



REFLECTIONS

Easter Sunday -
Saturday the Seventh Week of Easter
March 31, 2024 - May 18, 2024



MARCH 31 - MAY 18

This season's Reflections were written by

*Reverend Eli Davis, Pastor of Saint Paul Lutheran Church in
Grants Pass, OR*

*Reverend Duane Bamsch, Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in
Grass Valley, CA*

*Reverend Robert Mayes, Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church
and Zion Saint John Lutheran Church, Beemer and Wisner, NE*

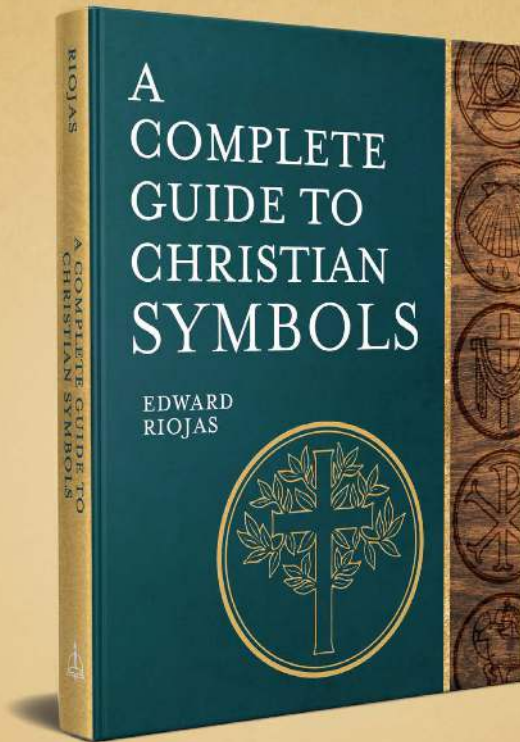
*Reverend Samuel Schuldheisz, Pastor of Beautiful Savior
Lutheran Church in Milton, WA*

2024 Reflections Staff:

Karrie Jacoby, Reflections Editor

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A Short Form for Daily Reflection

ADAPTED FROM LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK

Make the sign of the Holy Cross and say:

In the name of the Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Read the Psalm for the Day (A table of daily psalms can be found in Lutheran Service Book, page 304).

Read “Today’s Reading” if there is one listed.

Read the Daily Lectionary selections.

Read the Reflection for the Day.

Say the Apostles’ Creed.

Pray the Lord’s Prayer.

Pray one of these little prayers:

(In the Morning)

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

In the morning go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, such as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest.

(In the Evening)

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me.

If it is evening, then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

Easter Sunday

MARCH 31, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 16:1-8

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 14:10-31, Hebrews 7:23-8:13

"You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here. See the place where they laid Him." (Mark 16:6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. If you haven't noticed, death is the one thing our whole world is running away from. We hide death away in hospitals and nursing homes so no one can see it. We ignore death when it rears its head in public. Many times, we don't even pay attention when it is our own family that is dying. We're so afraid of it, that we can't even look death in the eye when it's right in front of our faces, unless we dress it up as something it isn't. We are afraid. We're afraid because we are powerless against death. And no one has ever beaten it...

Except One.

And that One changed everything. Mary, Mary, and Salome were looking for a dead Jesus. But they don't find Him in the tomb. Instead they are told that He is not here. He is not in the grave. He is not dead. He is risen. Jesus lives! What does this mean? It means that death has been overcome. Not just for Jesus, but for all people. The grave is not the end. The thing that we're the most afraid of has been conquered. And that changes everything.

Resurrection is now on the table. Jesus died and then rose for you. Jesus gives you His resurrection. It is yours. All the things we feared about death no longer have any bite to them. We no longer need to ignore death, or ignore those who are dying. We can look death in the eye and not be afraid, because we have a Savior that is stronger than even death itself. Even if death does take us or those we loved, it can't hold anyone for long. The day is coming when all will rise. The faithful will enter into eternal life with Christ, and the unfaithful will be judged, but death will no longer have a single trophy to mount on its mantelpiece.

That's how big the resurrection of Jesus is. Our enemy, death, has been defeated by Christ. That's why Easter Sunday is so central to the Church. Death can no longer be our end. Even when we die. And that's why every Sunday is a little Easter. This news is so big, it's the center of our faith. This is the day Jesus rose. This is the day we receive the promise of His resurrection. All because Jesus lives! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus lives! And now is death - But the gate of life immortal; This shall calm my trembling breath - When I pass its gloomy portal. Faith shall cry, as fails each sense: -Jesus is my confidence! (LSB 490:5)

Easter Monday

APRIL 1, 2024

Today's Reading: Luke 24:13-35 (36-49)

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 15:1-18, Hebrews 9:1-28

And He said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. (Luke 24:17)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Yesterday, we heard that Jesus has conquered death by His resurrection. That's good news for us. We no longer need to be afraid when we face death. But how do things change when it's someone we care about who dies? The harsh reality is that everyone dies, because that's the wages of sin. Even our loved ones die, whether that 's today, or a day down the road. And that day hurts so badly that we often don't know what to do next. Death is our enemy. Death is what attacks us like this. And on our own we have no defense. Sad feels like too light a word to describe what Cleopas and his friend were enduring. Sad is too light a word when we are grieving.

But Jesus doesn't leave us alone when death comes near. He joins us on the road. He weeps with us (John 11:35). He comforts us (John 14:27). And He does something about it. Jesus enters into death in our place. Jesus dies for our sins. So that on the third day, Jesus's resurrection would be an end to death, and a promise of our resurrection, and the resurrection of those we love in the faith unto eternal life.

But that promise isn't just for sometime down the road. It's also for today. What does Jesus do with Cleopas and the other disciple? "He took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them." If those words sound familiar, they should. It's the same language used in the Words of Institution at the Lord's Supper. Many Churches have communion rails that are in the shape of a semicircle. It's that way for a reason. When we receive the Lord's Body and Blood, we do so with the whole Church. Not just the whole Church on earth. But all those who have died in the faith as well. We are with them even now, gathered around the rail, receiving Jesus. Jesus comforts us in our grief, both now, and in the hope of the resurrection.

Death will still try its hardest to be our enemy in this world. Its attacks still hurt more than we can bear. But not even death can stop Jesus from bringing His resurrection and His hope to us, through His Word, through His baptism, and through His body and blood. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Easter Tuesday

APRIL 2, 2024

Today's Reading: Luke 24:36-49

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 15:19-16:12, Hebrews 10:1-18

[Jesus] said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:46-47)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. If you ever find the need to explain what Christianity is to someone who doesn't know, here's how I do it: There was a guy two thousand years ago who claimed to be God. To prove it, He said that they would kill Him, and on the third day He would rise from the dead. They killed Him, and on the third day, He rose from the dead. Maybe He's right about that God thing.

Well, that guy who rose from the dead said that the Law and the Prophets, and the Psalms, what we call the Old Testament, is all about Him. In what way? That repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations. That guy is Jesus. And what He came for was to forgive our sins. That's why He died. Because those sins needed to be paid for. And He paid them in full for you, for me, for the world. Because we are forgiven, we are able to confess our sin, openly acknowledge it, and repent.

Do you realize just how hard that is for sinful people to do without faith? Someone might confess something that they don't think is wrong. Or something that they think everyone else does, so there is no harm in it. But the Old Adam in our hearts cannot bear to confess anything that we can stand accused by others with. Those that have no choice but to confess that they've harmed others find that, apart from faith, their sanity is broken. The idol of self is shattered. Despair is all they have.

And yet Christians regularly confess such things. I, a poor miserable sinner. We confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. It is the same sin confessed, but we are not broken by confessing it. Just the opposite. It is taken away, we are forgiven, and we are left with the joy of Christ. Delivering Jesus' forgiveness to you is the joyous job of your pastor. Go to him. Confess your sins. Hear those words of Jesus from your pastor's mouth. You are forgiven in full. That is miraculous. And that's who Jesus is. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

If Christ had not been raised from death Our faith would be in vain, Our preaching but a waste of breath Our sin and guilt remain But now the Lord is ris'n indeed; He rules in earth and heav'n His Gospel meets a world of need—In Christ we are forgiv'n (LSB 486:1)

Easter Wednesday

APRIL 3, 2024

Today's Reading: John 21:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 16:13-35, Hebrews 10:19-39

When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. (John 21:7b)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Why does Peter throw himself into the sea? Perhaps Peter was just so excited to see Jesus that he couldn't wait to get to shore. But the problem is they weren't very far from shore in the first place, especially since Jesus could talk to them from it. Also, Peter isn't mentioned in our reading today as actually getting to shore, or to Jesus. In fact, the next we hear about him, he's getting back on the boat to bring the fish in the net. Almost like he's avoiding Jesus. Which might be exactly the case.

You see, Peter denied Jesus three times. And that denial hurt Peter to the core. He had been living with that sin unconfessed and unforgiven for a while now. And the longer we keep those sins hidden, the harder it is for us to give them over to Christ, who has paid for them all. In Peter's case, it took Jesus calling him three times to feed His lambs for Peter to understand that Christ's forgiveness covers every sin. So it's not too difficult to see Peter, stripped for work, needing to cover his shame.

We too have sins that need forgiveness. We too have denied Jesus when we should have confessed him. We too are ashamed of what we have done. We might acknowledge that sins are forgiven, but maybe, because my sin was so bad, I'm too disgraced to join in with everyone else. We're far more comfortable just covering everything up. Hiding from everyone, especially Jesus, lest my shame be exposed for the world to see.

But where did Peter, in all his shame end up. In water. Where is all our sin taken away? Where is all our shame clothed with Christ's righteousness? Where is all our disgrace covered and cleansed? In water. You are baptized into the death of Jesus. By that water, and by the Word connected to that water, all your sin has been taken away. By your Baptism, Jesus forgives you completely. Every sin, no matter how bad, they're all taken away. He died for them all.

And this is yours. It is not earned. It is not by your own works. Jesus gives this forgiveness to you freely. He assures you that by His cross, He has paid for that sin in full. And He has sealed that promise by baptizing you...In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God's own Child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ He, because I could not pay it, Gave my full redemption price. Do I need earth's treasures many? I have one worth more than any That brought me salvation free Lasting to eternity! (LSB 594:1)

Easter Thursday

APRIL 4, 2024

Today's Reading: The Lord's Prayer

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 33:1-20; Romans 3:1-18

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Prayer is a conversation that God starts in His Word. This fact still surprises a lot of Christians. We tend to think that prayer is us sending our requests to God, and then hearing back nothing at all until something happens. That's missing the very half of prayer that we need. God initiates the conversation with us. He has a lot to say to us. And it is written down in the Bible for us to read. And it's there where the Lord teaches us how to pray.

In Divine Service settings One and Two, the pastor says right before we all pray the Lord's Prayer, "Lord, remember us in Your kingdom and teach us to pray:" These words come from the disciples in Luke 11:1. Jesus tells His disciples in the very next verse, "When you pray, say:" And He gives us the Lord's prayer. Jesus teaches us how to pray with these words. And this prayer that Jesus gave us covers everything we could possibly need. Over the next few weeks, we'll get a chance to look at those words in depth here on Thursdays.

But our Lord teaches us to pray, not just with these words, but with all the Words of Scripture. The Psalms are also known as the prayerbook of the Church. They're the words that the Old Testament Church prayed. They're the words that Jesus prayed. And we still pray those words today. In those Psalms, we have prayers for all kinds of places we find ourselves in life. There are prayers of joy, prayers of sorrow, prayers for being in need, prayers for repentance, prayers for endurance, prayers for overcoming our enemies, and prayers for our enemies.

We don't just find prayers there either. Every place where the Lord has made a promise to us is a place where we learn how to pray. For our Lord wants us to pray to Him and ask for the things that He has promised to give. In that way, all the Bible is our prayer book. And we can expect the Lord to answer 'yes' when we ask for what He has promised to give. Every part of the Lord's prayer calls upon a promise of God. And He fulfills his promises.

Therefore pray. Pray as the Lord has taught us. Pray as the Word of God teaches us. Pray, because prayer is a conversation that God starts in His Word, and He wants to talk to you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Easter Friday

APRIL 5, 2024

Today's Reading: Hebrews 12:1-24

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 18:5-27, Hebrews 12:1-24

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1b-2)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. We're not really built for endurance in our society today. We have a way out of, or away from just about any kind of suffering we can imagine. We will even avoid things that are mildly inconvenient, or mask over them by retreating to our phones for that next dopamine fix. When difficult things come, we do not know how to handle them, or what endurance even looks like.

But our Lord built us for endurance. Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24) And, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." (Matthew 5:11) St. Paul also says, "we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame..." (Romans 5:3-5a) Or as the verse that my pastor gave me on my Confirmation day says, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer... Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10)

You see, there is more joy when suffering is over than can ever be achieved by running away from it. And Jesus has that in store for us, both in this life, and into the next. That's why we confess our sins, and receive forgiveness instead of pretending we have no sin. That's why we endure the cost of being a Christian in this pagan world, with the sure and certain hope of eternal life. And that's why Jesus, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross. His joy was in your salvation.

After Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30) on the cross, He cried out with a loud shout. I think it was a shout of joy. Because it shook the earth, tore the curtain of the temple in two, and raised the dead. But the suffering was done. He endured. Your forgiveness is won. And now, it was time to rest.

Remember, the Lord has built you for endurance. He is the one who gives it to you. He is your founder and perfecter. And His gifts of life, forgiveness, and salvation are worth enduring all for. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Easter Saturday

APRIL 6, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 105:1-5, 8; antiphon: 1 Peter 2:2-3

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 19:1-25, Hebrews 13:1-21

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.
(1 Peter 2:2-3, Antiphon for the Introit on the Second Sunday of Easter)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In tomorrow's Introit, we are told to "long for the pure spiritual milk." We need to be fed in our faith just as much as we need food for our bodies. That food comes from Christ. And usually, this is where we would talk about the Lord's Supper. But our Introit does something different here. Instead of solid food, we are told to be like infants, and have milk.

This is often compared in the New Testament to the very basics of the Christian faith. "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food." (Hebrews 5:12). As a result, you may hear fellow Christians say things like: "The death and resurrection of Jesus is the basics of the faith. We want to move on from that milk to more meaty topics." But anything that leaves out the death and resurrection of Jesus loses the very center of what makes it Christian. Besides, spiritual milk is good for you, no matter how mature in the faith you think you are.

Remember, the promise made to the people of Israel. They were coming into a land flowing with milk and honey. And the Lord didn't just mean a parcel of land in the Middle East. His Church is the place where we are fed that pure spiritual milk. We live in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We never graduate from that good news. It remains at the center of our entire Christian lives. Is there meat to dig into as well? You bet! But it always returns to Christ at the center.

After all, where else are you going to find the forgiveness of sins, given freely? Where else are you going to find life after death in the resurrection of the flesh? Where else are you going to find your salvation if not in Christ's own work, done on your behalf? Therefore, long for the pure spiritual milk that Jesus has for you. Only with Jesus at the center can your faith grow. And He's the one who gives the growth. By keeping you in His Word, and giving you His gifts in the sacraments. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Jerusalem the Golden, With milk and honey blessed The promise of salvation,
The place of peace and rest We know not, oh, we know not What joys await us
there: The radiancy of glory, The bliss beyond compare (LSB 672:1)*

Sunday the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 7, 2024

Today's Reading: John 20:19-31

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 20:1-24, Luke 4:1-15

...Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. (John 21:19b-20)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Scars tell a story. I got a new scar on my chest not long ago. I had gallstones, one the size of a golf ball. That's got quite a story behind it. Others have scars on their arms, legs, faces, and those come with stories too. Some of them are entertaining. But some of them are difficult stories, with a lot of pain behind them. And for some, the pain is still there. Those are the scars we hide. There are also some scars that we can't see, buried deep down. Emotional scars, some of which have not fully healed.

All of these scars tell a story. A story of when we were hurt. I've been asked more than once, "Will we still have our scars in the resurrection?" After all, the disciples put their hands on Jesus' scars. And it was by those scars that we believe. But we really do want our painful scars gone. Isn't that why Jesus came? Isn't that why Jesus died? To make those scars that hurt us go away?

Yet the scars of Jesus also tell a story. Scars from the whip. Scars from the nails. The scar from the spear. These tell the story of Jesus saving you. Jesus got all those scars by paying for your sins, by dying in your place, and by giving you His perfect life in exchange.

Jesus didn't die to take away your scars. Heal your wounds? Yes. Bear your pains? Absolutely. But those scars are too important to hide away. Too important to remove. Because scars mark the place where a wound has healed. If your wound is still open, Jesus is there to heal that wound. But when healed, the scar remains. Your scars, all of them, mark the place where Christ has healed you. They mark the place where Jesus is with you even now.

Because you share your scars with Jesus, those words, "Peace be with you," now mean so much more. There is not a single sin that isn't forgiven. There isn't a single wound that can't be healed. There isn't a single death which hasn't already been overcome. And every day you see that scar. Every day you feel that scar inside. Every day that scar reminds you of the painful story that goes with it. It is also a reminder that Jesus died for that. Jesus rose for that. Jesus is with you right now for that. You have His peace. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord by the stripes which wounded Thee, From death's dread sting, Thy servants free That we may live and sing to Thee. Alleluia! (LSB 464:5)

Monday the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 8, 2024

Today's Reading: Acts 4:32-35

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 22:20-23:13, Luke 4:16-30

And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.
(Acts 4:33)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Sunday's first reading from Acts makes the early church sound perfect. Everyone shared, nobody had need, and Jesus was preached every day. If our world lived like that, a lot of our problems would be better off. Do you know how long that lasted? Three verses later, in chapter five, sin broke it.

What's even better than giving up everything and being taken care of completely by the Church? Giving up only part of that, and still being completely taken care of. Ananias and Sapphira had figured out how to game the system. How to get all the stuff without the same sacrifice everyone else made. The surprising part is that Peter speaks the Word of the Lord concerning their sin, and they die. As a result, "great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard these things." (Acts 5:11)

What is the First Commandment? You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Sometimes we've been taught that fear means respect. But that's really more trust, not fear. Fear is knowing that God is rightly angry over sin. Sin hurts those our Lord loves. Remaining in our sin is to continue hurting those whom God loves. We should be afraid of God because of our sin. Just as Ananias and Sapphira should have feared God before sinning the way they did. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. (Proverbs 9:10a)

But fear isn't the only thing we are called to. Our Lord is angry over sin, yes. But He has also poured out all that wrath upon Christ at the cross. Jesus stood in our place, endured what our sin earned. He loves us in that He sacrificed everything for our sake. Our love isn't the cause of our faith, it's the result of God's grace. We love because He first loved us. And we trust Him, because He's shown Himself trustworthy in keeping His promises. Promises that He fulfilled in His death and resurrection.

That's why the early church lived the way it did. Because Christ took care of their greatest needs already. Sin, death, and the devil have been overcome. And in the middle of it all? Preaching of the resurrection of Christ. That's what was at the center then. And it's still at the center now. Christ crucified for you. Christ risen for you. Christ forgiving your every sin. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Tuesday the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 9, 2024

Today's Reading: 1 John 1:1-2:2

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 23:14-33, Luke 4:31-44

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9 ESV)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Last Sunday's Epistle reading from 1 John has a familiar couple of verses if you're used to using Divine Service, settings One or Two. As we prepare to confess our sins, we speak responsively verses eight and nine from chapter one. But have you ever stopped to think how strange it is that Christians regularly confess our sins?

People without faith don't generally confess to having done anything wrong. Our sinful hearts train us from birth to justify our every action. The toddler who knocks over the lamp blames his stuffed animal. When that excuse doesn't work, he learns to make his self-justification more believable next time. Even at ten years old, he has learned to be ready to explain why he's done every action, just in case anyone questions him. Self-justification is such a part of our lives in this world, that we expect it from everyone.

No one confesses to having done anything wrong, at least not in any meaningful way. People might admit to doing something that everyone else does, or something that has no actual consequences. Someone famous, when caught doing something really bad might make an apology tour. Not because they think they did anything wrong, but it's the price to pay to retain their fame, money, or power.

When someone does end up doing something that they can't justify, it breaks them. They live the rest of their lives in regret, in grief, in despair. It drives them to madness, and they believe that they are without hope, without forgiveness, without mercy, because they recognize that they have sinned, and they cannot fix that.

But Christians confess their sins all the time, and we don't fall into madness or despair over it. Why? Because not only do we know we have sinned, we also know that God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Christ Jesus has taken all our sin away. He paid sin's price. He died on the cross in our place. And He's given us His perfect life in exchange. That good news overcomes our attempts of self-justification. That good news overcomes our despair. That good news is for you. And we trust our Lord enough to confess all our sins to Him, knowing that He has already forgiven all. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 10, 2024

Today's Reading: Exodus 24:1-18

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 24:1-18, Luke 5:1-16

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank. (Exodus 24:9-11)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. There's a lot going on in the Daily Lectionary's reading from Exodus today. The Lord renews His covenant with His people. Moses heads up Mt. Sinai. And just before that, at Sinai's base, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders join Moses in seeing God. That's really cool! Don't you wish you could see Jesus like they did?

We must admit that we don't see Jesus in the same way. Jesus Himself told Thomas in last Sunday's Gospel lesson, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29) And yet, our Lord has given us a place to go that's very much like how they saw God in Exodus 24.

When you're in Church next Sunday, pay attention to the altar. What's on it? You'll find bread and wine. When Christ's Word is spoken, that bread and wine are now also the body and blood of Christ. The same body that hung as a sacrifice on the cross. The same blood that was shed for your forgiveness. We see Jesus there. We behold God, and we eat and we drink. The same way they did at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

The altar is the place where heaven and earth meet. It's where God is seen. Maybe in a little different way than Moses, Thomas and the rest saw. But our Lord cares enough about you to rend the heavens and come down. He meets you where you are, down here in the dirt of your sin, and the grime of your fallenness. And He comes to cleanse you. Taking away your shame. Forgiving your sin. Comforting your grief.

He doesn't worry what will happen to Him, even when it's a cross. You're worth getting dirty for. You're worth dying for. This is what Christ has done for you. And it's what Christ continues to do for you. And we get to see it every time we're in Church. We get to see Jesus. And not just see Him, but hear Him, taste Him, smell Him, touch Him. He engages all our senses so that we may know that He is here indeed, and here for you. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 11, 2024

Today's Reading: The Lord's Prayer - Introduction

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 25:1-22, Exodus 25:23-30:38, Luke 5:17-39

Our Father, who art in heaven. What does this mean? With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We usually know Luke 15:11-32 as the parable of the Prodigal Son. But the person in the story who acts the least like we think he should is the father. The father in that story gives a reckless son his inheritance early, knowing he will squander it. The father should be stern and teach his son a lesson about respect when he finally returns. But instead he sacrifices his dignity to go running to him, sacrifices his property in order to fully restore the son to inheritance rights, and throws a feast for his son to let all his neighbors know that he will not let his son be shamed. Such actions cost a lot, both in money, and in social standing. But the father was willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of his son.

This is how God the Father treats us. Our sin is an open rebellion against Him. And yet, instead of leaving us to die in our sin, the Father sacrifices His Son Jesus in order to save us. No price was too high, no shame too great, no loss too much when it came to saving us. God was willing to get His hands dirty in order to get us out of the dirt of our sin. He let that sin fall upon Him, rather than let us die forever with it upon ourselves. That's what love does. And God loves us. Even while we were still sinners, God loves us.

Therefore we pray to God as children go and ask their own fathers for what they need. We might have a really good Dad that God gave us, we might have a Dad that isn't so good. But our Lord is the perfect Father. The example for all fathers to follow. So we go and ask Him for what He has promised. And, like the crazy father in the parable, He plans to say yes to all of it. Every promise He has made. His name, His kingdom, His will, daily bread, forgiveness, deliverance, all of it. He wants us to call upon Him and ask for it. And He will give it. That's a promise. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Friday the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 12, 2024

Today's Reading: Luke 6:1-19

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 31:1-18, Luke 6:1-19

And He said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Luke 6:5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In the New Testament reading from the daily lectionary today, Jesus and the Pharisees butt heads over the Sabbath. The Third Commandment is indeed, 'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.' God did command that no work should be done on the Sabbath. But the word Sabbath in Hebrew means 'rest.' (It also means 'seven.') Abstaining from work is certainly one way to rest. But it is not the only way.

When Jesus' disciples plucked grain and ate it, they received rest from their hunger. When Jesus healed the man with the withered hand, that man received rest from his affliction. When Jesus healed the diseases of the multitudes, and drove out unclean spirits, those people received rest from sicknesses and oppression. But the Pharisees were furious, and plotted together what they might do to Jesus. Because Jesus ignored the lesser rest in order that people might have a greater rest.

We still do this today. We so want the lesser gifts that our Lord gives that we despise the greater. We pray about a test, or because we're late, and we want to get through that moment well. But maybe missing that moment is something the Lord has for us in order to strengthen our faith, and teach us endurance. But we end up placing such importance on that moment, that we resent God for letting us go through that, and want nothing to do with the forgiveness of sins or eternal life. The Pharisees and we aren't all that different.

Therefore repent. Turn to Christ and hand over your sin. Because He has done something truly remarkable with the Sabbath. In Genesis, on the seventh day, God rested from all His labors. Good Friday was the sixth day. And moments before sundown, which marked the beginning of the Sabbath, Jesus was placed in a tomb. And there He rested. The entire Sabbath Jesus rested from the work of giving us the greatest rest of all. Jesus rested from all His labors of the cross where He earned our forgiveness and salvation. Forgiveness even for failing to see the rest He has given us.

Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. He gives the greater rest. Therefore find rest in Him. Find sin, death, and the devil conquered. Find all your greatest troubles and fears overcome. Find rest from your work, from your life, from everything you have been given to endure. Christ is our rest. So rest in Him. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 13, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 30:1-5; antiphon: Psalm 16:11b

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 32:1-14, Luke 6:20-38

Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning."(Psalm 30:5b, from the Introit on the Third Sunday of Easter)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Psalm used for the Introit tomorrow is a Psalm of thanksgiving and praise. It expresses the joy of having been delivered from a terrible situation. However, we tend to get so wrapped up in the joy, that we forget how it must have felt in those moments before the Lord gave relief.

This Psalm is written in the first person. That makes this Psalm my prayer. Before I was drawn up, I was at the bottom. The foes were about to have an opportunity to rejoice over me. I had to cry for help. My soul was in Sheol, down in that pit. There was a whole night of weeping. And from the moment it started, I wanted it to be over. But it was not over right away. It did not end at my first prayer. I had to endure the night.

In this sinful world, there will always be something that I must endure. Running away from it often only gets me into more trouble, more suffering. Covering it up only takes the joy out of everything else. I must learn to endure many things in this life, because I need to endure.

But needing to endure is not a sign of the Lord's absence. It's a sign of His presence. Because Christ endures with me. And Christ endures even more for my sake. Because Jesus Christ died on the cross for me and rose for me, I have His promise that I will not have to endure forever. There is an end to what I suffer. It may not be this moment. It may not be this day. But there is an end to suffering. There is an end to what I must endure.

And when that end comes, there is nothing so joyful in all the world. Especially with Jesus enduring with us. And that's our Introit tomorrow. There is joy when we receive a hard fought victory. There is joy in getting the help we need. There is joy in being healed. There is joy in the resurrection. There is joy in the forgiveness of sins. There is joy in being named a child of God. And that such joy comes at the end of endurance only magnifies the joy to a level we could never understand without going through all that. Jesus Christ is our morning. He has endured all for you. And endures all with you too. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Sunday the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 14, 2024

Today's Reading: Luke 24:36-49

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 32:15-35, Luke 6:39-49

“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” (St. Luke 24:39-41)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. “Have you anything here to eat?” That’s the strangest thing ever to hear from the Risen Lord after the resurrection, isn’t it? But He has a good reason to ask: “a spirit does not have flesh and bones.”

This Jesus that appears to the disciples (hidden away behind locked doors, no less!) isn’t some spiritual apparition. He isn’t a figment of their imaginations. He stands before them in the flesh, and, as we all know, you have to eat to live in this world. The risen Jesus needed to eat just as much as you do, because He is a real, living person.

And that is the comfort in these words. That Jesus, risen from the dead—the one who bore all your sins in His body, who died a horrible death upon His cross, who descended into Hell and came back, who conquered death, who rose from the dead and lives even now—needed a snack. Even in His resurrection He identifies so closely with His creatures, He is still so completely man (while being completely God), that He eats with his closest friends.

Truth be told, He kind of has to; because they are still a bit unsure if this is all real. St. Luke says they “disbelieved for joy.” That is, they were so absolutely stunned and overjoyed to see Jesus again that they couldn’t believe their good fortune. You know how that works, right? You get news about something that is so astounding and so earthshaking that you can’t believe it is real, even as you jump for joy upon hearing the news.

How does Jesus calm them down and remind them that He is indeed with them in the flesh? By eating with them. By doing the most human thing possible; sharing a meal with those He loves.

Don’t forget in this Easter season of glory and Alleluias that your Lord Jesus needed to eat because He became man for you; to bear your sin, to wash you with His blood, to fulfill God’s Law for you, and ultimately to make a place for you at His eternal table. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Monday the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 15, 2024

Today's Reading: Acts 3:11-21

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 33:1-23, Luke 7:1-17

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. (Jonah 3:10)

“And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.” (Acts 3:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus's healing miracles can sometimes make us feel less than. They can make us feel left out or unimportant. Why does this person get to be healed, and here I am, still suffering from the thing I've prayed over and over again for God to heal or take away? Why doesn't He do for me what He does for these people in the Bible, like the disabled man Peter healed? That's a complicated answer beyond this brief page. But this fact remains: that man may have been healed, but he did eventually die. And that's the thing about us all; we will all die unless Jesus returns first.

But that is where the comfort of this text comes in. We will all surely die, but we will also all be surely raised on the Last Day. And the faith that we have in Jesus now will lead to perfect health in the life of the world to come, and that life never ends. That life is one that lasts forever. That perfect health will last forever. That newly-resurrected body will never give you the problems it does now.

Your Baptism created within you the faith that gives perfect health. Your Baptism gave you life everlasting. It is something you have right now. You may not see or feel it, but that is Jesus's promise to you: by virtue of your Baptism, you now have eternal life and you now live forever. You can't see the fullness of that just yet, none of us can, but it is yours. Oh, sure, your sinful flesh will want to deny that every single day. “There's no way I can have eternal life, just look at me!”

No! Jesus has said to you in your Baptism that you indeed are recreated to live forever. The promise of His Word, given through Holy Scripture backs that up. He has declared it, and you trust His Word, given into your ears. That's what faith is; trust created in you by Jesus to hear and believe His promises for you. Perfect healing is yours. Life forever is yours. Everlasting comfort is yours. Because of Jesus, because He loves you and wants you with Him forever. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Tuesday the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 16, 2024

Today's Reading: 1 John 3:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 34:1-28, Luke 7:18-35

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. One of the hardest things for us to understand is what the resurrected life will be like. When we get to the New Jerusalem, the New Creation, how will we live? What will we look like? How does all of this work? After all, I'm not sure I'll ever learn to play the harp while floating on a cloud and trying to keep my halo on straight!

Faith. Trust. Promises. These are words our sinful flesh has a hard time grasping and holding onto. And the best part about that is that we don't have to try and grasp those things, because our faith does the grasping and believing!

Every day, faithful Christians wonder if they are good enough for Jesus to "take them to heaven." And every day, that same Jesus encourages them through His Word that that isn't the right question.

We are God's children NOW, St. John says. Because of your faith, given to you in your Baptism, you are now God's child. Right now. This very minute. And that faith that He's given to you in your washing and recreating is what grasps the promise that you have a future with Him in eternity.

We still can't fully understand what that will look like, but that's OK, because we have His further promise that we will see that future when He comes again for us. On that Last Day, on the day of the resurrection of all the dead, we will see what we've been waiting for, and it'll be better than the greatest unboxing video of all time.

We are God's children now, indeed. Live every day in that promise. Trust that promise, given to you, and rely on it when times are good, and especially when it is hard to believe, because Jesus has redeemed you, bought you back, wrapped you in His arms, and holds you near in a way that will be made so perfectly clear when He comes again for you.

You are God's child now. He's not going to let you go. Hold Him to that promise, because He holds Himself to it, because He loves you. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 17, 2024

Today's Reading: Exodus 34:29-35:21

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 34:29-35:21, Exodus 35:22-38:20, Luke 7:36-50

And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the LORD's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. (Exodus 35:21)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. If you ask most pastors, they would be ecstatic if they never, ever, ever had to talk about money in the Divine Service ever again. It always feels a bit uncomfortable, because even though the Offering of the Church is a free gift from the people of God, it always feels a bit like 'asking for money.'

At the same time, though, churches do need funding to keep the lights on, pay their church workers and support staff, and to make the worship space look like a place where the Most High God visits His people, regardless of the building where you gather.

When Moses asked the Children of Israel to bring offerings together, he was planning to build the Tabernacle to the Great I AM's exacting specifications. There was a specific plan for the tabernacle which we don't have to follow today in our churches, since there isn't one specific place on earth where Christ is present, but upon every altar where his Word is taught in its truth and purity and where His sacraments are administered according to His institution.

One way that we love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, and mind is by returning to Him a portion of all we earn as a way of thanksgiving and praise for all He has done for us. Offerings can be musical, or hands-on during a workday or servant event, or as an acolyte or usher. They primarily take the form of monetary gifts, though, in the offering plate.

Has your heart been stirred or your spirit moved by what the Lord God has done for you in Christ? Are you thankful for the salvation Christ won for you on His cross? One response of praise and thanksgiving is to set aside some of your income (paycheck, allowance, etc.) to return to the Lord's church on a regular basis.

It can be a wonderful feeling to return in joy to the Lord just a tiny portion of all that He showers upon us. It is just one more way to say thank you to the Lord for lifting you out of sin and death and setting you on the way of forgiveness and salvation. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 18, 2024

Today's Reading: The Lord's Prayer - First Petition

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 38:21-39:8, 22-23, 27-31; Luke 8:1-21

Hallowed be Thy name. How is God's name kept holy? God's name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. (The Lord's Prayer, the First Petition, Small Catechism)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God's name is inscribed upon your forehead and heart in Holy Baptism. That's an almost scary thing. God Himself has 'marked you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified' we say in the baptismal rite.

This means that wherever you go, you bear God's holy name upon you. You go out into this dark, sin-wracked, and dying world with the mark of Almighty God Himself upon you. The demons see that and know who's side you are on immediately. That is also a scary thing, because it makes you an easy target for their attacks. And those attacks come in strange and mysterious ways. Sometimes it is a temptation from a friend. Or a random Instagram reel or TikTok. There are so many ways that the world, the Devil, and yes, even your own sinful flesh, rebel against that mark of God's holy name upon your forehead.

How do you keep God's name holy in such a dangerous and sin-filled world? How can you lead a holy life when waves of sin constantly wash over you? By going to church, by receiving the Lord's Supper. By participating in Bible Study. By spending time in daily devotions. By remembering your Baptism.

Sure, those all sound mundane (and probably even boring), but that is how God promises to be with you. That is how Christ Jesus promises to strengthen you and your faith. He uses the things of this world (which He created) to remind you that you have been recreated in Him.

Gather together where God's Word is taught in truth and purity. Hear the preaching of that living Word of God. Taste on your tongue with joy the gift of Jesus's body and blood. Dip your fingers in the baptismal font's living waters. Let God Himself remind you again and again of what he's done for you.

Open your ears to those words. Let His gifts wash over you and give thanks for what He has done for you in Jesus. Remember that you are baptized and you are safe in God's hands. Live your life in the sure and certain hope that because Jesus lives and has saved you, that God's holy name will always be with you until He comes again. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Friday the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 19, 2024

Today's Reading: Luke 8:22-39

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 39:32-40:16, Luke 8:22-39

And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. (Luke 8:36-37)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. “We don’t like you, Jesus. We appreciate that you healed that demon-possessed guy and got him to be civilized again, but we’re afraid of you now. So, if you wouldn’t mind, please go far, far away.”

That’s not exactly the response you might expect after a miracle. Of course, there is a bit more to it. The exorcized demons possess a herd of pigs and drown them, causing the loss of a good bit of income, so I can understand their fear. What could happen next, after all?

Trust is the issue. Who do they trust? Who do you trust? The newly demon-free man wanted to follow Jesus back to Galilee and on a “glory tour” of sorts. He wanted to see all the wonderful things Jesus would do, but Jesus told him that his greatest work would be staying home and telling others how he was healed.

The disciples have the same problem. Just before this they are amazed at Jesus’s power over the storm. They can’t quite wrap their heads around what happens. And, to be honest, they are a bit afraid, too. They’re not sure what to think.

You have seen what Jesus has done for you. He has raised you from death in your Baptism. He has taken your sin away in His death and resurrection. He comes to you mysteriously in bread made body and wine made blood to strengthen and comfort and forgive you.

Are you still a bit afraid of Him, though? Are you not sure that you can trust Him, since He has the ability to do such mighty things? Do you wonder when He might turn on you, a sinner who can’t do His will? A healthy fear of God is a good thing. The LORD is a great God, a great king above all gods, we sing.

And everything he does—calming storms, driving out demons, comforting the hurting, forgiving sins, rescuing from sin, death, and Hell—He does for you, because of His great love for you. And because He does these things for you, you can trust Him. You can trust that He’s caring for you the best way He can; by preparing you for the resurrected life with Him for all eternity. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 20, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 23; antiphon: John 10:14, 15b

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 40:17-38, Leviticus 1:1-7:38, Luke 8:40-56

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (From the Introit for Easter 4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Tomorrow, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, is known as Good Shepherd Sunday. It's when you're reminded that Jesus guides and shepherds you through this life until He gathers you into the eternal sheepfold of the New Creation.

Of course, Psalm 23 is the Introit appointed for tomorrow. King David's comforting words of guidance lead into the Divine Service, making you ready to hear how Jesus's rod and staff keep you from harm. But these words shouldn't be reserved for one day. Nor should they be reserved for funerals, as it so often seems. These are words that bring everyday Christians hope and peace every single day. The shepherd's rod is that which drives away evil—it keeps the hungry lions at bay. It's there to crack the skulls of those who would devour the sheep. The staff is the iconic shepherd's crook, that long stick with the hook that is used to pull wayward sheep back onto the path.

Every day of this life on earth, in this sinful world, is one in which the Evil One lurks like a roaring lion, seeking to devour you. And even though he lurks, hidden, Jesus is there with His rod—His club—ready to defend you from the attacks of the Evil One and rescue you. But don't forget your own cluelessness. So often, you're safe, because Jesus is on the case. Never underestimate the collective stupidity of a flock of sheep that darts off in every direction at the slightest provocation, though!

All it takes is one "BOO!" and you're off. Charging into uncharted territory thinking it is safer there than with the Good Shepherd. Soon enough though, He appears with His staff ready to pull you out of the mess you've gotten yourselves into.

Remember when St. Peter thought that forgiving someone seven times was the height of grace? And Jesus said, "Nope. SEVENTY times seven!" That's how it works with your Good Shepherd. You're in the valley of the shadow of death. Living this life, knowing that traps and danger are all around, and your Lord Jesus keeps coming into the fray to save you, to deliver you, to snatch you from the clutches of death and destruction.

Yes, the valley of the shadow of death is frightening. But Jesus has already been there for you. He's made it a safe passage. And He will lead you through to the other side in safety. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Sunday the Fourth Week of Easter

APRIL 21, 2024

Today's Reading: John 10:11-18

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus: 8:1-13, 30-36; Luke 9:1-17

"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again." (St. John 10:17-18)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Introit for today is Psalm 23, where King David talks about the Lord being a shepherd, the greatest shepherd, actually. And Jesus says today that He is that shepherd David spoke of.

Not only does He keep a sharp eye on His sheep with rod and staff, protecting and saving them, He also lays down His life for them. His sheep are so important, so valuable, that He dies for them. The Son of God is so powerful that He can lay down His life by His own choice, and come back to life again afterwards. This is what so confounded Satan and his demonic hordes. Satan thought he had won; Jesus was dead! But He wouldn't stay that way. Nope, not a chance.

He leapt in front of the greatest danger that anyone could face: eternal death and separation from God fueled by the sins of every person who ever has or will live, and He died dragging that death and destruction into the grave with Him. And then, after burying it there, He came back to life, He rose from the dead. Because He has the authority to do this (and actually does it!), you never have to be afraid that He will abandon you like some hired hand. He knows you are His own sheep, He knows you by name—He spoke your name in your Baptism, after all.

This is who keeps watch over your soul. This is why you need fear no evil, for He is always at the ready, guarding and keeping you for eternity. When you run and hide, when you have enough of His mercy and flee his protection, His mercy and goodness still seek you out, for He's literally been through hell for you. It doesn't matter where you go, or how long you're gone, He will seek you out and gather you up in His arms to your dying breath because His blood has washed you, His name is upon you. He has a place set aside for you in His house forever. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday the Fourth Week of Easter

APRIL 22, 2024

Today's Reading: Acts 4:1-12

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 9:1-24, Luke 9:18-36

"This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:11-12)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Do you think the world revolves around you? Sometimes you can get so wrapped up in things and activities that you suddenly think the entire world exists to serve you, and you alone.

But that's not true. Jesus is the center of the world. The center of the whole cosmos, actually. It all revolves around Him, no matter how important you think your next game or test or play is.

He is the cornerstone, that upon which everything is built and everything has its foundation. It can be hard to wrap your mind around that, because you don't see Jesus in our world, physically. The leaders of the Jews knew who Jesus was, they had seen Him die and rise, but even they didn't want to believe Jesus was the center of everything.

They had a plan. They had a reason to pretend Jesus wasn't real and didn't actually rise from the dead, and it all centered on them being the most important people in town. Notice that St. Peter calls them "the builders," the ones who were to build upon Jesus, the Word from which all is created and has its being.

So also in our day, the church builds (and is built!) on the Crucified Christ as the foundation. Everything we do, everything we say, everything we sing, everything we pray, finds its source and hope and basis in Jesus.

That is wonderfully freeing! You don't need to try and come up with a way to make Jesus appealing, because He is the very foundation of all things. He alone is the one through whom salvation is given. His Word creates and sustains. His gifts comfort and save. It is truly all about Jesus, and what He gives for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Christ is our cornerstone, On Him alone we build; With His true saints alone
The courts of heav'n are filled. On His great love Our hopes we place
Of present grace and joys above. Here may we gain from heav'n
The grace which we implore, And may that grace, once giv'n,
Be with us evermore Until that day When all the blest
To endless rest Are called away.*
(LSB 912:1, 2)

Tuesday the Fourth Week of Easter

APRIL 23, 2024

Today's Reading: 1 John 3:16-24

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 10:1-20, Leviticus: 11:1-15:33, Luke 9:37-62

And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. (1 John 3:23-24)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Love one another. That's easy in principle, right? I can love my neighbor 'over there' in my mind pretty easily. But my annoying neighbor in math class? My borderline bully of a neighbor in PE? Hmm. Not so easy.

“Let us not love in word or talk but in deed and truth.” Those are hard words to hear. Those words from St. John call you to action. They call for actual acts of love for your actual neighbors. Even the neighbors you might not like very much.

Being a 'little Christ' to those around you isn't easy. Of course, the example you have is Jesus Himself. How can you even try to match the example of Jesus? You can't. Period. There's no way you can love your neighbor to the extent that Jesus has loved you and everyone else on earth. And that's OK, because He is God and you are not. Still, you are called to love your neighbors, as hard as it might be. And, truly, that's a good thing. When you love your neighbors, you show the world, even in a limited way, how God in Christ loves them and you. And when you don't love your neighbor as you should, it casts Christ and the church in a bad light. There have been far too many examples of that from the church ever since Jesus ascended to the Father, unfortunately

Yet, He is gracious in all of that and still loves and forgives and calls and gathers His saints together. He commands that you believe in Christ. Again, that is something you do only because the faith He gives you believes for you. That same faith that you have which believes in Christ also helps you love your neighbor. Don't get in the way of the faith Jesus gave you; it's doing the work of saving you, of loving your neighbors, and leading you to be a light in this world. It's the Word of Life, it will never steer you wrong, but lead you in the way of peace and salvation. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Heavenly Father, grant Your mercy and grace to Your people in their many and various callings. Give them patience, and strengthen them in their Christian vocation of witness to the world and of service to their neighbor in Christ's name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (For guidance in our calling)

Wednesday the Fourth Week of Easter

APRIL 24, 2024

Today's Reading: Luke 10:1-22

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 16:1-24, Luke 10:1-2

“The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” (Luke 10:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Today, Jesus ordains seventy-two apostles and sends them into the countryside to herald His coming and preach His Word. He gives them very specific instructions about what to do, and He also gives them His authority. Not just any authority, but the authority of Almighty God. By hearing the sent one, they hear God himself speaking. By rejecting the sent one, they reject God himself.

That probably gave the seventy-two a pretty strong case of the shakes. Like a newly-ordained baby pastor straight from the seminary, they were going out to speak life and death to these unsuspecting towns. Sure, they had Jesus's promise and Word and authority, but would anyone take them seriously? Would their Certificate of Ordination actually mean something?

Jesus is up front about it too, he sends them out “as lambs in the midst of wolves.” They know right away that this is an uphill task. But it isn't a hopeless one. He doesn't send them out demanding success or else! Just go and preach the Word. Let the Holy Spirit handle the rest. If they are receptive, stay around a while. If they reject you, move on to the next town. It isn't about you, Jesus says, it is me they don't like.

You'll face this issue yourself, if you haven't already. Simply being Christian is enough to cause friction among your peers, even before you get to talking about the kingdom of God. So take heart in knowing that it isn't you they don't like; it's Jesus. And He's already won this fight for you. He's already washed you in his blood and brought you into His kingdom. While you pray that everyone you know joins you, you know their salvation isn't up to you. The Holy Spirit moves in ways you can never understand to bring to faith those around you.

So go, Christian! Go into the countryside and hallways and sports fields and tell people the kingdom of God has come near. Live as a faithful child of God and trust that the Holy Spirit will take care of the heavy lifting for you. That's His work, after all. He's already called you into that kingdom! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and take them to heart that, by the patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Word)

St. Mark the Evangelist

APRIL 25, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 16:14-20

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 17:1-16, Luke 10:23-42

*Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.
(St. Mark 16:14)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Ouch. Rebuked by the risen Jesus. Scolded by the holiest of all (God-)men. They were used to Jesus doing this to the Scribes and the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, but His own disciples? It wasn't unheard of, after all; He called St. Peter "Satan" and grilled Sts. James and John over wanting the seats of honor when Jesus came into his kingdom. That doesn't mean these words didn't sting, though.

St. Mark the Evangelist, also known as John Mark in the New Testament, wrote this gospel from the recollections of St. Peter (according to church history and tradition). He gets a bit of a pass, maybe, for not being in the room when Jesus spoke these words, but they certainly had an impact on him.

History and tradition say he went to Rome and recorded this Gospel from St. Peter's memories, and then went on to found the Church in Alexandria, Egypt, where he was its first bishop and he ultimately suffered a martyr's death. Before that, he accompanied St. Paul on his first missionary journey before traveling with Barnabas to Cyprus.

That's quite a lot of traveling for a man who wasn't in the inner circle of Jesus's apostles. What it does make clear, though, is that St. Mark took to heart what Jesus said in that room about going into all the world and proclaiming the gospel. Through his work of writing this gospel and proclaiming Jesus, that same message of salvation and truth spread farther and farther from Jerusalem until it covered the globe.

Today, you are able to read this gospel at a moment's notice. It's just a few taps away on your phone, which I'm sure would be an absolute amazement to St. Mark! But this is the love that God the Father, the risen Christ, and the Holy Spirit have for their people. They make sure that the Word which brings salvation spreads to every ear that needs to hear, sits upon every tongue that needs to speak, and enlivens water, bread and wine so that it pours out its saving work upon God's children, wherever they may be. Thanks be to God for his mercy! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Friday the Fourth Week of Easter

APRIL 26, 2024

Today's Reading: The Lord's Prayer - Second Petition

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 18:1-7, 20-19:8; Luke 11:1-13

Thy Kingdom Come. What does this mean? The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also. (The Lord's Prayer, the Second Petition, Small Catechism)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Where is God's kingdom today? We are assured that God's kingdom comes without our prayer, but where can we see it? How do we know he's with us, or that we are even a part of His kingdom?

Some want to see a theocracy on earth, where everyone is under a "Christian" ruler who makes sure God's work and will are done everywhere on earth through legislative and social means.

The problem is that God never promised to work that way in our world. Even the Old Testament kings were only there to get God's people to the place where the Messiah would come. Certainly, on the Last Day, God will come in great power and glory and we will all live under Him in his eternal kingdom forever, but what about now?

Now, we look for where God Himself promises to be. Where God says He will come to us and grant us His gifts. God is present everywhere, for He is God; He fills all of creation as the Almighty Creator. But if you want to meet Him directly, or at least as directly as a sinner can meet the holy and righteous God, you go where He promises that you will see and hear Him. In His Word, in the Divine Service, in His Sacraments.

We call this God's 'Kingdom of Grace.' It is where He promises to hide His indescribable glory behind simple earthly things so that we are able to receive from His hand all of His gifts without fear of being slain by His glory. Remember when Isaiah saw God in His glory in the temple and thought He was a dead man (Isaiah 6)? You never have to be afraid of that. Jesus has already come to you, washed you in his blood, raised you from your death, and made you a new creation by His death and resurrection.

God's gracious kingdom is open to you whenever you gather before His altar. Rejoice that you have such open and free access to the Lord of Creation, for He is always there, ready to give you His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation freely for Jesus's sake. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday the Fourth Week of Easter

APRIL 27, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 145:1-2, 8, 10, 21; antiphon: John 16:16

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 19:9-18, 26-37; Luke 11:14-36

The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. (From the Introit for Easter 5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Unfortunately, the Old Testament picture of God most often seen in our world is that of a grumpy, angry, and spiteful old man. There is even the idea that there is an “Old Testament God” and a “New Testament God,” that they are completely different gods.

You, of course, know this is foolish and untrue. But the picture is still so common that it isn't strange to hear someone say that they “will go all Old Testament” on a problem they have. Yet, King David, himself an Old Testament king, says the opposite about his and our God. He says that He is gracious and merciful. And he's right. For every example of God unleashing great wrath and vengeance, there are multiple examples of God withholding that punishment as long as possible, giving the sinners every opportunity to repent and turn to Him.

That is exactly who God is for you. He could have blasted Adam and Eve back to dust when they fell. He could have drowned Noah and his family, too, during the Flood. He could have killed all children in the Tenth Plague in Egypt, and not just the oldest of those not protected by the Lamb's blood. Even in those cases, Almighty God withheld His wrath as long as He could. Noah preached for 120 years while he built the ark, Moses had already pleaded with Pharaoh nine times, and while Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, they were given a promise, the greatest promise anyone could get. A savior was coming.

While the God of the Old Testament is indeed just and pours out His wrath when needed, so did the God of the New Testament. Only, in the New Testament, that same God poured out all of His wrath at one time and in one place: upon Jesus. Yes, God is merciful and abounding in steadfast love. He took all of the wrath and suffering and punishment and darkness and abandonment that was coming for everyone on earth and poured it out on His Son.

He took all of that wrath and punishment from you and redirected it to one who was willing to die in your place. It is hard to grasp, but it is also true. Someone loves you enough to suffer in your place. Because Jesus does this, mercy and grace are yours, for you, too are covered in the Lamb's precious and saving blood. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Sunday the Fifth Week of Easter

APRIL 28, 2024

Today's Reading: John 15:1-8

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 20:1-16, 22-27; Luke 11:37-54

*"Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you."
(John 15:3)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In Numbers 8:5-22, Moses describes the cleansing ritual for the Levites, the servants of the Lord at His tabernacle. They had to be set apart from the other Israelites to be devoted to the Lord's service. But first the Levites had to be made clean. Their sinful nature made them unclean, of course, just like all others by nature. Your nature too is corrupt and you need God's cleansing by the Gospel.

The Levites were cleansed first by being sprinkled with purifying water. They had to shave, they had to wash their clothes and themselves. After this came sacrifices. Two bulls were sacrificed, one as a burnt offering and one as a sin offering. A grain offering was also made in thanks to God. Finally, the Levites themselves were offered as a "wave offering." This Old Testament ceremony brought something that belonged to people, and dedicated that to be the Lord's. Only after this, could the Levites serve the Lord. But Jesus says you are made clean a lot easier. You are cleansed by His Word. However, remember that Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). So when Jesus says His Word has cleansing powers today, we can also see a fulfillment of the Levite's cleansing.

First, you are washed in Baptism. Baptism is truly cleansing, because forgiveness of sins is delivered here. By this, you become a branch in Jesus the Living Vine and more than just a servant - You are His friend. Next, Jesus offers Himself as our burnt offering. God's anger at your sins poured out completely on Jesus at the cross. Repent. But also believe that for all your sins, Jesus suffers the punishment. Jesus is also our sin offering. All of the eternal fallout of your sins, Jesus transfers you out of, even if there still remain worldly consequences for those sins. On the Last Day, you will be transferred out of these too. By faith in His death, you are now transferred from the kingdom of sin into God's righteousness. You are even free from sins that were done against you! After this, faith gives thanksgiving to God for His mercy to you. Now, Jesus' word carries this forgiveness to you. Hearing Jesus' word makes you clean. For His death has won your salvation, and His Word communicates this to you. God be praised! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, our Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday the Fifth Week of Easter

APRIL 29, 2024

Today's Reading: Acts 8:26-40

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 21:1-24, Luke 12:1-12

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:35-36)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. There is one prayer God always answers "Yes" to. That is if you pray that God sends you someone to confess the Gospel to. God always sends someone across your path, so that person can hear too. Whether they've heard it before or not, either way, God is great at putting His people in the right places where His Gospel can be confessed.

Philip comes to the Ethiopian official at God's prodding. Philip was a public preacher of God's Word. Hearing the man read from the book of Isaiah, Philip stopped him and asked if he understood it. The man did not. That shows us that you can't just give a Bible to someone who doesn't have faith in Christ. He won't know how to read it. He'll be confused. He might read Leviticus and think Christians make animal sacrifices. People must be taught. You must be taught. For this reason, God sends you parents and your pastor. Both are needed for the teaching of the faith to you.

The Ethiopian heard the Gospel that Philip preached, beginning from that Isaiah text. Jesus Christ was crucified for sinners. Like a Lamb before its shearers, so Jesus went before Pontius Pilate and the Jewish leaders silently. Jesus did not try to get out of dying and have someone take His place. For He came to take YOUR place, under sin, under death, under God's wrath. That way, you would be gifted with the opposite - His place, free from sin, rescued from death, under God's mercy. He did not want to save Himself. Jesus wanted to save you. That's why He did not offer any defense before Pontius Pilate to spare His life.

The Holy Spirit worked through the Word and gave the Ethiopian faith in Christ. Philip preached, the Ethiopian heard, faith was created. Notice that Acts specifically says that Philip told him the good news about Jesus. And what did this good news include? After hearing Philip, the Ethiopian wanted to be baptized. This shows us that Baptism is also part of the good news of Jesus. Baptism is Gospel. Baptism is not some unneeded extra, while the Word of Jesus' death is all that matters. No, Baptism is God's work for you by Word and water. By Baptism, you are adopted into God's family, gifted with God's name, given the Holy Spirit, and have an eternal promise of God's mercy by that Sacrament. That sounds like good news to me. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Tuesday the Fifth Week of Easter

APRIL 30, 2024

Today's Reading: 1 John 4:1-11 (12-21)

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 23:1-22, Luke 12:13-34

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.
(1 John 4:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Test the spirits? Are we talking about multiple choice? Fill in the blank? Maybe it's the dreaded essay test! Or worse - the kind of theological interview many seminarians take to be pastors. The theological interview is basically an hour-long spoken examination before two intelligent professors who can ask any theological question they want! That's not what St. John means. Thankfully! "Testing the spirits" is John's way of saying that you are to test the Scriptural faithfulness of every preacher you hear.

Why does John speak of spirits? What's that about? That's because in the New Testament, no one could be a public preacher without having some spirit influencing him to speak. It was either the Holy Spirit, or it was an evil spirit. The Holy Spirit sends out pastors who speak of Jesus and His free salvation for you. They proclaim Scripture's teaching purely. We know they are influenced by the Holy Spirit, because Jesus says in the gospel of John, 15:26, "the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, will bear witness about me." All false spirits, however, send out preachers who persistently teach against what Scripture says. They may preach leadership skills or how to become a better person. They may preach that babies are innocent of all sin and don't need Baptism, or that God chose to only save some people and not all. Whatever it is they say, they don't speak according to Scripture.

Test the spirits! But how can you know if your pastor is speaking Biblically or not? You hopefully haven't read the Bible as much as he has! But, you are taught the entire Christian faith by the Small Catechism. This is the "layman's Bible". This directs you to what God teaches. His commandments teach what you are to do, but they convict your heart if you have not done them. The Creed teaches what God has done for you, to create you, but also to save you. God sent His Son to redeem all Creation, and the Holy Spirit now proclaims Jesus' salvation by the mouths of His pastors! The Lord's Prayer teaches you how to pray to God. The Sacraments of Baptism, Absolution and the Lord's Supper teach you how God continues to give you His healing Gospel, in the life of the Church. If your pastor is preaching what is in line with this? Tell him you appreciate it, and you appreciate him. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Saint Philip and Saint James the Apostles

MAY 1, 2024

Today's Reading: John 14:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 23:23-44, Luke 12:35-53

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?" (John 14:8-9a)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Poor Philip. He's trying to ask Jesus the right question, Jesus just shakes His head. 'Oh, Philip. Haven't you been paying attention to what I've been teaching you? Shouldn't you know this by now?' You kind of feel bad for the guy. If you ever felt embarrassed in catechism or Sunday school when you asked a question everyone else thought was dumb, you'd feel worse if Jesus thought that!

And it's not like James the Less (that is, the son of Alphaeus, not the brother of John) was doing any better. This apostle never says anything in Scripture. He is always silent, never daring to speak up. You'd feel bad for the guy, but you don't notice him! He's doing his best to pretend like he's a statue. Silent, unnoticed, hoping to skate by without any undue attention. The problem is, no one should be silent. We are called to confess Christ, to learn from Him, and to pray to Him.

But Jesus came to gather only flawed people like Philip, James, and yourself around Him. Jesus does not come to gather the most eloquent speakers, the smartest kids in the class, or perfect physical specimens of beauty and strength. Jesus calls flawed people. He calls not only the timid and clueless. He calls sinners - sinners like Philip, James, and you. He calls people who deserve nothing but death and God's anger because of their greed, self-serving, and self-righteous thoughts.

Yet to such flawed people like Philip, James, and us, Jesus gives His righteousness. This is not on the basis of our works but on the basis of faith in His works for us. His merits are applied to us. And His merits are not just the good works of a good, regular guy. This is the eternal Son of God, who is one with the Father and who makes the Father in all His goodness and mercy present to us. When God the Father comes to us in Christ, He also comes to create us anew. When we receive His means of grace in faith, God takes our flaws and minimizes them. His Word and faith make us more courageous, more alive, without fear or shame. That makes us even more bold to confess Him to others. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, Your Son revealed Himself to Philip and James and gave them the knowledge of everlasting life. Grant us perfectly to know Your Son, Jesus Christ, to be the way, the truth, and the life, and steadfastly to walk in the way that leads to eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 2, 2024

Today's Reading: The Lord's Prayer - Third Petition

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 24:1-23, Leviticus 25:1-55, Luke 12:54-13:17

What is the Third Petition? Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

What does this mean? The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.

How is God's will done? God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die.

This is His good and gracious will. (Small Catechism, 3rd Petition and Explanation)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When Scripture speaks of God's will, it simply means what God wants. And what does God want for you? 1st, to do for Him. Basically, the Ten Commandments. The Commandments are God's will, not suggestions. Whatever work is good, that is described by the Ten Commandments. God is pleased when these Commandments are done. So when you do these works, which Christians can only begin to do in this life, you are serving God. You also serve God when you serve your neighbor. The Catechism reminds us with every explanation to the Commandments that begins by saying, "We should fear and love God so that we..." Because of our sinful nature, we cannot keep the Commandments well enough to justify ourselves. So for this part of God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, God Himself must act.

God wants 2nd, for Him to do. God wants to rescue you from your sins and to redeem you. To do this, He sent His Son Jesus to die for you and to rise for your justification. Jesus, the perfect, spotless Lamb of God, was sent to die for your sins by God's good and gracious will. Now, having ascended, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit who speaks of Him. The Holy Spirit operates by the pure preaching of the Word and by the Sacraments. This too is God's will. Luke 7:30 says that the Pharisees and teachers of the law rejected God's will by not being baptized by John. So receiving the Sacraments is part of God's will. Not as a commandment to obey, but as a gift of grace to receive. By the means of grace, faith in Jesus is strong. God wants to declare you righteous by Jesus through faith in Him alone.

These two ways are how God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. By this, the will of our spiritual enemies is broken and hindered. God be praised. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Heavenly Father, guard our faith and our life so we believe Your holy Word and walk according to Your commandments, and that we entrust our lives to Your good and gracious will. Amen.

Friday the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 3, 2024

Today's Reading: Luke 13:18-35

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 26:1-20, Luke 13:18-35

"Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." (Luke 13:24)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Years ago, adults were shorter. If you want proof, sometime go to the country of the Netherlands and take a tour of some of the old Dutch windmills. The doorframes between rooms in windmills are so short that no adult except those who are under 5'0 can walk in comfortably.

A Dutch windmill door is a lot easier to enter than the narrow door Jesus speaks of. This is not a physical door, portal, or gateway. This narrow door is the way into eternal salvation on the Last Day. Jesus says many people will seek to enter salvation on the last day and won't be able to. The reason is they seek to enter it by their works, who they are related to, or how much money they have, etc. And there's the problem - no one is good enough by his merits to enter. Being related to someone cool doesn't grant access. And money? Ha! What does money matter to God who created gold and silver by a mere word?

Only One can enter that narrow gate by His works: our Lord Jesus Christ. It is as if that door is Jesus-shaped, and only He can go through it. As true God and man, Jesus was perfect under the Law. But Jesus did not want to be the only person to be saved eternally and enter that narrow door. So He also gave up His perfect life to die for your death sentence. Jesus willingly took God's condemnation against your sins on Himself at His cross. Now He is risen, showing that your sins are paid for completely. Now Jesus lives, showing that all of God's anger at Your sins has been poured out. Jesus' resurrection shows there is a doorway through eternal death - and it leads through His grave.

In Holy Baptism, you are joined to Jesus in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:1-6). Your sinful nature drowned in the font, and you rose up to newness of life. Baptism has joined you to Jesus' body (1 Corinthians 12:13). Baptism gives gifts of life, rescue and salvation. Faith gladly receives these gifts that baptism gives, and continues to give every day. But if you are joined to Jesus' body in your Baptism and trust in His salvation, you are also able to enter through that narrow, Jesus-shaped gate in Him. Joined to Jesus by Baptism and made alive through faith in Him, you also enter with Him into eternal salvation. Not by what you deserve - but simply trusting the free salvation that is in Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 4, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 66:1-2, 8-9, 20; antiphon: Psalm 66:16

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 26:21-33, 39-44; Numbers 1:1-2:34, Luke 14:1-24

Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me! (Psalm 66:20)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. There is a common misunderstanding about prayer. Many people think that God hears prayers better if more people pray. That's why many people ask anyone and everyone to pray for their sick relative or their friend who is suffering. Now don't get me wrong. Christians should pray. God commands us in the 2nd commandment to pray, and use His name rightly. God also promises to hear us when we pray, and will answer our prayers by what is best in His good and gracious will.

But it's not true that God hears prayers better if more people pray. The prayers of many are not louder to God than prayers made by just one. The amount of people who pray doesn't matter as much as the faith of the people who do pray. Everywhere in Scripture, prayer is connected with faith in Christ. Those who have saving faith in Christ are heard and blessed. Those who do not have saving faith in Christ, or who pray to false gods, are not heard and not blessed. So for example, God refused to hear the prayers of the unrepentant Israelites in Isaiah 1:5, whose hands were covered with blood - metaphorically speaking. Or consider when God spoke to the idolatrous Judeans who blended their worship with their idol-worshiping neighbors' worship. Jeremiah writes of this in Lamentations 3:44, saying, "You have covered Yourself with a cloud, That prayer should not pass through."

This is why the Psalmist today is so cheered that God hears his prayers. It is a sign that this psalm-writer is still in God's love and grace. He has not fallen out of saving faith in the Christ who was to come (who has come now, Jesus). Rather, the Psalmist is relieved that God hears His prayers, because that also means that he will not be condemned like the unbelieving world.

What about your prayers? If you don't pray regularly, repent and believe the Gospel, and then do it. Make prayer part of your routine, saying many private prayers throughout a day. Where God does not say yes right away, that does not mean you are lacking in saving faith. It might mean God has better plans. It might mean God wants you to wait a little bit so your heart is in better condition to appreciate His gifts. But where God does answer your prayers with a resounding "yes," you can be thankful, cheered, and moved just like the Psalmist. For your loving heavenly Father knows your needs, and by answering your prayers, it shows that you continue to be His dear child through faith in Christ. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Sunday the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 5, 2024

Today's Reading: John 15:9-17

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 3:1-16, 39-48, Number 4:1-8:4, Luke 14:25-15:10

*"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."
(John 15:12)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Love is commanded. Therefore, this kind of love that Jesus speaks of is not a feeling. You cannot command anyone to feel a certain way. As much as you might wish to be able to command that hot girl in English class or the guy across the row in band to feel attraction to you, sadly it doesn't work that way.

The love that Jesus commands is action. Self-giving action, at that. This is not the kind of self-giving that a girl does when she finally gives in to pressure from her boyfriend to have sex. That's not self-giving, that's giving in. Jesus does not command sin, for sin is dangerous and destructive to people. Sex before marriage, for example, is a monstrous faith destroyer. That is why God set up His commandments - to safeguard and protect you from dangers that would harm good gifts God gives. Getting back to the self-giving nature of love, it is the kind of action that sacrifices money, time, a caring heart, perhaps your popularity, to help someone under affliction.

Chief among the commandments is love. Your love for fellow believers (especially in your congregation) is to reflect Jesus' love for you. You cannot truly know love, that is, without learning God's Word and believing the Gospel. You cannot truly show love where you are ignorant of the self-giving Jesus gave when He laid down His life for sinners. For Jesus not only commands love - He commands a specific love. This specific love mirrors Jesus' own actions for us.

Because no one can keep this commandment by nature, we confess our lovelessness and receive Jesus' absolution from our pastor as from God Himself. Our pastor's absolution delivers forgiveness for our lovelessness. And it also refreshes us in Jesus' love for us. His love is action, meaning that in confession and absolution, Jesus is acting to communicate the righteousness He won for you by His death. Risen from the dead, Jesus has broken the power of death and defanged the devil. There is no condemnation for you who believe this. Therefore, receiving Jesus' love in the act of hearing the forgiveness of sins, we can then show the same kind of heart and forgiveness to those who sin against us lovelessly. God grant Your Spirit that we might! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Monday the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 6, 2024

Today's Reading: Acts 10:34-48

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 8:5-26, Luke 15:11-32

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. (Acts 10:44-45)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The first believers in Christ's salvation were Jews. They grew up in the Jewish religion. The men were circumcised as infants. The people ate the clean foods Leviticus taught. They sacrificed at the temple when they came to Jerusalem for the annual feasts. Then the savior promised in Scripture finally came. Jesus the crucified and risen was actually the Christ! Some Jews believed it, and were brought into Christ's salvation.

With this in mind, you can understand why the "Jewish" Christians were astonished in Acts 10. For it shocked them when they heard Peter speak of a vision from God that led to a Gentile converting. It continued to shock their world when the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on Gentiles too. We might think the Jewish believers were snobs. We might be tempted to think the Jewish believers were acting like popular kids who didn't want the chess club joining their lunch table. But that's not the case at all.

It's more that the Jewish believers could not understand how the Gentiles did not follow God's Word before they became believers! God's Word commanded certain sacrifices, circumcision, kosher foods, rituals, the Jewish feasts, etc. But the Gentiles came to faith apart from these parts commanded by God's Word! A Gentile was primarily a pagan idolater. A Gentile didn't mean a different ethnicity, but one who followed any of the non-Christian religions out there. And the Holy Spirit came upon them! It would be as if God had decided to zap an unbeliever at your school, who heard the Gospel only once, and that day he started going to your church and catechism class.

The reason the Gentiles came to faith was that they heard the Gospel. What about the ceremonial laws? Jesus fulfilled them, including the sign of circumcision, the clean foods, the rituals, the sacrifices, the feasts. All of it is fulfilled in Jesus, especially by His innocent suffering and death and His resurrection from the dead. Since Jesus has fulfilled all of the Law, the Old Testament ceremonial laws are now put aside. They were the shadow, Christ is the substance. The moral Law remains in place, but Jesus has kept this Law for you perfectly and done everything needed for your salvation. Hear God's Word and trust in Jesus, and you likewise have this salvation too. Through faith, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you make a beginning at keeping the moral law too. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Tuesday the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 7, 2024

Today's Reading: 1 John 5:1-8

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 9:1-23, Luke 16:1-18

[T]his is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” (1 John 5:4b)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Historians remember people in previous centuries who took over much of the world. These are the famous conquerors such as Alexander the Great, Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan. These world leaders conquered much land and territory in their times. They led powerful armies, made treaties with other rulers, and in general, won a lot of their battles.

Jesus is not on the list of world conquerors, not exactly. He never raised an army or took land. He never owned land Himself as far as we know. And it's even more definite that you are also not a world conqueror. You don't own land. You haven't raised an army or taken over cities. You take math and P.E. classes, for crying out loud. That's usually not what world conquerors do.

Yet today St. John says in his epistle that you and all believers have overcome the world! Everyone who is born anew as a child of God has overcome the world! You are born anew at the font, that is, Baptism has given you a new birth and adoption in Jesus. Because of this, you are joined to Jesus mystically. We don't see it. You might feel different, you might not. But it is a reality. Baptism gives supernatural gifts - being joined to Jesus, being given the Holy Spirit, adopted into God's family, forgiven of sins and rescued from the devil. Faith receives these gifts. Faith works with Baptism. Baptism joins you to Jesus mystically, like a branch is connected to the vine. Faith means that you are as a living branch and not a dead one. Both Baptism and faith are important and needed.

Why does our faith overcome the world? Because by Baptism and through faith in Christ, we are joined to Jesus. In John 16:33, Jesus says, "I have overcome the world." He has overcome the world by His righteous, innocent life because He never fell to temptation or believed the world's depraved ideas. Jesus has overcome the world also by sacrificing Himself to die for your sins which the world could not do, and rise again from the dead, which the world cannot overcome. Baptism joins you to Jesus. Faith receives Jesus' benefits. So because you are joined to Jesus who has overcome the world, you overcome the world as well. You are not on the list of world conquerors... but perhaps you, I, all believers, and Jesus especially, should be. As Romans 8:37 also reminds us, We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 8, 2024

Today's Reading: Numbers 10:11-36

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 10:11-36, Luke 16:19-31

And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you." And when it rested, he said, "Return, O Lord, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel." (Numbers 10:35-36)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The ark of the covenant was basically a very decorated, ornate box. It was a man-made thing. In Exodus 25, God gave Moses instructions how the ark was to be built. Yet despite it being a man-crafted thing, the ark was of divine origin. Therefore the ark was both of God, and of man. God designed it. Man built it.

Moses speaks when the ark was moved or brought back. "Arise, O Lord!" "Return, O Lord!" But it was this man-made box that was being moved! People had to pick it up and move it every time they were marching to the next spot. The ark didn't do anything. It just sat there. It sounds like Moses was speaking to a box, and thinking this man-made box was God Himself!

Moses is not committing idolatry, though. He says this because God used the ark of the covenant as His throne. 1 Samuel 4:4 speaks of "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim." This referred to the two cherubs on the golden mercy seat lid that covered the ark. So when we see the ark in the Old Testament, we see it as the place where God chose to locate Himself in all His power, to give mercy in the proper way to His people. That's why even though the ark was picked up by men, it was still as though God Himself was moving. God Himself was leading, because He commanded by His Word where His people were to go or where they were to stop.

Jesus is like the ark of the covenant. He is both of God and of man. Begotten of the Father from all eternity, yet born of the virgin Mary. Like the ark of the covenant, Jesus is where God has chosen to locate Himself in His power, to give mercy in the proper way to His people. This is what the Catechism teaches about Jesus. Basically, there are three points to remember about Jesus' divine and human natures. 1) These two natures are one person. 2) These two act as one for your salvation, and 3) The divine nature shares with human nature. And all for you and your salvation. The incarnate Son of God in human flesh lived perfectly in your place. He bore your sins. He suffered and died. He rose in your place as well. All so that you could come before God the Father safely, forgiven of sins and cleansed from all unrighteousness. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Ascension

MAY 9, 2024

Today's Reading: Luke 24:44-53

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 11:1-23, 31-35

And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. (Luke 24:50-51)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus ascends. You might wonder why this matters. It seems like the Ascension is the least important thing in the Apostles' Creed. Ascension day is never seen as on the same level as Christmas and Easter. Ascension day often gets ignored. Your church may not even have an Ascension day service.

But the Ascension is amazing! Notice what Jesus does when He ascends. He blesses His believers. But what is even more important, is that Jesus never stops blessing His believers. While He ascended, meaning, even as Jesus was being lifted up into God's immediate glory, Jesus speaks nothing but blessing. And now that Jesus has entered into God's heavenly presence with His body, it's like Jesus cannot stop blessing His people.

A blessing is not just a pious-sounding wish. A blessing is not, "I hope something good happens to you, even though I can't promise that it will." Blessings in Scripture were powerful words that brought about good gifts. In Genesis, Isaac could not repeat Jacob's blessing for Esau. His blessing gave a specific gift for the person who received it. Jacob's blessings for his 12 sons likewise were very specific. They were words of power to bring about what his Words spoke of. In the gospels, Jesus cannot bless someone who hates Him. He does not bless the devil, nor the Pharisees who denied that He was God's Son. Instead, Jesus blesses those who want to be close to Him and those who cannot bring themselves to Him. He blesses little children, Peter for confessing the truth about Jesus, and those who are not offended at Him. On the last day, Jesus will say to the faithful, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:34).

The Ascension means that Jesus gives unending blessing for you. His blessing is an ongoing reality, and will be even past the world's end. That means when your conscience accuses you, you can instead rely on your ascended Lord who does not accuse you, but blesses you. If you face tragedy, loss, even death, the blessing of the risen Christ ascends over this and constantly speaks peace for you. His Word is a Word of power. Jesus cannot stop blessing you now in the preaching and the Sacraments. He who died for your sins and is risen, now ascends into heaven with unending blessing on His lips. Amazing. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Friday the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 10, 2024

Today's Reading: The Lord's Prayer - Fourth Petition

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 11:24-29; 12:1-16; Luke 17:20-37

What is the 4th petition of the Lord's Prayer? Give us this day our daily bread.

What does this mean? God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

What is meant by daily bread? Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like. (Small Catechism, 4th Petition and explanation)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God is not interested in man's soul only, but also man's life. The same God who sent His Son to save sinners also spoke Creation into existence. The same Father who gives His Holy Spirit also provides material needs. Lutherans call it all "daily bread." Not that you're going to eat shoes or weather, or slab some butter or jelly on faithful neighbors. These are also "daily bread," just not that kind.

Rather, everything good is given to you by God. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray that we realize this. But you probably don't think of it. If you saw God at work every time He was sustaining your being, you'd be shocked. You probably wouldn't be able to see anything else but God's hand giving gifts. From your socks to your comb, even the guy cooking fries at the restaurant you ate last Saturday, God's hand is everywhere, on every vocation that's not sinful and is everywhere giving daily bread.

You don't always realize this because God keeps Himself hidden. In this way, God works to keep saving faith in Christ living. God does not want us to rely on sight, but on faith in Christ and His saving death and resurrection and the Word that proclaims this. When we rely on our sight, we're disappointed. That's when we see some people having more than others, instead of trusting that God gives all people daily bread at the needed time. Relying on sight also leads us from trusting in God's love when He withholds daily bread for a time. Yet because Jesus has turned God's heart to us by His innocent suffering and death, believers can be full of hope even when everything else fails. Even if it's bad weather, or your shoes are stinky or your government does shady things - God still gives what you need. For He gives what you ultimately need - salvation through faith in His crucified and risen Son. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 11, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 27:1a, 4-5, 10, 14; antiphon: Psalm 27:7

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 13:1-3, 17-33; Luke 18:1-17

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord! (Psalm 27:14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Christianity is a waiting game. Much as you might want immediate results, the Psalmist teaches you that you have to wait. When affliction hits you, when there's suffering among your friends or family, when blessings are coming but they're not here yet, you'd love for God to step in immediately. But most of the time, God does not deliver His blessings, relief, or healing according to your preferred time schedule.

So you have to wait for the Lord. You have to bear the affliction. You have to endure powerlessness. You can only anticipate the good that's coming sometimes. That's hard. Not only is that hard, that also can be faith destroying. Jesus' parable of the sower in Matthew 13 teaches that some receive the Word with joy for a time, only to fall away from it in times of persecution or suffering. Our sinful nature does not like to wait. Perhaps that's a good reason why God teaches us that we must sometimes.

When God acts, He acts always at the right time. Whenever He withholds blessings, it is so your heart might learn to rely on His Word and promises. Suffering teaches reliance on God's Word for those who are willing to learn that lesson. Whenever God turns His face away in anger, it is so you might offer prayers to God and remind Him of His Word and promises that He has bound Himself to. When God allows suffering, it is so your heart learns that this world is not your friend but a valley of sorrows. But He also promises grace and every blessing to all who trust in His Word and conform their lives to living according to His Commandments.

Therefore, Christianity is a waiting game of epic proportions. But as you wait for the Lord to show His mercy, you can be strong. Your heart can take courage. You can be bold. For God has not cast off His people forever. His anger may last a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime. In Jesus, God has acted for your eternal good and blessing. In Jesus' death, God was reconciling the world to Himself. By Jesus' death, the Christians' heart finds all strength and courage. He suffers for your sins so you do not fall under God's eternal anger. Jesus is forsaken by God so that you would never be. Nothing makes a heart so courageous and strong as hearing the Gospel, that Jesus died and rose for you and your sins are forgiven. He also died in the fullness of time. God always acts at the right time. And that's good enough for faith. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, grant that our hearts do not lose courage as we wait for Your mercy, but instead find strength in Your Word and promises given in Jesus. Amen.

Sunday the Seventh Week of Easter

MAY 12, 2024

Today's Reading: John 17:11b-19

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 14:1-25, Luke 18:18-34

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When Moses came near the burning bush in Exodus 3, the Lord said to him, "Do not come near, take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." When the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord enthroned in glory in Isaiah 6, the angels sang out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Wherever the Lord is there is holiness. Whatever He declares holy is holy. The problem for us is that whenever we see God's holiness in the Bible, we are reminded that apart from Him we are unholy. We have no holiness of our own. Moses was afraid. Isaiah confessed his sin. So do we, whenever we gather in Divine Service. We confess that we are poor miserable sinners and that we have sinned, that we are unholy, in thought, word and deed.

But then something miraculous happens. God speaks His holy Word in holy absolution to forgive all our sin. God called and ordained your pastor into the office of the holy ministry, to be a servant of the Word. God who is holy gives holy gifts to declare unholy sinners holy in His name. In holy Baptism you are washed and baptized into the name of the holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In holy absolution you stand forgiven before God who is holy. In the Holy Supper you receive Jesus' body and blood for forgiveness, life, and salvation.

How does our holy Lord do all of this? By his holy Word, just as Jesus prays in John 17. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. To sanctify is to make and declare holy. That's exactly what our Lord Jesus prays for and what God does. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection God gives us a holiness that is not our own. God's holiness is always received from God, not achieved by us. So the next time you read or hear God's Word remember that God is sanctifying you. When you go into His house God is there to give you holy gifts in water, word, bread and wine. When you fear your sin and death, do not be afraid. You are holy in Jesus. You have His Word on it. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O King of glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth whom You have promised from the Father; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Seventh Sunday of Easter)

Monday the Seventh Week of Easter

MAY 13, 2024

Today's Reading: Acts 1:12-26

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 14:26-45, Numbers 15:1-41, Luke 18:35—19:10

So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us - one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection. (Acts 1:21-22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Some skeptics like to throw shade at the Christian by comparing the life and work of the disciples to a game of telephone. The original message has been changed, corrupted, or misheard over time, so they say, or something like those lines. Readings like Acts 1 are a great reminder that this couldn't be further from the truth. The Christian Gospel, your faith, and the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection weren't passed down willy-nilly, but with great care, attention to detail, and historical evidence.

One of the important pieces of evidence in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the fact that there were eyewitnesses. And not just one, not even just the twelve. Acts 1 reminds us that there were many other disciples who were present with Jesus for those three years. from the time of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River to His ascension forty days after His resurrection. Not only that, Paul says, there were over five hundred more eye witnesses after Jesus rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15). These disciples weren't playing a game; this was deadly serious. They saw Jesus dead on a Friday afternoon outside of Jerusalem and they saw him again numerous times alive again before His ascension.

The disciples, like Mathias, are reminders that the Christian faith is founded on fact, not fantasy. Jesus' death and resurrection are historical events, not hearsay. What Jesus did to save you was witnessed by men like Mathias, and the women at the empty tomb. His promises are trustworthy and true. Jesus promised He would die and rise and He did, just as He said. Jesus gave us disciples to faithfully, and at times under great peril to themselves, deliver accurately and reliably, the good news they witnessed. Thanks be to God that we have so many eyewitnesses who testified to His resurrection and still are witnesses to us today. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Second Sunday of Easter)

Tuesday the Seventh Week of Easter

MAY 14, 2024

Today's Reading: 1 John 5:9-15

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 16:1-22, Luke 19:11-28

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (1 John 5:13-14)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther explains the opening of the Lord's Prayer, the words "Our Father," by saying that with these words, God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father. Whenever I hear these words I think of my own children who, with boldness and confidence, ask for a treat after dinner. Why? Because they know their father loves and cares for them so they ask with boldness and confidence!

Boldness. Confidence. You might not think about those words when it comes to prayer, but that is how we are instructed to pray as Christians. Why? Where is our confidence? Not in ourselves and not in anything we think, say or do. No. There's no confidence in our sinful flesh. Our confidence is in Christ crucified for us. The catechism teaches us to pray this way because Jesus lived, died, and rose again for you. We have boldness and confidence before God the Father through Jesus who continues to be our intercessor and mediator before God. We pray in boldness and confidence knowing that our confidence rests on Jesus and in the Father's love for us in Jesus.

This is what St. John is teaching us in 1 John 5, that our confidence in prayer rests not upon our shoulders, but on the shoulders of Jesus who bore the sins of the world on the cross. Because Jesus saves and gives eternal life. you can be confident that He hears your prayer. Our Lord commands us to pray but also promises to hear us. St. John also teaches trust along with confidence in Christ. Whenever we pray, we pray, "Thy will be done." And even though we don't always know how God will answer our prayer, we can pray in confidence knowing that God's will towards us is good and gracious in Jesus. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O God, You make the minds of your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes and chances of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter)

Wednesday the Seventh Week of Easter

MAY 15, 2024

Today's Reading: Luke 19:29-48

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 16:23-40, Luke 19:29-48

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! (Luke 19:38)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Even though the church calendar says we are in the seventh week of Easter, think back for a moment to Palm Sunday, and then further back to Christmas. What do Christmas and Palm Sunday have in common with one another?

The more you think about it, the more similarities you find. Both Jesus' birth and entry into Jerusalem were foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament. Both Christmas and Palm Sunday point to Jesus' humility; He was born in humility, wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday in humility. And yet He is also a king, both in His birth and on Palm Sunday as He makes His way to the throne of the cross.

Jesus did all of this to bring peace between God and sinners. And that word peace is another thing that connects Christmas and Palm Sunday. At Jesus' birth, the angels announced to the shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men." As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowds shouted out the same joyful words. "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest."

Turns out that Christmas and Palm Sunday have a lot in common. Christ Jesus who was born in our human flesh entered Jerusalem to go to the cross and die in our place as God and man. The angels announced that the Savior from sin and death had arrived in Bethlehem and the Palm Sunday crowds announced that the Savior had arrived in Jerusalem to go to the cross to make peace by His death on the cross. God reveals his glory in Jesus' incarnation for His and His glory in his crucifixion for us.

But these words are not only a past event. We continue to join the angels and crowds every time we prepare to receive the Lord's Supper, singing the same words. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!" Jesus who was born for us, and entered Jerusalem to go to the cross for us, now is present with us and for us in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. The same body and blood of Jesus who was born for us and died on the cross for us is given for our forgiveness, life, and salvation. And blessed are you in Jesus' gifts. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday the Seventh Week of Easter

MAY 16, 2024

Today's Reading: The Lord's Prayer - Fifth Petition

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 16:41-17:13, Numbers 18:1-19:22, Luke 20:1-18

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by His grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us. (Explanation to the 5th Petition)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. If you run the 100-yard dash and win, you expect to get a medal or ribbon. If you go to work you expect a paycheck. If you play Super Mario Brothers and defeat Bowser you expect to rescue Princess Peach. This is the way the world works, you get what you deserve. You earn what you have worked for and so on. When it comes to the gifts of God, we expect God to play by our rules. But guess what? God doesn't do what we expect. God doesn't give us what we deserve, and that's a good thing.

If God gave us what we deserved, or rewarded us with what we had earned, what would that mean? Quite simply, death. The wages of sin is death, St. Paul writes in Romans 6:23. This is why Jesus gave us the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." In the fifth petition we pray for forgiveness. We pray for a gift from God that we do not deserve.

And the good news is that God gives us both mercy and grace. In his mercy He doesn't punish us as we deserve. Instead, Jesus takes all of the punishment for our sin and God's wrath of judgment upon Himself on the cross. In His grace He also gives us what we don't deserve, His forgiveness, life, and salvation. This is what we pray for in this petition, and by God's grace and love, this is what He gives us. By God's grace, we also are called to give this undeserved forgiveness to others as well. And we pray in this petition that we would love and forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven us. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, You despise nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts that lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness we may receive from You full pardon and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friday the Seventh Week of Easter

MAY 17, 2024

Today's Reading: Luke 20:19-44

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 20:1-21, Luke 20:19-44

Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. (Luke 20:25)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. A good chess player will see his opponent's opening move, a queen's gambit perhaps; but a great chess player will counter the opponent with a challenge or trap of his own.

In today's Gospel reading there's a chess game going on and the pharisees' disciples think they have Jesus in check. But Jesus turns the tables on His opponents; He issues a challenge of His own...not for trophies or titles, but to bring His hearers to repentance and forgiveness.

They ask Jesus, Tell us, then, what you think. "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" In politics this would be called a gotcha question. If Jesus answers, "No, it isn't lawful", the political Herodians might have reason to go after Jesus for being a traitor or a religious nutcase. And if Jesus answers, "Yes, it is lawful", then the Pharisees can peg Jesus as a traitor and blasphemer for supporting the Romans. But here's the thing, Jesus' opponents don't really care about the answer. They only want to trap, discredit, and destroy Jesus.

When Jesus replies, He makes His checkmate move. "Render, or pay to God the things that are God's." The issue is whether or not the pharisees – and all who hear Jesus words – believe that He is and bears the authority of God, as the Son of God, as the one the Father sent with all authority to teach, preach, heal, forgive, live, die and rise from the dead.

And what did Jesus do when he came with the authority of the Father? Jesus came into our flesh to render to God what was God's, namely our humanity, and to restore the image of God to our flesh. He rendered to God the things that are God's. He did it "not with gold or silver," not with the coin of Caesar, but with His holy and precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death at the hands of the Pharisees and the Herodians and the Roman government, all of whom served as God's instrument that you would belong to Him, be holy in Him, be saved and declared righteous in him. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O God, the protector of all who trust in You, have mercy on us that with You as our ruler and guide we may so pass through things temporal that we lost not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saturday the Seventh Week of Easter

MAY 18, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 104:24, 27-28, 30; antiphon: Liturgical Text

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 20:22-21:9, Luke 20:45-21:19

These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. (Psalm 104:27-28)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Scripture begins and ends with God providing a feast for His people. In Eden the Lord gave every tree of the garden to eat of freely, save the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In Revelation John sees and hears the joy of the marriage supper of the Lamb, a heavenly banquet with Christ at the center. From Genesis to Revelation, God has spread a table of His goodness and mercy. The whole Bible stretches out like a banqueting spread of God's grace.

Psalm 104 reminds us of this in beautiful words. The Lord opens His hand and His creatures are filled with good things. This is what God does. Where He is present, there's a feast. Israel ate the Passover lamb as they were saved from death in Egypt. Moses and the elders ate on Mt. Sinai in the Lord's presence. King David wrote a psalm about the Lord preparing a table in the presence of our enemies (Psalm 23). The Lord provided food for His prophet Elijah in the cave. And the list goes on. God's Word is a long menu of his mercy, an endless buffet of His grace and steadfast love.

Psalm 104 also reminds us that without our Lord opening His hands we would all starve. We would all go hungry. Through His goodness and mercy, He gives us our daily bread, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer. The same is true in our life of faith before God. Apart from the goodness and mercy of God we are spiritually dead as well. But the Psalmist knows this as well. So the Lord opens His hands and we are filled with good things, on our earthly tables, and at our Lord's table.

It's no accident that when God becomes man, wherever He goes there's food and a feast. He changes water to wine. Feeds thousands. Declares Himself the Bread of Life. He takes bread and wine on the night He was betrayed and declares, "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Take, drink; this is my blood of the new testament which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus opens His crucified and risen hand and fills you with good things, His body and blood for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You bless the earth to make it fruitful, bringing forth in abundance whatever is needed for the support of our lives. Prosper the work of farmers and all those who labor to bring food to our table. Grant them seasonable weather so that they may gather the fruits of the earth in abundance and proclaim Your goodness with thanksgiving; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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