such arrogance we neither will, can, nor ought with a good conscience to approve. Let him, however, who will do it, do so without us.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part II, §1–2