

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

Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Martin Jackson

Good Shepherd L. C. Rogers, AR

Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

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Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Church, Simpsonville, SC; Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Mission, Knoxville, TN

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Rev. Fillmore Alvarez

St. Mary's Lutheran Church
Navotas City, Philippines

Rev. Carlos Marin

Iglesia Confesional de Colombia
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THE LUTHERAN HERALD



CHRIST BEFORE HEROD (ALBRECHT DÜRER, CA. 1509)

MARCH 1–APRIL 3, 2021

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The Calendar

February 28	Lent 2—Reminiscere	TLH 329
March 7	Lent 3—Oculi	TLH 262
March 14	Lent 4—Laetare	TLH 151
March 17 (W)	St. Patrick, Bishop and Confessor (White)	TLH 499
March 19 (F)	St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Guardian of our Lord (White)	
March 21	Lent 5—Judica	ELH 587
	-ELH 587 ("Lord Jesus Christ, True Man and God") is printed on the second to last page of this issue of <i>The Lutheran Herald</i>	
March 25 (R)	The Annunciation (White)	TLH 237
March 28	Lent 6—Palmarum	TLH 146
April 1	Maundy Thursday	TLH 163
April 2	Good Friday (Black)	TLH 172
April 3	Holy Saturday	
	(Violet before Sundown; White after Sundown)	TLH 190

(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 begins on March 2; the Holy Week/Easter break begins March 27 and concludes April 19. (The break is so lengthy because the instructors and seminarians will participate in the Colloquium and Synod.)

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.

Preparation for Death

587

8s. 6L.

Schumann's Gesangbuch, 1539



Lord Je-sus Christ, true man and God, Who bor-est anguish,
scorn, the rod, And diedst at last up-on the tree, To
bring Thy Fa-ther's grace to me: I pray Thee, through that
bit-ter woe; Let me, a sin-ner, mer-cy know.

2 When comes the hour of falling breath,
And I must wrestle, Lord, with death,
When from my sight all fades away,
And when my tongue no more can
say,
And when mine ears no more can hear,
And when my heart is racked with
fear:

3 When all my mind is darkened o'er,
And human help can do no more;
Then come, Lord Jesus! come with
speed,
And help me in my hour of need;
Lead me from this dark vale beneath,
And shorten then the pangs of death.

4 Joyful my resurrection be,
Thou in the judgment plead for me,
And hide my sins, Lord, from Thy
face,
And give me life, of Thy rich grace!
I trust Thee utterly, my Lord,
For Thou hast promised in Thy
word!

5 Dear Lord, forgive us all our guilt;
Help us to wait until Thou wilt
That we depart; and let our faith
Be brave, and conquer e'en in death;
Firm resting on Thy sacred word,
Until we sleep in Thee, our Lord.

Jesus had performed many miracles, even raising the dead. And now Jesus Himself was dead. Fittingly, the skies all around turned black.

Matthew writes that Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man, but, most importantly, that he also had become a disciple of Jesus. Luke 23:50-51 tells us, “Now behold, there was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. He had not consented to their decision and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God.” John 19:38 confirms that Joseph was a disciple, and adds, “but secretly, for fear of the Jews.” The Pharisees and teachers of the Law were intimidating everyone and putting out of the synagogue anyone who showed any favor toward Jesus. Nicodemus, too, according to John 3, came to talk with Jesus secretly, in the middle of the night.

So, note here that Joseph is called a disciple. He is asking for Jesus’ body to give a proper burial. This was risky indeed. Even though his and Nicodemus’ faith was perhaps not as bold as the other disciples, they did demonstrate that they had faith in Jesus as the Messiah of God’s kingdom.

Jesus’ death on the cross for you is a powerful statement of God’s love and dedication to you. God’s love for us moves us to show our love for Him and others.

Prayer: O God, who didst enlighten this most holy night with the glory of the Lord’s resurrection, preserve in all Thy people the spirit of adoption which Thou hast given, so that, renewed in body and soul, they may perform unto Thee a pure service; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

In the midst of the solemnities of Lent, the saints of the Trilune God live in anticipation of Easter. Gesimatide already began the count of the days, and each Sunday in Lent brings us closer and closer to the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord.

The consolation of the coming Feast gives us peace in the midst of the penitential sorrows of Lent. With all that which is happening in the world in these dark days—with politicians and businessmen competing to see who might debase our culture with the greatest speed and efficiency—the consolation which the Holy Spirit establishes and sustains in Christ’s Church are ever with us. Lent holds before our eyes the Christian’s perpetual need in this life to walk in repentance before the Lord, but each Sunday is always a ‘little Easter’ and the saints know again the salvation which our Lord has accomplished, as we receive again the forgiveness of our sins through Word and Sacrament.

As the days pass in this season, the clergy of our diocese also know that our colloquium and synod are quickly approaching. For several of the brethren, this will be the first time that they have met face to face: the Lord has richly blessed the fellowship of this diocese through those who were received by colloquy in the midst of the pandemic, and this annual meeting provides the first occasion for all of us to gather since the 2019 synod. I also encourage the laity to consider attending the colloquium and synod, as it is a marvelous time to grow in knowledge, and to enjoy the fellowship of Christ’s Church. (If you would like to attend, please contact me by email at bishopheiser@mac.com.)

The Lord bless and sustain you in this season, and grant you His peace!

Yours in Christ, Bishop Heiser

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Reminiscere Sunday

Article XIII. How Man is Justified before God, and of Good Works.

What I have hitherto and constantly taught concerning this I cannot in the least change, viz. that by faith (as St. Peter says) we acquire a new and clean heart, and God accounts, and will account us righteous and holy, for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. And although sin in the flesh has not been altogether removed and become dead, yet He will not punish or regard this.

For good works follow this faith, renewal and forgiveness of sins. And that in them which is still sinful and imperfect is not accounted as sin and defect, even for Christ's sake; but the entire man, both as to his person and his works, is and is called just and holy, from pure grace and mercy, shed upon us and displayed in Christ. Wherefore we cannot boast of our many merits and works, if they be viewed apart from grace and mercy, but as it is written, (1 Cor. 1:31): "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord," viz. that he has a gracious God. For thus all is well. We say besides that if good works do not follow, faith is false and not true.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

FRIDAY, APRIL 2: JOHN 18:1—19:42

GOOD FRIDAY

As we look at Jesus on the cross we know that He is not dying for His own sins, because He did not have any. We who did sin are the ones who deserve to be punished. Instead, Jesus died in our place.

As we come to Him confessing our sins and clinging to Him in faith, something wonderful happens! Luther called it the "blessed exchange": Jesus exchanges His righteous and holy life for our sin and death. He goes to the cross to pay for our sin, and we get His righteous and holy life--a forgiven life, a restored life, an eternal life! That is not a particularly good deal for Jesus, but an incredibly great deal for us! Therefore, as Christians, we keep our life's focus on that cross! Remember that the cross signifies that blessed exchange with Jesus, which includes His atonement for your sin and its spiritual consequences. All this is exchanged at the cross and received through faith.

That is what Jesus did for you! That is what the Gospel means--Christ crucified for you means that your sins are forgiven, that you have a holy life now, and an eternal life with Christ forever! That is what Jesus means when, on the cross, He says, "It is finished!" His work of salvation for us is now accomplished. We receive that work through faith, and we are saved, forgiven, justified with God, and now live in peace with God.

Prayer: Almighty God, we beseech Thee graciously to behold this Thy family, for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and given up into the hands of wicked men and to suffer death upon the Cross; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

What is the point of Jesus washing the disciples' feet? The water certainly reminds us of Baptism, but this was a lesson in humility. Jesus was teaching, and the disciples were arguing which of them was most important. This topic was a favorite of theirs, even though Jesus kept telling them that true greatness was in service to God and others. So, Jesus gave a living object lesson. He took the place of a servant and did what servants do—they wash feet. Jesus came round and placed their tired feet in a bowl, poured fresh water over their feet to remove the dust, and then wiped them off with a towel.

Peter wanted to spare Jesus this humiliation, but Jesus would have none of that. He insisted. Jesus needed to continue to wash Peter so that his heart and his life would remain clean. The next day, Jesus would show how He truly “loved them to the end.” On the cross, Jesus gave his life for us in our place.

Just before Jesus washed the disciples' feet, John tells us that Jesus knew that He “was going to God,” so He rose from the meal and prepared to wash His disciples' feet. It was indeed a lesson in humility, with Jesus Himself showing the ultimate humility for our ultimate washing, where we are washed in the blood of Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb of God.

Prayer: O Lord God, who hast left unto us in a wonderful Sacrament a memorial of Thy Passion, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so use this Sacrament of Thy Body and Blood, that the fruits of Thy redemption may continually be manifest in us. Amen.

Self-importance and lack of faith go hand-in-hand. If we resist the Holy Spirit and think that our wants and will are more important than humbly praying “Thy will be done,” then we need the Lord to help our unbelief. Evil spirits plague us with pride and vanity more than they attack people with convulsions or other such signs of possession. Unfortunately, few see this as a serious problem and seek help from the Lord. Instead, we are wrongly encouraged to think that God ought to submit to our whims and that manipulating others in the name of “help” or “concern” for them is noble.

Christ calls us to be faithful. He calls us to love and serve in humble fulfillment of our vocations and duties. One application of His Words to the disciples about prayer and fasting is fulfilled in the lives of His people. The devil attacks all of us, but humble prayer and faithful discipline—which come from God's Holy Spirit—are powerful means of driving away the evil one and his influence.

The Lord is our help and our righteousness, which means He teaches us and guides us. Faith seeks His will and kingdom. Unbelief focuses on getting what we want from Him, but faith looks past our own wants and focuses on the cross of our eternal life. And His righteousness teaches us to pray that all things work to serve the message of that Gospel.

Prayer: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

God's people have always been taught to fear, love, and trust in Him. This is Solomon's message as he proclaimed to the people the importance of the temple. He declared to them the importance of faith!

This is still the message that is taught and proclaimed in the Church. There will continue to be adversities, plagues, sicknesses, attacks from evil men and satanic powers, but our help is always found in the name of the Lord. What has changed is that we do not look to one temple in one city, but we look to one holy Cross of Jesus Christ and one consistent body of doctrine that is found in the Word of God. As the Gospel of salvation in Christ crucified is rightly taught and all His commands about the Scriptures and Sacraments are rightly observed, the holy help in His name can be found in those places.

A local church may not have the buildings or the social activities that some think are important, but if it is faithful to the true doctrine and practice of the Scriptures, manifest in what they believe, teach, and confess, then that is a far greater blessing! Outward things can seem helpful or impressive, but the Lord works faith in us to shape our hearts, souls, and minds. All the other things ought to be understood according to the sufficiency of His grace.

Prayer: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Passover was celebrated once a year, but the Lord's Supper is a meal for all seasons. It is one in which our Lord's Body and Blood are "Given and shed for you," for the forgiveness of sin! In fact, that is the whole point of the sacrament. Jesus instituted a New Testament meal that supersedes the Old Testament Passover.

The Passover meal is superseded because the deliverance to which it pointed ahead was now being accomplished. The sacrificial lambs that were killed to save Israel's firstborn back then actually pointed ahead to God's sacrificial Lamb, His OWN firstborn to save all of His people! So, the Passover meal was done in remembrance of the angel of the Lord "passing over" the houses where He saw the blood of the lamb on the doorposts. Jesus instituted a meal to be done in remembrance of Him--in remembrance of HIS sacrifice on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven, and thereby have the angel of God's wrath "pass over" us, as it were, all because of Christ's death in our place.

The Christ event trumps the Passover event, and therefore the Christ meal, the Lord's Supper, trumps the Passover meal. And, rather than once a year, the Lord's Supper is indeed a meal for all seasons. It is one that we would do well to attend often, for the forgiveness of our sins, and the strengthening of our faith.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds are continually afflicted, may mercifully be relieved by the Passion of Thine only-begotten Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“Unless a grain of wheat dies...” Jesus is in the death-and-resurrection business. Meanwhile we keep trying various fixer-upper programs on ourselves. What we fail to realize is that, in and of ourselves, we are spiritually dead. So, we keep trying to make ourselves look alive to God. “Works righteousness”—that is what Luther calls all these attempts to make ourselves acceptable to God.

The truth is that we are dead as doornails before God in our feeble attempts to make ourselves and our religion appear “meet, right, and salutary.” We are dead as doornails before God in our feeble attempts at parroting a particular set of confessions or rituals, and equating that with true belief and following of Christ.

Jesus had no time and little patience for sightseers, tire-kickers, and window shoppers. Instead, He calls us to follow Him into death and a new transformed life. The message of His Gospel is that we come before God with empty hands. We come before God and confess freely that we are dead as doornails by ourselves and by any of our outward showings of religiosity. Jesus calls us to His unique death-and-resurrection transforming power so that we are remade from the inside out. Then, and only then, that grain of wheat that died can “produce much grain” in Him.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, grant us grace so to pass through this holy time of our Lord’s Passion that we may obtain the pardon of our sins; 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.

David’s sin was profoundly wicked. He acted treacherously and violated multiple Commandments. But the Lord had pity on him when he repented. David did not shift the blame or claim that he had good reason for his misdeeds. He repented and said, “I have sinned against the Lord.” In Psalm 51:3 David says, “I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.”

This is very different from what the false teachers encourage people to think. We often think that we can make the sins of others an excuse for our own. Or we use double standards where we downplay our own sins even as we show spite toward others who have committed similar trespasses. Even reading this, our sinful hearts tempt us to think, “Yeah! I know other people who do that!” But faith teaches us to acknowledge our own transgressions and repent of our own sins in sincere humility.

Our Lord Jesus taught us to pray “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Here we confess that we have sinned against the Lord, sometimes even as greatly as David did. But we also remember that He will forgive us as we show the same repentance that David did. In this petition we ask that He make us truly humble, able to love others as He loves us.

Prayer: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The desire of the Greeks to see Jesus was answered by our Lord with the teaching of the Gospel! This makes the important point that the Church and her worship are not just about beholding certain persons or events; the Church is about teaching faith in Jesus Christ and observing that which He commands us.

Too many people have the wrong impression that worship is just about showing up and seeing the service or hearing a sermon. The Church's worship is not about occasional experiences, but it is about the ongoing connection to the Word of God and the faithful use of His Holy Sacraments. These things strengthen our faith and help us to grow in spiritual maturity. As we continue in His Word, we become better at serving according to His will. We become better able to trust in Him above all things. And we become more humble about this present life of sin and weakened flesh, as we also look forward to the greater life to come in His eternal kingdom. It is good for us to want to see Jesus, but we must also see the whole counsel of what He teaches us, as well as seeing Him as our Lord and Savior! As the Father said at the Transfiguration, "Hear Him!"

Prayer: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

It is Holy Week, and yesterday was Palm Sunday. Jesus comes riding into Jerusalem like a king, and we ride along almost like we are in on an inside joke. Everyone keeps calling Jesus the king, and we know that He really is! Even when the Pharisees arrest Him and charge Him with blasphemy because He says He is the Son of God, we might snicker to ourselves because we know that He really IS the Son of God. And then He is handed over to the Romans and the soldiers mock Him as king, and again we grimace at what is being done to our Lord. But we know how the story ends, so we also have something of a snicker because we know the secret that they obviously do not know—that Jesus really IS king.

Then they crucify Him. And what is the sign above His head? It says, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Oh, the irony! Since we know the ultimate outcome, we can also let our snicker come out, at least just a little, because we will have the last laugh here. We know the secret; we know the truth! Jesus really is the king! As He told Pilate, His kingdom is not of this world. And He has brought us into that kingdom. So as Jesus rides triumphantly into Jerusalem, the crowds shout "Hail King of the Jews," and we say, "Yes, indeed. Jesus IS King."

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who amid so many adversities do fail through our own infirmities, may be restored through the Passion and intercession of Thine only-begotten Son; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Palmarum (Palm) Sunday

Article III.

Also they [the Lutherans] teach, that the Word, that is, the Son of God, did take man's nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are Two Natures, the divine and the human, inseparably conjoined in one Person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the Virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, that He might reconcile the Father unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but for all actual sins of men. He also descended into hell, and truly rose again the third day; afterward He ascended into Heaven, that He might sit on the right hand of the Father, and forever reign, and have dominion over all creatures, and sanctify them that believe in Him, by sending the Holy Ghost into their hearts, to rule, comfort and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and the power of sin. The same Christ shall openly come again to judge the quick and the dead, etc., according to the Apostles' Creed.

—The Augsburg Confession

FRIDAY, MARCH 5: LUKE 10:17–20

REMINSICERE

The power of the Enemy is faithlessness and spiritual death. Even though we may suffer physical pains and emotional difficulties, that does not mean the serpents and scorpions of Satan's kingdom have gained power over us. The name of Jesus Christ is placed on us in Baptism, and in His name we have that power like the seventy to overcome the evil one. The faith that our Lord creates and sustains in us by His Word and Sacraments makes us well and keeps us in the life of the world to come. As long as His name and His Spirit are with us, our true well-being is secure.

On the other hand, the devil will continue to bite us, sting us, and poison us in any way that he can. Some evil spirits may be hard to drive out (as we were reminded in Monday's reading), but our help is in the name of the Lord. The devil only gains a real advantage over us when we ignore or resist the power that is given to us by our Savior. This is why it is so important to remain connected to His Church and continue to treasure the Body where we study His Word and receive His sacred gifts. Our Lord warns His servants not to become complacent or prideful in past victories over evil because the evil one will continue attacking us. But it is Christ Jesus alone who keeps our names safe in His kingdom.

Prayer: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In the time of our Lord's Apostles many of the Jews and their leaders had submitted to the teachings of the evil one. They rejected that Jesus was the true Christ, and they resisted His Holy Spirit's testimony. In spite of the shrewd observation from the Pharisee Gamaliel, many of them continued to fight and persecute the Apostolic ministry. The Apostles and other Christians endured beatings, hardships, and even martyrdom for the name of Jesus, but they still triumphed over the power of Satan because they died in the name of the true Christ.

Take note of what the Church did in the face of persecution. They did not rise up in force against the council. They did not pretend to obey while secretly plotting to respond in kind. Nor did they wail and complain about how they were victims who deserved revenge. The Apostles of God's faithful Church rejoiced that they suffered and were persecuted for righteousness' sake, and they daily taught and preached in the name of Jesus Christ. This means they had worship services and studied the Word! They were not going door-to-door, harassing people in the name of Jesus. And they were not showing up in the temple to wage obnoxious arguments or counter-campaigns. They simply fulfilled their vocations. They taught and preached in proper places, proper times, and the Church gathered around this message of Jesus in worship. May the Lord help us follow this example in our trials and difficulties as well.

Prayer: O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Paul certainly feared the Lord. After being knocked off the back of a horse and blinded by words coming from the mouth of God (Jesus), Paul certainly feared God. And even though we know about some of the things that Paul endured from evil and unbelieving men, we know that Paul feared God more than men.

Do you fear God more than you fear men? How many times have you cringed when the subject of God or religion came up at the table during holiday gatherings? Do you fear peer pressure that may come from attending Divine Service rather than school events? Are there times when you fear man more than God? How many times have you kept silent when you should have been standing up for Jesus? Are there times when you fear that God will not provide for you and your family unless you have that certain job with great benefits? Does not everything belong to God? Will He not provide for your needs?

Yes, God knows us and knows our needs. If we fear God, our actions in giving Him first priority in our lives will be known by others—often in a persuasive way—to lead them to Christ. God knows when we fear, love, and trust in Him because He is the one who gives us that faith to do and confess His will before men.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Jesus spoke the terms of His “Last Will and Testament” when He spoke the words at the initial Lord’s Supper. It was the new testament and covenant spoken of so wonderfully in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Those verses conclude by saying: “For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.”

At the Lord’s Table Jesus has left to you His earthly possessions—His Body and Blood. He possessed no worldly wealth. He has given to you your inheritance from Him. He gives you His Body in, with, and under the bread to give you hope for resurrection. He gives you hope for eternal life with Him as He plants His Body in you like a seed that will be brought to life by the Holy Spirit. He gives you His holy Blood in, with, and under the wine, poured out for you in a miraculous and mysterious manner. He gives to you His holy Blood to ease your troubled, guilt-ridden conscience. He gives to you His holy Blood to give you new life, for His life is in the blood.

The wealth that our Lord Jesus had in His incarnation He gives to you in this Holy Sacrament. All this He does to forgive your sins and strengthen your faith in Him and what He has done for you. Thanks be to God for this Holy Supper. What a wonderful covenant, already fulfilled on both sides by the God-Man, Jesus!

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Oculi Sunday

Article II.

Also they [the Lutheran pastors] teach, that since the Fall of Adam, all men begotten according to nature, are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence; and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through baptism and the Holy Ghost.

They condemn the Pelagians and others, who deny that the vice of origin is sin, and who, to obscure the glory of Christ’s merit and benefits, argue that man can be justified before God by his own strength and reason.

—The Augsburg Confession

Article II. Of Original Sin.

The second article, Of Original Sin, the adversaries [the Roman Catholic theologians] approve, but in such a way, that they, nevertheless, censure the definition of Original Sin, which we incidentally gave. Here at the very threshold, his Imperial Majesty will discover that the writers of the Confutation [the Romanist response to the Augsburg Confession] were deficient not only in judgment, but also in candor. For whereas we, with a simple mind, desired, in passing, to recount those things which Original Sin embraces, these men, by framing an invidious interpretation, artfully distort a proposition that has in it nothing which of itself is wrong. Thus they say: “To be without the fear of God, to be without faith, is actual guilt”; and therefore they deny that it is original guilt.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession
(The Augsburg Confession was written in 1530, the Roman Confutation responded to the Confession in 1530, and then the Lutheran Apology (Defense) was written in 1531.)

King David’s song declares how God had proved Himself faithful, delivering him in the midst of all the twists and turns of his life. By means of a rapid-fire list of titles, David is holding forth the various acts which God has performed. The Lord is a rock, a fortress, a deliverer, a strength, a shield, a horn, a stronghold, a refuge, and a Savior. Each one of these titles could serve as an entire devotion revealing who God is.

However, in this devotion I wish to draw your attention to the first-person pronouns and adjectives. David is not merely saying that God is a rock who serves as an immovable protection from enemies. David is declaring that God is “my” rock. When David’s enemies came against him and Saul set out to destroy him, God was David’s rock, a firmness of safety. David includes the word “my” with every title. This word is illustrative of David’s faith and the acknowledgement that God gets the credit for all of David’s earthly deliverance and eternal salvation. When David says, “I will call upon the Lord,” this is not simply a reference to prayer. David is trusting in the Lord to save him.

As a believer in Jesus Christ for salvation, David’s song becomes “my” song, and your song. David’s “my” is to be my trust as well. When I sing David’s song, I apply the first-person pronouns to myself. Through faith in Christ, I call upon the Lord because I know He is my Deliverer and Savior.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Moses said to the people, ‘You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.’”

Moses felt the mountain tremble greatly. He saw the lightning and heard the thunder. He heard God call the people stiff-necked. He heard God’s voice warn him that He was about to “break out” against the people. But to make matters even worse, the high priest, Moses’ brother Aaron, collected gold from the people and fashioned it into a golden calf which they worshiped while Moses remained on the mountain in God’s presence. When Moses came down off the mountain and saw the great sin of the people as they worshiped the golden calf, he threw the tablets and broke them.

We are told that the very next day Moses went back up to the Lord, but the Scriptures also tell us the Lord visited the sin of the people upon them in the form of a plague because Aaron made the calf and the people worshiped it as an idol. Thus we see how seriously God regards sin.

God’s Commandments are established to show your sin to you. Repent, acknowledge your sins, and confess your sins to God. And believe that your sins are forgiven because of Jesus’ suffering and death to atone for your sins. Repent, confess, and believe. It was that way for the people at the foot of the mountain. It is that way for us now.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

We know that Abraham believed in God. But more than just believing in God’s existence, Abraham believed God and what God said. Abraham was a sinner, but God credited his faith—his proper belief in God—as righteousness to him. As a result, Melchizedek took bread and wine and blessed them and gave them to Abraham. Melchizedek blessed Abraham with a sort of divine service. Who was this Melchizedek? His name reveals him as “king of righteousness,” or “king of peace.” He was known as one without mother, father, or genealogy. He seemingly comes out of nowhere. We are told that Jesus will be like him and serve forever as God’s High Priest.

So what does Jesus do to emulate Melchizedek? He knows us by our faith in Him. And He blesses us with His presence, with His bread and wine, His Body and Blood. Jesus, the God-Man, serves us in Divine Service. Jesus has entered into the Presence of God forever as High Priest. He mediates with God for our sins through His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death which atoned for our sins. Jesus serves us forever as our High Priest. Jesus is our Prince of Peace, whom we abide in peacefully before God forever and ever.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Hope and holiness go together. 1 John 3:3, “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” We have a sure and certain hope of salvation that will be revealed at the second coming of Christ on the Last Day. The promise of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life is continually presented in the Word and Sacraments. In Baptism, “Everyone who believes and is baptized will be saved.” In the Word, “Whoever believes these words has eternal life.” In the Lord’s Supper, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” This grace of God is fully trustworthy. Thus, “Rest your hope fully upon the grace...”

When St. Peter says, “Gird up the loins of your mind,” he is telling believers not to waver between the old life of conforming to sinful lusts, and the new life of faith in Christ and the resulting Christian holiness. Tuck your flowing robe into your belt, so that your mind can resolve to live in your new Christian life unhindered. Be determined to firmly believe in Christ, and to be God’s child, holy in all your conduct. Obedient children of God trust fully in the grace of the Gospel promise, and relying upon that Word they lead holy lives. Through the call of our Holy God to believe, He gives us holiness in Christ and works in us the holiness of thankful lives.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

When calamity hits, repentance of sins is always an appropriate response. It is not that we should seek or expect to find a direct correlation between a particular calamity and a particular sin. Most of the time it is not that clear. However, we are sinners, and the Lord desires that we confess our sins and trust in Christ for forgiveness.

In today's text Joshua says to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me." God gets the glory when we confess and speak the truth concerning our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. Due to our sinful nature, we are not able to produce a true confession. God gets the credit because He has worked the confession in us through His sin-exposing Law. Furthermore, when faith in Christ's forgiveness follows that confession, God gets the glory there, too! God gets the credit because He has worked trust in us through His faith-creating Gospel message. All glory be to God!

We do know that Achan stole the battle plunder, which according to the covenant belonged solely to God. In verse 20, Achan gives glory to God and confesses, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel..." We are not told whether Achan's confession was followed by faith or not. We leave his eternal destiny in God's hands. Therefore, let us firmly trust in Christ's Gospel, so that we are not in doubt.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

"Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead."

Paul was dealing with persecution. Death was very real to the early Christians. Whether you want to think about it or not, you too have the sentence of death in yourself because of your inheritance of Adam and Eve's original sin.

Original sin caused the removal of God's image from you. Sin caused you to be born into this world spiritually dead. Original sin leads to more sin, actual sin. You sin by the things you think! You sin by the things you say! You sin by the things you do! But more than that, you sin by the way you are! You are by nature sinful and unclean. If you say you have no sin, you deceive yourself and the truth is not in you. And make no mistake about it, the wages of sin is death. That is what you are paid for your sinful life: death.

But thanks be to God that His Son rose from the dead for our new life. Thanks be to God that His Son returned alive for his disciples, and many others, to witness His resurrection. And thanks be to Jesus, the Son of the only true and living God, who has promised to return again to resurrect us from the dead and take us with Him to His eternal kingdom in glory. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Popular culture, the world, and the devil say love equals toleration. But God’s love is not toleration. God does not tolerate sin or the sinner. Neither will He leave the sinner alone. He calls the sinner to repentance and faith. He does this through His performative Word and the Sacraments.

Sometimes God sends a Christian who loves you like Jesus does to call you to repentance. Has there ever been a person who said something like, “I am going to say this to you because I love you...,” and then that person proceeded to tell you of a sin for which you need to repent? Have you ever had a friend who was a good enough friend to do that for you? If you have a friend like that—who loves you like Jesus loves you—you are blessed.

Jesus loved even Pharisees like His adversary Paul. Jesus pointed out Paul’s sin and called Paul the sinner to repentance. God’s undeserved pardon and grace brought salvation to Paul and everyone else who has been moved to faith by God’s work through His Word, Spirit, and faithful disciples. That is the way with God’s love. God won’t leave sinners alone. And that is the way with His Son, Jesus. He calls sinners to repentance, and then forgives us.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

When St. Paul says their coming to the Thessalonians “was not in vain,” he is expressing his firm belief in the Word of God. “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; ... it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

In so far as the preacher has been called and ordained by God, he is “approved” to speak the Gospel to the congregation. God’s approval of the pastor does not allow him to speak “error or uncleanness... nor... deceit,” for falsehood does not accomplish God’s purpose. Misapplied commands and exhortations of the divine Law will not accomplish God’s purposes. Neither is the pastor authorized to bring his own human “demands.” Like St. Paul, the pastor is not to use “flattering words” to “please men” or manipulate the members.

In these eight short verses St. Paul speaks of the Gospel three times! The preaching of the Gospel of God is never in vain. The Gospel is the good news of the free promise of forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ. “The gospel of Christ... is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). The coming of St. Paul, Silas, and Timothy was not in vain because they imparted the Gospel of God.

When you have attended Divine Service and the pastor has boldly preached the Gospel message, you can be sure that God’s Word has gone forth to accomplish His purpose, “to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:2).

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The qualifications for the office of deacon are listed in today's text. Whenever you seek a heart doctor or a plumber, you want to know that the person is qualified and able to perform the sought-after work. In addition to the qualifications, there is also the placing of a man into the office. When God calls a qualified man into the office, you know that God desires to use that man and He is active in that ministry. In yesterday's reading, St. Paul includes both ideas of qualified and called when he says that they were "approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel" (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Today's text requires the deacon to be "holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience." The word "mystery" refers to something which needs to be revealed. The Christian faith that God's Son atoned for the sins of the world is not known by natural knowledge. The mystery that the Father has provided forgiveness through His Son is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The deacon trusts and holds to the Scriptural mystery of the Christian faith so that he knows in his conscience that his sins are forgiven. The deacon is not sinless, but through faith he is forgiven, and in his actions he strives to be blameless.

The faith and words of the man of God ought to be "examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). Thus, let us follow both the faith of deacons, as well as their service of thankfulness.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Judica Sunday

Chapter VI. Of the Third Use of the Law.

1. We believe, teach and confess that although men rightly believing and truly converted to God have been freed and exempted from the curse and coercion of the Law, they nevertheless are not on this account without Law, but have been redeemed by the Son of God, in order that they should exercise themselves in it day and night, (Ps. 119). For even our first parents before the fall did not live without Law, which Law of God was also written upon their hearts, because they were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26sq.; 2:16 sqq.; 3:3).

2. We believe, teach and confess that the preaching of the Law is to be urged with diligence, not only upon the unbelieving and impenitent, but also upon the rightly believing, truly converted, regenerate, and justified by faith.

3. For although they are regenerate and renewed in the spirit of their mind, yet, in the present life, this regeneration and renewal are not complete, but are only begun, and believers are, in the spirit of their mind, in a constant struggle against the flesh, i.e. against the corrupt nature and disposition which cleaves to us unto death. On account of this old Adam, which still inheres in the understanding, will and all the powers of man, it is needful that the Law of the Lord always shine upon the way before him, in order that he may do nothing from self-imposed human devotion; likewise, that the old Adam also may not employ his own will, but may be subdued against his will, not only by the admonition and threatening of the Law, but also by punishments and blows, so that he may follow and surrender himself captive to the Spirit (1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 6:12; Gal. 6:14; Ps. 119:1 sqq.; Heb. 13:21).

4. Then as to the distinction between the works of the Law and the fruits of the Spirit, we believe, teach and confess that the works which are done according to the Law, as long as they are and are called works of the Law, are only extorted from man by the force of punishment and the threatening of God's wrath.

5. But the fruits of the Spirit are the works which the Spirit of God who dwells in believers works through the regenerate, and are done by believers so far as they are regenerate [spontaneously and freely], as though they knew of no command, threat or reward; for in this manner the children of God live in the Law and walk according to the Law of God, a manner which St. Paul, in his Epistles, calls the Law of Christ and the Law of the mind (Rom. 7:25; 8:7).

6. Thus the Law is and remains both to the penitent and impenitent, both to regenerate and unregenerate men, one and the same Law, namely, the immutable will of God; and the distinction, so far as it concerns obedience, is alone in the men, inasmuch as one who is not yet regenerate does what is required him by the Law out of constraint and unwillingly (as also the regenerate do according to the flesh); but the believer, so far as he is regenerate, without constraint and with a willing spirit, does that which no threatening of the Law could ever extort from him.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome, Art. VI

Verses 66-67 in today's reading follow up on the "sifting" process that resulted from Jesus' previous discourse: "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you also want to go away?'" In saying this, Jesus acknowledged that even the Twelve were not immune to falling away. All humanity is born from the same sinful stock of Adam and Eve, and therefore even the staunchest believer is still vulnerable to the pull of Satan. This, of course, would play out with the fall of Judas Iscariot.

Simon Peter, however, who would certainly have his share of issues, makes this steadfast proclamation: "But Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" In saying this, Peter confesses there is no other like Jesus. There is only one God, and Jesus is the true God. Over the course of time, the true disciples' faith had grown stronger, not weaker. Observing the actions of the very Son of God and absorbing His words had been the means by which Peter and the other disciples grew deeper in the faith. In other words, the Means of Grace--Word and Sacrament--which we are given in the Church today are to be treasured and observed with the same diligence, that we too may be rooted and strengthened in the one true faith.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

St. Paul's words to Titus conclude, "...that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things." With these words we see that St. Paul is concerned about a believer's faith and life.

"The doctrine of God our Savior" is clearly the message that the Triune God has atoned for our sins in the person of His Son, and is working to save us through faith in the preaching of the Gospel promise. There is great concern that the ministers preach the correct teaching, centered in justification by grace through faith, and not preaching a perverted teaching. The word "sound" is used as an adjective in three places: "sound doctrine," "sound in faith," and "sound speech." That which is "sound" is whole and rightly ordered. When a boat is described as sound, there are no holes in the hull. The correct doctrine of God is ordered by the central article of justification.

In today's directions for older men, older women, young women, young men, and bondservants, St. Paul is concerned for the vocation of these Christians. After St. Titus has delivered this sound message of salvation, those who hear it are to trust in it for salvation and lead Christian lives in keeping with that sound doctrine. In this way their Christian life "may adorn the doctrine." Or to say it negatively, "the word of God may not be blasphemed," but they should live a life of "good fidelity" to the doctrine of God our Savior.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Laetare Sunday

The Fourth Petition.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Here we are mindful of the poor breadbasket, namely, of our body and the necessities of the temporal life. It is a brief and simple word, but it is also very broad and comprehensive. For if you speak of, and pray for, daily bread, you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy the same, and also against everything which interferes with it. Therefore you must enlarge your thoughts and extend them afar, not only to the oven or the flour-barrel, but to the distant field and the entire land, which bears and brings to us daily bread and every sort of sustenance. For if God did not cause it to grow, and bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take bread from the oven or have any to set upon the table.

To speak briefly, this petition includes everything that belongs to our entire life in the world. For on that account alone do we need daily bread. But to our life it is not only necessary that our body have food and covering and other necessities, but also that we live in peace and quiet with those among whom we live and have our intercourse in daily business and conversation and in every manner possible; in short, whatever pertains to the interests of family, of neighbors and of government. For where these things do not prosper as they ought, the necessities of life also must fail, and life cannot be maintained. There is, besides, the greatest need to pray for temporal authority and government, as that by which, most of all, God preserves to us our daily bread and all the comforts of this life. For though we had received of God all good things in abundance, we should not be able to retain any of them, or use them in security and happiness, if He did not give us a permanent and peaceful government. For where there are dissension, strife and war, there the daily bread is already taken away, or at least diminished.

—The Large Catechism, §71–74

FRIDAY, MARCH 19: JOHN 6:60–65

LAETARE

When Jesus began His ministry, all was well. A nice teaching here, an impressive miracle there, and the multitudes formed. As with any crowd, their levels of allegiance spanned a wide array. But now came the time for allegiance to be tested. Jesus' words became bolder and sharper, and a natural sifting was taking place. Many found the listening "hard." This didn't mean it was difficult to understand, but it was hard for them to believe. Jesus' words were plain enough, but the hardened heart found no place for them. Those with superficial faith fell away, while those with rooted faith stayed fast. It was the parable of the Sower in action. The true disciples were being separated from the false. Jesus' words would eventually be vindicated, as the same One who came down from heaven would rise to return to His heavenly place.

We face the same challenge today. We are daily confronted with Jesus' question, "And who do you say that I am?" There is always a response when Jesus does the calling. His mere presence, whether in flesh in the first century or by inspired Word in the 21st century, always forces the issue. We may try to straddle the fence, but in the end the edge is too narrow. Every encounter with Jesus is truly a force to be reckoned with. We have the information before our eyes, let us pray that it makes a transformation in our hearts. Let us say with St. Peter, "I say You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Jesus had just declared Himself “the bread of life,” then pushed it further by equating that bread with His flesh. The grumbling of the Jews then turned to vehement arguing. “How can He be flesh that must be consumed?” Then came the final straw as Jesus included His blood that must be drunk. This was particularly galling to the Jews, recalling these words from Leviticus: “No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood” (Leviticus 17:12). But they failed to appreciate the previous verse: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11). Unless Jesus gives His flesh and sheds His blood, there is no atonement for sin. And without our faithful “consumption” of Jesus’ sacrifice, there is no salvation.

With this organic description of faith, Jesus emphasizes the intimate nature of our relationship with Him. Faith is not a mere intellectual exercise, but a union between God and man. And nowhere else is this more evident than in our literal, physical consumption of Jesus in Holy Communion as we partake of His true Body and Blood.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

When confronted with Jesus, there is always division--a sort of fork in the road. Either you will end up on the left or the right, a sheep or a goat. There is never a third option. Such is the case in today’s text. After seeing Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, many believed. But there were also those who saw the same resurrection, but instead of rejoicing in Jesus’ power over death, they saw Him as a threat: “Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.’” All the Jewish leaders could see was an intrusion on their position and lifestyle, not a Savior from sin.

The High Priest Caiaphas sought to end the threat: “And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.’” Little did he realize that “ending the threat” would actually aid God’s plan of salvation. May we, as believers, continue to hold fast to the “right side,” the blessed hope of everlasting life found only in Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In their wilderness wanderings the Israelites found themselves in the Desert of Sin. Even though its name is not connected to our English word, it is coincidental this is a desolate place where food and water are scarce or nonexistent. After having left the lush oasis of Elim, the Israelites' food supplies were running out and their hunger turned to grumbling and blaming. Though God had every right and reason to lash out, out of His great mercy He promised to sustain them with manna--God's bread from heaven. In addition, He would provide meat in the form of quail. But most importantly, they would experience the presence of the Lord God Himself: "Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud." God not only gave His people earthly sustenance, He gave them Himself. And thus He assured them He will always be with them, and with us.

But how often do we lament, "if only I had been there it would be easier to believe"? In reality, we are the more highly privileged, as God has made Himself available through the means of Word and Sacrament. The faithful message of Law and Gospel is only an arm's reach away, if only we avail ourselves of their riches. May God grant us the wisdom to behold the glory of God, given to us in His Means of Grace in His Church.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Jesus' statement, "I am the bread come down from heaven," got the Jews grumbling again. First, they attacked the words "from heaven," arguing they knew Jesus' earthly parents. What they did not know is the identity of Jesus' heavenly Father. Even though He had told them, they would not believe. They had rejected the "draw" of the Father (verse 44). Second, they objected to Jesus calling Himself "heavenly bread"--a gift far greater than the earthly sustenance given by God in the desert.

Jesus' message to these Jews was essentially the same one He gave to Nicodemus in Chapter 3 (about spiritual birth) and to the Samaritan woman in Chapter 4 (about living water). Whether described as a birth in the Spirit, living water, or living bread, the only way to the Father and everlasting life is through the Father's Son, Jesus Christ. And the only way to the Son is to believe in the eternal promises given in God's Holy Word. That Word is the sole source of His heavenly "draw" (Romans 10:17). If we ignore it, we are lost. But if we allow it to have its way, we will indeed have "the bread of life." God grant that we hunger for such divine food, that we may hold fast to everlasting life.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.