

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



JULY 4–31, 2021

**A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF
NORTH AMERICA**

The Calendar

July 4	Trinity 5	TLH 548
July 11	Trinity 6	TLH 287
July 18	Trinity 7	TLH 41
July 22 (R)	St. Mary Magdalene	
July 25	Trinity 8/St. James the Elder, Apostle	TLH 517
July 29 (R)	St. Olaf, King and Martyr	

ST. IGNATIUS LUTHERAN SEMINARY—Summer Intensives begin June 7 and continue through July 9. Please note: Matins on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday will be at 7:30 A.M. with classes beginning at 8 A.M.; on Wednesday, classes will begin at 7:30 A.M., with Matins at 11:30 A.M.

DIOCESAN VISITATION SCHEDULE—The diocesan visitations for 2021 have begun in earnest. Bishop Heiser was with Pr. Handrich and the saints of Holy Cross Lutheran Church (Peoria, IL) for the Rite of Disposition of their church building on June 13; the congregation is presently seeking a new location for services. Bishop Heiser met with Pr. Mueller on June 19 and with Pr Ahonen and the saints of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (Tony, WI) on June 20.

JULY 11	Pr. Mensing & Faith L.C. (Beaverton, OR)
JULY 16	Pr. Rydecki & Emanuel L.C. (Las Cruces, NM)
JULY 19-23	Pr. Sullivan & Holy Cross L.C. (Kerrville, TX)
JULY 26-27	Pr. Dulas & Sts. Peter & Paul L.C. (Simpsonville, SC)
JULY 28	Pr. Carver & St. Paul L.C. (Taylorsville, NC)
AUGUST 11	Pr. Scheck & Christ L.C. (Richmond, MO)
AUGUST 12	Pr. Handrich & Holy Cross L.C. (Peoria, IL)
AUGUST 13	Pr. Rutowicz & St. Boniface L.C. (Niles, MI)
AUG. 14-15	Pr. Henson, Dcn. Harroun & Trinity L.C. (Herrin, IL)
AUGUST 17	Pr. Stefanski & Holy Trinity L.C. (Harrison, AR)
AUGUST 18	Pr. Moll, Dcn. Jackson & Good Shepherd L.C. (Rogers, AR)



‘NEW’ ECCLESIASTICAL FURNISHING FOR ST. PATRICK’S—The saints of Holy Cross Lutheran Church resolved to donate their church furnishings—including altar, font, pulpit, lectern, and pews, among other items—to St. Patrick Lutheran Church in Chipley, Florida. The Peoria congregation is currently exploring options for renting space for holding future services.



SUMMER INTENSIVES—Classes taught during the Summer Intensives are a mix of local classes and remote teaching. Pr. Stefanski was able to come to Malone for the June 21–25 week when he was teaching the final week of the year of Greek instruction and the second week of the Pentateuch intensive.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

X. Of Ordination and the Call.

If the bishops were true bishops, and would devote themselves to the Church and the Gospel, they might be allowed, for the sake of love and unity, and not from necessity, to ordain and confirm us and our preachers; nevertheless, under the condition that all masks and phantoms of unchristian nature and display be laid aside. Yet because they neither are nor wish to be true bishops, but worldly lords and princes, who will neither preach, nor teach, nor baptize, nor administer the Lord's Supper, nor perform any work or office of the Church, but persecute and condemn those who being called discharge this duty; for their sake the Church ought not to remain without ministers.

Therefore, as the ancient example of the Church and the Fathers teach us, we ourselves will and ought to ordain suitable persons to this office; and (even according to their own laws) they have not the right to forbid or prevent us. For their laws say that those ordained even by heretics should be regarded and remain as ordained, as St. Jerome writes of the Church at Alexandria, that at first was governed in common by the bishops through the priests and preachers.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article X

It is often necessary and important to hold men to their own words and actions. Politeness is not always called for. In fact, our society is dying under the weight of niceness. This is not how the Apostles carried out their ministry. Peter had been saying over and over again that these men were primarily responsible for the murder of Jesus. In verse thirty he says, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.” God raised Him up; you murdered Him. This direct language makes the Jewish council nervous. The high priest says, “you... intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” Surely he must have remembered the mob who stood before Pilate and said, “Let his blood be on us and on our children!” (Matthew 27:25).

It is important to know when gentle words are called for and when blunt words are called for. These men were running toward hell. Only the clearest and most direct language would do. When speaking with unbelievers in our current society, it is often advisable to be gentle at first, but eventually they must be confronted with their sin and guilt. Our society largely doesn’t believe in sin and guilt. They must be confronted at some point to show them their need for the Gospel.

Prayer: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man’s understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

TUESDAY, JULY 6: LUKE 14:25–35 5TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

The status that we lose in this world because of our devotion to Christ will be replaced someday with a reputation for having been a loyal son and brother. This earthly country that you keep at arm's length will be replaced by a heavenly one. The family that you give up here in this world will be replaced a million times over in God's family when you sit down at that wedding feast in heaven. You will be loved and honored there as you have never been here. But, the road that leads to that heavenly kingdom is the road of suffering. It is that narrow way that leads to the mount of crucifixion. It is the way of loss and humiliation, but thankfully Jesus walked that road before us. He marched that road from Bethlehem to Golgotha, and then finally opened the road that goes to heaven.

Jesus says that we are to sit down and count the cost, whether we will be able to finish. You shouldn't embark on this Christian life without the proper resources, that is, the Word and Sacraments. You won't be able to forsake everything for Christ unless He is with you, giving you the strength to do so. But He does come to us and strengthen us to walk that road by means of His Word and Sacraments. In them we find Christ Himself.

Prayer: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

This is the primary passage that the Roman Church uses to defend its assertion of papal primacy. But such an interpretation is wrong. St. Augustine said on several occasions that the $\pi\acute{\epsilon}\tau\rho\alpha$ of this passage referred to Christ, not Peter. St. Ambrose championed the faith/rock interpretation. He did not see Peter the man as the $\pi\acute{\epsilon}\tau\rho\alpha$ (petra). Luther also understood the rock to be Peter's confession of faith. No matter how one interprets the passage, Peter is not the focus; Jesus is. Outside of some leadership role for Peter among the twelve, there is nothing else that can be proven from a Roman interpretation.

What if Peter is referred to by Jesus as the $\pi\acute{\epsilon}\tau\rho\alpha$ (petra) here (just for argument's sake)? The mountain of deductions that the Roman Church asserts from this passage is utterly unsupported. Peter is a stand-in for all the Apostles in this passage, and while he receives primacy of honor here as the first to confess the Christ, he receives no greater authority than the rest of the twelve. Also, Peter is called $\pi\acute{\epsilon}\tau\rho\alpha$ (petra) not because of any quality in himself (he is rebuked by Jesus five verses later), but because of the confession of faith he makes. The Gospel is still above the man, and faith in the One who brings the Gospel is still the main focus of the text.

Prayer: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The narrow road that leads to eternal life can be quite hard, and very lonely. Jesus knew that road. It wound its way through the fields and mountains of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. It was a road that often wandered through the wilderness. Sometimes He would be asked to leave a region, or not welcomed into a village, like in this reading from Luke's Gospel. And at the end, the road that Jesus walked was called the "way of sorrows." It twisted through the streets of Jerusalem and finally led to another very lonely place.

James and John were indignant at the treatment that their master had suffered at the hands of the Samaritans. They loved Jesus so much that it pained them to see Him mistreated. They were jealous for His honor, as all followers of Christ should be. But Satan used those feelings of love and protectiveness, and twisted them to his evil plans. James and John wanted to call fire down upon these ungrateful, miserable heretics, as if to say, "How dare they fail to welcome the Christ; destroy them!" But Jesus didn't need to be defended from the Samaritans. He must continue to travel the road so that He could die for those Samaritans. He travels that road for their salvation, and ours. We must follow our Master on the narrow road to heaven because He has made us His people.

Prayer: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Satan uses good and noble emotions and ideas to turn people aside. He does so with the three disciples who approach Jesus in this reading. “Lord, let me first go and bury my father;” “let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.” These can be good and noble sentiments, but when they turn one away from the path of faith they are traps and stumbling blocks of the devil.

One similarly troublesome place where Satan hides is in evangelism. Some people get so consumed with the urgency to evangelize that they allow it to pull them off the narrow path to heaven. Evangelism is not only good and godly, it is commanded by our Lord. But when we become so frightened for the future, so worried about not gaining young people, that we want to sacrifice right teaching and practice for the sake of evangelism, Satan is not far away. He is lurking in the obsession for growth and success, even if it is the growth and success of the Church. Satan tries to trick us in the area of evangelism because he knows we are vulnerable there. We get worried about what will become of our congregations if we don’t get new people. But we must trust that Jesus Christ has all things in His control. He will preserve us!

Prayer: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man’s understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

SATURDAY, JULY 10: LUKE 9:18–26 5TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

We agree with St. Peter that Jesus, who was born in the village of Nazareth, the son of Mary and Joseph, is the Christ. But what does “Christ” mean? We often say “Jesus Christ” as the name of this man from Nazareth, and that is perfectly correct since that is how even the biblical writers use these words. But originally, “Christ” was a title, and it was used in the phrase “Jesus the Christ,” or “You are the Christ,” like Peter says. “Christ” comes from the Greek word which means “anointed”. So, what does it mean that Jesus is the Anointed One? It means He is the chosen and blessed one of God.

The Son of God was foreordained before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20), and He would be the one to take away the sins of the world. God told His people for a long time that they would be rescued by this blessed and chosen one. All through the Old Testament God tells His people to watch for the coming of this blessed one, this Christ, who would save them from sin, death, and evil. The Christ was the chosen and blessed one that God would send. This is what Peter and the other eleven disciples, and all of Israel, were waiting for.

Prayer: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man’s understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through 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

The Sixth Sunday after Trinity

The Fifth Commandment

Thou shalt not kill.

We have not completed the discussion of both spiritual and temporal government, that is, divine and paternal authority and obedience. But here we go forth from our own house to our neighbor's, to learn how we should live with respect to one another, everyone for himself toward his neighbor. Therefore God and government are not included in this commandment, nor the power which they have to kill. For God has delegated His authority to governments to punish evil-doers instead of parents, who aforetime (as we read in Moses) were required to bring their children to judgment and sentence them to death. Therefore this prohibition pertains to individuals and not to government.

This commandment is now easy enough, and is often treated, because we hear it annually in the Gospel of St. Matthew (5:21sq.), where Christ Himself explains and sums it up—namely, that we must not kill, either with hand, heart, mouth, signs, gestures, help or counsel. Therefore it is forbidden to everyone to be angry, except those (as we said) who are in the place of God, that is, parents and government. For it is proper for God, and for everyone who stands in His stead, to be angry, to reprove and punish, even on account of those who transgress this and the other commandments.

But the cause and need of this commandment is that God well knows that the world is evil, and that this life has much unhappiness; therefore He has placed this and the other commandments between the good and the wicked. As now there are many temptations against all the commandments, so the temptation in respect to this is that we must live among many people who do us wrong, that we have cause to be hostile to them.

As when your neighbor sees that you have better possessions from property, and more happiness from God, than he, he is offended, envies you, and speaks no good of you.

Thus by the devil's incitement you will have many enemies who cannot bear to see you have any good, either bodily or spiritual. When we see them it is natural for our hearts in their turn to rage and bleed and take vengeance. Thus there arise cursing and blows, from which follow finally misery and murder. Therefore God like a kind father anticipates, interposes and wishes to have all quarrels settled, that no misfortune come of them, nor one destroy another. And in fine He would hereby defend, liberate and keep in peace everyone against all the crime and violence of everyone else; and has, as it were, placed this commandment as a wall, fortress and refuge about our neighbor, that we do him no bodily harm or injury.

—The Large Catechism, Part I, §180–185

MONDAY, JULY 12: MARK 1:9–11 6TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

St. John the Baptist was entrusted with “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). Confessing their sins, many people came to be baptized by John. Through John’s preaching the people were prepared for Jesus’ coming to them.

After His resurrection, our Lord Jesus commissioned His Apostles to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” The sacrament of Holy Baptism is included in the Gospel preaching. God attached a promise to those baptismal waters, saying, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” Through the Apostles’ preaching and baptizing the people received Jesus.

Through the mirror of God’s Law we have come to learn of our sin. Through the Gospel promise we have come to learn of that same “one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5) given in order to wash away our sins. We honor Christian baptism when we confess our sins and trust in the promise of the forgiveness of sins.

Our Lutheran Confessions speak of Jesus’ baptism, saying, “Thus, and much more even, you must honor Baptism and esteem it glorious on account of the Word, since He Himself has honored it both by words and deeds; moreover, confirmed it with miracles from heaven. For do you think it was a jest that, when Christ was baptized, the heavens were opened and the Holy Ghost descended visibly, and everything was divine glory and majesty?” (LC IV, 21)

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, JULY 13: MARK 16:14–18 6TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

It may seem harsh when St. Mark records that Jesus “re-buked their unbelief and hardness of heart.” However, their initial rejection is not simply unbelief, but includes a hardness of heart which rejects the truth, despite the preaching of the Word by eyewitnesses.

Jesus had sent the women and Mary Magdalene to His Apostles, but “they did not believe” (v.11). He also sent the Emmaus disciples to tell them He had risen from the dead, “but they did not believe them either” (v.13). This upbraiding is perfectly in order, because the Apostles despised the preached Word, and clung to their unbelief.

It is quite ironic that these same men, who do not believe the eye witnesses, were chosen by Jesus to be eyewitnesses of His ministry, in order that they might “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” And what is the purpose of this preaching of the Gospel? To create faith in the hearts of the hearers so that “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Preaching and baptism go together. Preaching creates faith, because “faith comes from hearing the message” (Romans 10:17). Those who believe trust in God’s Word concerning holy Baptism.

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 14: MATTHEW 15:1–9 6TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

In Matthew 5:20, Jesus says, “...unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” In today’s reading we have an example of the Pharisees’ “righteousness,” which Jesus calls hypocritical. From the profession of their own lips you would have thought that they were highly zealous for God and His Word. These leaders point out the supposed faults of Jesus’ disciples. However, their honor of God was only skin deep. Their real concern was for the praise of men. They kept the traditions of man, but they did not keep the commandments of God.

Jesus exposes their false ideas about God’s will and Word. Man cannot become righteous before God by his own self-appointed works. The righteousness which avails before God is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is received by faith in the heart. God’s Word of Law was not given to make a person righteous. God’s desire was not just the production of outward works. He desired to create a new heart in man through the Gospel. Once righteous through faith, man would desire to fear and love God.

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In 2 Samuel 12 the prophet Nathan told King David a story so that unknowingly David made a judgment against his own sinful actions. Here, Jesus tells a story about two sons in which the Jewish leaders unknowingly condemn their own lack of repentance and faith.

The Jewish leaders were right that the tax collectors and sinners needed repentance. Jesus acknowledges that the tax collectors and harlots had disobeyed the Law of God and sold out their Jewish birthright for covetous desires. However, when John the Baptist came preaching and calling sinners to repentance, those types of sinners repented and trusted in a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. But these Jewish leaders were wrong in that they claimed they needed no repentance. Jesus tells them that they had rejected John's way of righteousness—which is through repentance and faith in the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

It is no great trick to be able to expose the faults and sin in our neighbor's life, because no one is righteous; no, not one. However, we need grace to learn the way of righteousness for ourselves. We ask God to lead us to repentance for our own sin, and lead us to faith in our Savior.

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The leaven of the Pharisees was false holiness, in which they trusted their works for salvation and rewards. The leaven of Herod and the Sadducees was false freedom, in which they lived immoral lives. The leaven of both destroys a God-pleasing life of faithfulness and thanksgiving. The disciples think that Jesus is speaking about earthly bread and worldly concerns for daily sustenance. This warning for the disciples to “take heed” is not about the lack of provisions on the lonely eastern shore of the lake. Jesus is seriously concerned about spiritual dangers.

Human reason, the perception of the senses, and logical understanding are all affected by the heart. Jesus asks, “Is your heart still hardened?” Their eyes still see what they want to see. Their ears hear Jesus’ words, but they put their own meaning into the words. They do not remember the gracious miracles which Jesus performed. Jesus’ question, “How is it you do not understand?” is designed to get them to acknowledge their spiritual dullness.

The only way that we can open our lips is for God to graft into our hearts the love of His name. The only way for us to make a right judgment is for God to increase in us true religion. The words of our Savior Jesus Christ lead us to take heed, repent of our sins, and trust in Him for forgiveness.

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Every sin is offensive to God. Nevertheless, there are some sins which can entrap a believer so that he falls from grace and “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Clinging to sin in unrepentance will cause one to be “cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched.” It is better to take action right now, while you still can. Even drastic and decisive action is needed to remove the cause of sin so that the believer can still enter into eternal life. If one of the hands, feet, or eyes is found to be the cause of sin, then amputation would be justified. However, we know that it is the heart of man that controls the hands, feet, and eyes. You cannot remove the desire to sin except through God replacing your sinful heart with a heart that fears and loves Him.

Jesus’ solution includes the application of fire and salt. Fire has a burning property which cleanses impurities, while salt preserves and cures the germs of corruption in food. We have “salt within ourselves” when we are constantly applying the Law to our thoughts, words, and deeds so that we live a life of repentance. We season even our sacrifices to God with fire so we see that our righteous deeds are as filthy rags in God’s sight. It is only through a lively faith in Christ’s forgiveness that our daily sins of weakness do not harm us.

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XXVI.

It has been the general persuasion, not of the people alone, but also of such as teach in the churches, that making Distinction of Meats, and like traditions of men, are works profitable to merit grace, and able to make satisfactions for sins. And that the world so thought, appears from this, that new ceremonies, new orders, new holydays, and new fastings were daily instituted, and the teachers in the churches did exact these works as a service necessary to merit grace, and did greatly terrify men's consciences, if they should omit any of these things. From this persuasion concerning traditions, much detriment has resulted in the Church.

First, the doctrine of grace and of the righteousness of faith has been obscured by it, which is the chief part of the Gospel, and ought to stand out, as the most prominent in the Church, that the merit of Christ may be well known, and that faith, which believes that sins are forgiven for Christ's sake may be exalted far above works. Wherefore Paul also lays the greatest stress on this article, putting aside the law and human traditions, in order to show that the righteousness of the Christian is another than such works, to wit, the faith which believes that sins are freely forgiven for Christ's sake. But this doctrine of Paul has been almost wholly smothered by traditions, which have produced an opinion that, by making distinctions in meats and like services, we must merit grace and righteousness. In treating of repentance, there was no mention made of faith; all that was done was to set forth those works of satisfaction, and in these all repentance seemed to consist.

Secondly, these traditions have obscured the commandments of God; because traditions were placed far above the commandment of God. Christianity was thought to consist wholly in the observance of certain holydays, fasts and vestures. These observances had won for themselves the exalted title of being the spiritual life and the perfect life. Meanwhile the commandments of God, according to each one's calling, were without honor, namely, that the father brought up his family, that the mother bore children, that the Prince governed the Commonwealth,—these were accounted works that were worldly and imperfect, and far below those glittering observances. And this error greatly tormented devout consciences, which grieved that they were bound by an imperfect state of life, as in marriage, in the office of magistrate, or in other civil ministrations; on the other hand, they admired the monks and such like, and falsely imagined that the observances of such men were more acceptable to God. ...

Wherefore our teachers must not be looked upon as having taken up this matter rashly, or from hatred of the bishops, as some falsely suspect. There was great need to warn the churches of these errors, which had arisen from misunderstanding the traditions.

—The Augsburg Confession, §1–11, 18–19

MONDAY, JULY 19: LUKE 12:1–9 7TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Have you ever lost track of your car keys, or glasses, or possibly a favorite pen or pencil or other item? It seems to be a common occurrence based on the amount of secular comedy that hinges on a character not knowing where an important item is.

There are several billion people in this world these days, and governments strive to count them all and keep track of them for various reasons. Yet there are no doubt those who “slip through the cracks” or get lost.

In these verses, God promises that nothing can or will escape his attention. It is a way of reminding us that he knows all things, even things that we cannot imagine knowing or remembering. It might be easy for us to imagine that God has the same limitations we do; one might think He can lose track or forget about some of the things we are doing that we might not want to be known. But God does not get tired, He does not go to sleep. And none of us will “get away” with anything because God was not watching or paying attention to us.

Yet this is also a great comfort for us—we know that any person is worth more than many sparrows. Indeed, this Scripture teaches us that even the very hairs on our heads are numbered! And the God who loved us enough to send His only-begotten Son to live a perfect life and die a perfect death for us is watching out for us.

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and on earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, JULY 20: LUKE 15:1–7 7TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

What a joy it is to find something we have lost! In our lives we can turn things upside-down looking for something. We obsess over where we last saw that thing, and can have a hard time focusing on anything else until we find it. And it is usually in the last place we looked.

Jesus tells us here that there is the same care and concern in Heaven over every sinner who repents. It may be tempting to think we can get away with a particular sin for a time without being caught, especially if no one else knows about it. But God knows all, and sees all, and that kind of sin grieves Him just as the more crass outward sins, such as murder and theft, that get reported in the news.

But thanks be to Him that He does search for us! Through His Word He calls us to repentance. His Word does not return to Him void (Isaiah 55:11), and it works both repentance and faith in us. As he teaches here, there is great joy in Heaven when sinners repent!

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and on earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Humans have a tendency to focus on things that really do not matter. Especially when that focus can let us ignore something more important that does matter.

In the ancient Jewish ceremonial Law, given by God through Moses, faithful Jews were forbidden to eat certain foods, because that would make them unclean. Foods like bacon and shellfish were forbidden. Jesus' perfect life and death fulfilled that Law for us, and today we can enjoy pork products, shrimp, and other foods with no fear of sin against the Law of Moses.

But even when that Law was in force, as it was for the Pharisees and for the disciples during Jesus' earthly ministry, Jesus wants us to understand that what we do is far more important than what we eat. It is not as if anyone but Jesus could keep the whole Law perfectly, but even if we could follow a more minor point of the Law well, we must not place our hope of salvation in keeping the Law. Rather, the Law shows us, as believers, how we can live a life pleasing to God now that we stand in the grace He has shown us in His Son.

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and on earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Do any of us know the details of how plants grow from seeds to maturity? No doubt botanists and others who work with plants regularly and directly know far more than most people; and certainly the Author of Creation knows all since He designed them. But it is to those of us who trust in the natural processes He set into motion that he speaks.

Here Jesus likens the working of God’s Word to the way that plants sprout and grow. In a garden we may plant flowers, take some care at the beginning to make sure that the soil is soft and suitable for the plants, that there is sufficient water and sun for them to grow. But most of those natural processes happen automatically—the plant grows and bears fruit in due course.

When the fruit or flower is ready, the grower comes with the sickle to harvest it. This is what plants are grown for. In the same way, our Lord and Savior will also someday come to call us home to live with Him and our fellow believers forever. This should not fill us with fear, but with comfort, as on that day we will be able to leave this earthly vale of tears. Our believing friends and families will know that we have gone to be with the Lord, and they should rejoice that they will get to see us again when their turn comes, or in the great Resurrection—whichever comes first.

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and on earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Sometimes, because this world is all that we have seen, we need a reminder of how fallen and degenerate it is. Our verses for today testify to this—it is only because of sin and the fallen state of the world that “offenses” will come. They were not part of God’s original plan for us when He created the world and called it good; but Man fell and they are with us now.

These offenses are traps for our lives and faith. If, for example, we see someone who should know better do something he should not be doing, and then we do the same thing, now that person has imperiled both his own faith and the faith of someone else!

Death by drowning is supposed to be particularly unpleasant, but here Jesus says that it would be far better for those who cause offense to Jesus’ “little ones” to die this way than to face God’s judgment for bringing the kind of offense that causes problems for the faith of others.

May we always be found faithful in doctrine and life, and be good examples in thought, word, and deed for all who look to us as examples! God’s Word will strengthen us to this end, according to his promises.

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and on earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

SATURDAY, JULY 24: LUKE 11:34–36 7TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Jesus demands consistently high standards. As humans we like to see shades of gray everywhere; we want to minimize or excuse the bad things we think, say, or do, and we want to find ways to justify mixing bad deeds with good. But here Jesus teaches what is good is light, and what is bad is dark, and they are completely exclusive of each other. Light drives away and banishes darkness, or else darkness swallows up light. They cannot be mixed, and there can be no compromise between them.

God's Word often describes itself as a light, especially in Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Jesus calls himself the bright Morning Star in Revelation 22:16, and our hymn beautifully confesses Jesus as the Morning Star and light of our souls (TLH 343, v. 4):

A pledge of peace from God I see
When Thy pure eyes are turned to me
To show me Thy good pleasure.
Jesus, Thy Spirit and Thy Word,
Thy body and Thy blood, afford
My soul its dearest treasure.
Keep me Kindly
In Thy favor, O my Savior!
Thou wilt cheer me;
Thy Word calls me to draw near Thee.

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and on earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through 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

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Article XIV. Of Monastic Vows

As monastic vows directly conflict with the first chief article, they ought to be absolutely abolished. For it is of them that Christ says (Matt. 24:5, 23 sqq.): “I am Christ,” etc. For he who makes a vow to live in a monastery believes that he will enter upon a mode of life holier than the ordinary Christians, and by his own works wishes to earn heaven not only for himself, but also for others; this is to deny Christ. And they boast from their St. Thomas that a monastic vow is on an equality with baptism. This is blasphemy against God.

Article XV. Of Human Traditions

The declaration of the Papists that human traditions serve for the remission of sins, or merit salvation, is altogether unchristian and condemned, as Christ says (Matt. 15:9): “In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” And Titus 1:14: “That turn from the truth.” Also their declaration that it is a mortal sin if one do not observe these statutes, is not right.

These are the articles on which I must stand; and if God so will I shall stand even to my death. And I do not know how to change or to concede anything in them. If anyone else will concede anything, he will do it at the expense of his conscience.

Lastly, the Pope’s bundle of impostures still remains, concerning foolish and childish articles, as the dedication of churches, the baptism of bells, the baptism of the altar-stone, with its godfathers to pray and offer gifts. Such baptism is administered to the reproach and mockery of holy baptism, and should not be tolerated. Afterwards, concerning the consecration of wax tapers, palm-branches, cakes, spices, oats, etc., which nevertheless cannot be called consecrations, but are nothing but mockery and fraud. There are infinite other such deceptions, which we commit to their god, and which may be adored by them, until they are weary of them. We will not be confused by them.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

MONDAY, JULY 26: MATTHEW 7:22–29 8TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

The false prophets come in their sheep's clothing and thus deceive many. But the Lord of the Church speaks a warning to the false prophets, assuring them that they do not and will not deceive Him.

The false teachers depart from the prophetic and apostolic doctrine and teach their own doctrines in place of the truth. The 'sayings' (that is, teaching) of Jesus is the rock upon which the Church stands; the sayings of the false teachers may have the appearance of worldly wisdom, or be established by great power, or offer the appearance of deep piety, but they are nothing but shifting sand. The more that men build on such a pathetic 'foundation,' the greater the ruin that ensues when it all comes crashing down.

The scribes imposed an appearance of piety, but lacked faith; since they did not set forth that which is taught in the Word of God, their teaching was without authority. The prophetic and apostolic doctrine is the divinely-revealed teaching, and where it is heard, we hear the Word of the Lord, condemning sin and proclaiming salvation to all who repent and believe in the Christ.

Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

TUESDAY, JULY 27: JOHN 7:14–24 8TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Jesus was teaching in the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. The Jews were already divided concerning His doctrine. “However, no one spoke openly of Him, for fear of the Jews.” (v. 13) In all Jerusalem, there was no doubt endless contention between the sects of the Pharisees, but any discussion of the One who proclaimed the Truth brought the fear of judgment at the hands of the rulers of the Jews.

The Lord began to teach the Jews by noting their failure to fulfill the teaching of Moses: They did not keep the law and seemingly understood nothing concerning the Gospel and the means of grace. As the administration of the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision on the Sabbath could not violate the law of Moses, so the mercy which the Christ showed to the man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5) was perfectly in keeping with the purpose of the Sabbath, for “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27) The man healed by Jesus was made “completely well” by the Word of the Lord, and the Lord then said to him in the temple: “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.” (John 5:14) The Lord blesses and preserves His people, admonishing and consoling us through His Word.

Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

St. John the Baptist bore witness to the coming of the Christ, but the authority of the Christ was in no way contingent on the testimony of John. John was sent to baptize and to proclaim the coming of the Messiah, but this was for the sake of the people, that they might repent before the Christ was revealed to them.

Our Lord teaches clearly that He did not need John to ‘vouch’ for Him; instead, Jesus notes that Jews had made inquiry of John and therefore they should believe the testimony of the one who was a prophet and more than a prophet (Mat. 11:9).

The Jews were infuriated because they perceived that “He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.” (John 5:18) The miracles demonstrated that Jesus is who He says that He is: “... for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.” This was testified to in every one of the Christ’s miracles, but above all, in the work of the atonement which the Christ performed on the altar of the cross (Heb. 13:10–12). Those who, by the work of the Holy Spirit, believe that which is taught concerning Christ’s atonement, receive the forgiveness of sin.

Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Kinship with the Christ is not a matter of bloodlines and family trees. It is established by the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace.

St. Olaf was not the first King Olaf to bring the faith to Norway; Olaf Tryggvason was king from A.D. 995 to 1000, and he helped to establish the faith in Norway and Iceland, but his brief reign was followed by a partial relapse of the nation into paganism. St. Olaf was Olaf Heraldsson, who reigned from A.D. 1015 to 1030. He was recognized as a saint within a year of his death and was soon called “Rex Perpetuus Norvegiae” (“Perpetual King of Norway”).

St. Olaf brought missionary bishops to Norway, and while, prior to his time, the faith had begun to spread in coastal towns in Norway, it was during Olaf’s reign that the Church made inroads in the interior of the country. Early histories also credit Olaf with legal reforms which granted protections to the Church and its authority.

St. Olaf stands as one among a number of converted magistrates whose reign offered protection to the Church and patronage to missionaries operating within their territory. The history of the Church would have been markedly different if such influential converts had not used their authority to protect the proclamation of the Gospel. In so doing, they served Christ, demonstrating in Word and deed their baptism into Christ.

O Lord, grant steadfastness in a faithful confession to those among the magistracy whom Thou hast gathered into Thy holy Church, and direct the hearts of the faithful to support them in their vocation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Again and again, our Lord proclaims woe to the scribes and Pharisees on account of their hypocrisy. They had cultivated an outward appearance of piety capable of fooling the people into believing that that they were faithful teachers, even as they were self-indulgent persecutors of the Church. But their outward deception could not deceive the One who perceives the hearts of men.

This is the nature of the righteousness of the Pharisees: it is a religion of outward appearances, and not one of inward repentance. It was not that they lacked for language about repentance—after all, they mimicked piety when they spoke ill of their forefathers: “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.” But the Lord noted the admission at the heart of such feigned piety: the Pharisees acknowledged they were the spiritual kin of the persecutors of the Church. If they did not repent, they would prove their connection with what their spiritual forefathers had done, for if they did not repent, then their persecution of the saints of God would result in that terrifying conclusion: “... that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth...”

The rebuke delivered to the Pharisees is a call for all to repent of such spiritual hypocrisy and trust in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy and plenteous redemption.

Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

SATURDAY, JULY 31: MATTHEW 21:18–22 8TH S. A. TRINITY

The fig tree was a warning against unfruitfulness. St. Mark sets forth the account of the withering of the fig tree surrounding the account of the Lord driving the moneychangers from the temple (Mark 11:12-24). The appearances of the temple—like that of the fig tree—appeared to proclaim fruitfulness, but when inspected by the Lord, both were lacking fruit.

It was thus that, in Luke 13, the Lord called upon those who heard Him to repent, lest they perish. He then spoke a parable to them: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’ ” (v. 6–9) For three years, there was no repentance during the time of the Lord’s ministry leading up to His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. The time was swiftly approaching when judgment would descend on Jerusalem on account of a lack of repentance.

We have the consolation of the divine Word when we make confession of our sins, assuring us that our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

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