



REFLECTIONS

**The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost -
The Ninth Saturday after Pentecost
June 30 - July 27, 2024**



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JUNE 30 - JULY 27

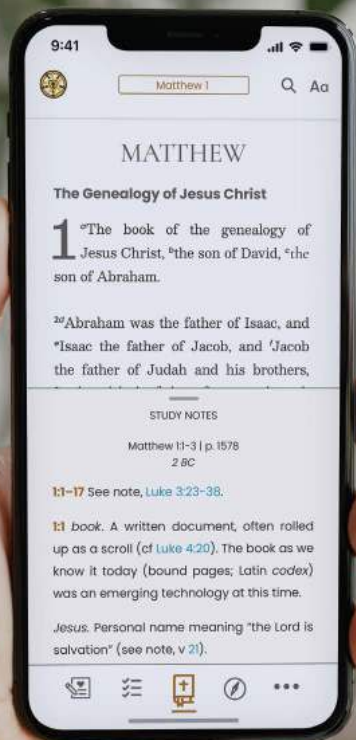
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A Short Form for Daily Reflection

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.

The Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

JUNE 30, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 5:21-43

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 5:1-6:5; Acts 10:1-17

And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. (Mark 5:25-26)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When you think of the Christian faith, blood is probably not the first thing that comes to mind. However, blood is a recurring element in the Bible. From the first sacrifice that God performed to clothe Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis to the song of Revelation that praises the Lamb that is slain whose blood sets God's people free, blood is a central theme throughout the Bible. In the story of the woman with a blood flow, we see Jesus present in flesh and blood among the crowd. The woman had an ongoing problem that she couldn't manage to stop, but when she touched Jesus' garment, her blood flow was immediately dried up, and she was healed. This is because Jesus came to let His blood flow for the life of the whole world, and it is what healed the woman, and it can heal you, too.

All of us, including the woman in the story, are sinners who need cleansing. We need cleansing from our sins to stand before God whole, clean, and at peace with Him. That precious cleansing has been given to you at the font. The baptismal waters connected to the Word of God are where Jesus has planted His cross as a lifespring for cleansing and restoration. From Jesus' side on the cross, you have His blood and water flowing freely for you and for the life of the whole world. John puts it this way: "This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one." (1 John 5:6-8, NKJV). In Baptism, you do not touch the hem of Jesus' robe; rather, Jesus clothes you with His robe that covers all your sin. Not only does He clothe you, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, He declares you healed in both body and soul.

Jesus came to suffer and die for our sins so that we could be forgiven, at peace with God, and saved for eternity, whole and sound. Believe in Him, trust in Him, for the blood of the Scriptures, the blood of Jesus Christ brings you life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Sixth Monday After Pentecost

JULY 1, 2024

Today's Reading: Lamentations 3:22-33

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 6:6-27; Acts 10:18-33

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
(Lamentations 3:22-23)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Every day, we go through the motions of our daily routine—wake up, jog, make coffee, have breakfast, wash, rinse, and repeat. But some days, memories of our past mistakes and sins creep up on us, making us feel hopeless and weighed down. Read all of Jeremiah's words in Lamentations chapter three. Up until our appointed verse, Jeremiah's lament is all over his sin and the wrath of God. He, too, remembers and despairs over the sins of the past. "Remember my affliction and roaming, The wormwood and the gall. My soul still remembers And sinks within me." (Lamentations 3:19-20, NKJV).

It takes 22 verses for Jeremiah to get to the mercy and promises of God. God's message to us is clear, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed,... they are new every morning;" (Lamentations 3:22a; 23a, NKJV). This mercy has been poured for you freely by the blood of Jesus. The same blood that has washed you clean in your Baptism. As we wake up each morning, let us remember that we are baptized into Christ. You have been marked with the sign of the cross on your forehead and heart. This mark is permanent, a promise from the blood of Christ that can never be removed.

Your Baptism is a reminder that there is forgiveness for all sins, and your past mistakes are no longer remembered by the Lord. They have been drowned in the depths of the sea, and as far as the east is from the west, they are no longer remembered. This is the faithfulness that Jeremiah speaks to himself and to the sin-ridden people of Israel. It is the faithful love of God that is here for you every morning.

So try a new routine! Before the coffee pot turns on or you put on your jogging shoes, remember your Baptism daily. When you wake up, make the sign of the cross, say the Lord's prayer and the Creed, and remember that you are a child of God. You are changed, and no matter what the day holds for you, God's merciful forgiveness will never be consumed; He is faithful to you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Sin, disturb my soul no longer: I am baptized into Christ! I have comfort even stronger: Jesus' cleansing sacrifice. Should a guilty conscience seize me Since my Baptism did release me In a dear forgiving flood, Sprinkling me with Jesus' blood? (LSB 594:2)

The Sixth Tuesday After Pentecost

JULY 2, 2024

Today's Reading: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13-15

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 7:1-26; Acts 10:34-48

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Everyone today desires equality, whether it is among races, creeds, sexual identities, or economic opportunities. Equality isn't bad. However, despite our efforts to achieve it, we still witness inequality around us. Even the groups fighting for their specific form of equality cannot agree. The truth is that life will never be completely fair, and there will always be inequality. Our Lord also tells us, "For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good..." (Mark 14:7a, NKJV). As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves. Martin Luther stated in the explanation of the Eighth Commandment: "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way."

This is our Christian duty, but we often fall short. We tend to live for ourselves, strive to improve our image, and even love money. We must repent of this foolish behavior and cling to the cross of Jesus. "...He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9b, NKJV). Jesus is wealthy beyond measure, having created all things for Himself and standing with no equal among us. Yet, from His birth, upbringing, ministry, passion, death, and resurrection, He became the poorest of the poor for us. He took on our sins, becoming sin, death, and the cursed one of God to make us equal with Him. Through the forgiveness of sins, we have wealth beyond measure. In the Kingdom of God, there is no equality; He has not been fair to us. If He were fair, we would be condemned forever. Thanks be to God that Jesus became poor so that we might have His grace's riches now and forever. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*The world seeks after wealth
And all that mammon offers
Yet never is content
Though gold should fill its coffers.
I have a higher good,
Content with it I'll be;
My Jesus is my wealth.
What is the world to me!
(LSB 730:3)*

The Sixth Wednesday After Pentecost

JULY 3, 2024

Today's Reading: Joshua 8:1-28

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 8:1-28; Acts 11:1-18

And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land. (Joshua 8:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. There are those Christians today who have no use for the Old Testament. In fact, some people have thought that there must be two Gods found in the Bible, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament. The Old Testament god is an angry old man, full of wrath, shooting lightning bolts and fire at everyone. He loves war, destruction, and bloodshed. The god of the New Testament is one of acceptance—kind and peaceful. He is always laughing, walking around with baby sheep, and happy with everyone. This view is far from the truth; the Lord our God is one. He does not change in both testaments of the sacred Scriptures.

The Old Testament often refers to God as "The Lord of Hosts" or "Yahweh of Armies." Yahweh of Armies is used to describe God's role as a protector of his people, even when they are engaged in battle. In Joshua chapter 8, Yahweh of Armies speaks the battle plan, which shows signs of God's mercy as He takes into account the sin and weakness of those He is fighting for.

Although the destruction of Ai and Bethel may seem ruthless, Yahweh of Armies fights for His people by protecting them from their enemies and defending His holy name. Israel's army is involved in the fighting, even though they, as a nation, must repent of their sins. We are at war today. We are fighting against sin, temptation, and the devil, but the biggest enemy we face is ourselves. We have been the cause of war, destruction, and death. However, Yahweh of Armies fights for us by going to war for us through His suffering and death on the cross. Jesus fights what seems to be a losing battle. He goes to war by losing His life, seemingly losing the war against the enemies of sin, death, and the devil. But through His glorious resurrection, He has won the victory for us.

In the Eucharistic liturgy, we sing the words of the Old Testament, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth." The word "Sabaoth" means heavenly armies. The Old Testament always points us to Jesus, who fights for us even now today. By the Word and Sacraments, our Lord forgives and strengthens you to meet the challenges and spiritual warfare we face each day as we call on Him to fight for us. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Sixth Thursday After Pentecost

JULY 4, 2024

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Sacrament of Holy Baptism– Fourth

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 10:1-25; Joshua 10:28-22:34; Acts 11:19-30

What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We have often been reminded to remember our Baptism and that we have been baptized into Christ, making us God's dear child. However, despite this knowledge, we often find ourselves feeling alone, stuck, and fearful of our own destruction and death. It seems that Baptism alone does not take care of the messes we create or those caused by others.

Luther reminds us that although we are baptized, we are still stuck with our Old Adam. This part of us will never go away and will continue to tempt us to deny Christ and live for ourselves. The world also tells us to prove ourselves, make a name for ourselves, and be our own god, while the devil prowls around reminding you of your sins and that you deserve death.

We are in a continuous struggle in life; we are forgiven, yet we still sin and will continue to do so until we die in this world. God's Law still remains, reminding us daily that we are sinners and that we love to follow our Old Adam. Paul puts it this way: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." (Romans 7:18-20, NKJV).

Remembering our Baptism means living in the newness of life that Christ has given us. It is not just about recalling the date and time when water was splashed on you. It is about remembering that Christ put our Old Adam to death with Him on the cross, and we are now a new creation. Paul reminds us of this: "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4, NKJV). Jesus says this: "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." (John 7:38, NKJV) A river can be a blessing, but it can also kill. As you remember your Baptism, repent. Cast off the Old Adam into the raging river of water and blood that flows from Jesus' side for you. By that same water and blood, you have the newness of life in Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Sixth Friday After Pentecost

JULY 5, 2024

Today's Reading: Joshua 23:1-16

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 23:1-16; Acts 12:1-25

But you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day. For the LORD has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. (Joshua 23:8-9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. My father died 20 years ago, and I have a lot of memories of him and some things I have forgotten. I can recount the joyous times with him and when I fought against him. The greatest memory was when I was able to sit with him the day before he died. My family was all there, and he was able to recall his life, his memories with us, and even impart some final words of wisdom. It was a beautiful thing, even in the face of death.

In Joshua 23, we see Joshua as an aging leader. He has gathered the Israelites at Shechem, the sacred ground of their forefathers' covenant with God. Joshua imparts his final counsel, emphasizing the crucial balance of faith and living in the covenant of God. He urges the people to remain steadfast in their covenant with the Almighty. Joshua reminds them, "You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you." (Joshua 23:3, NKJV). He is passing on the Lord's words of wisdom to those who come after him. This is how our Lord works with you as well.

Even in the face of joy and sadness, sin and forgiveness, life and death, our Lord reminds you of all He has done for you. This is why you have the Sacred Scriptures, which recount all that the Lord has done for the life of the world. When someone dies, they usually pass along their last will and testament, an inheritance they prepared for their loved ones. On that first Holy Thursday, before His betrayal and death, Jesus passes on to His disciples and you the wisdom and gifts of His salvation.

Each Sunday, you partake of Jesus' last will and testament given and shed for you in the blessed Eucharist. This sacred Gift is focused on you to point you to the inheritance prepared for you in eternity. Yet, as you come to the Lord's table, you are not alone. We hear the pastor chant, "...with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven." At the Lord's table, you gather at the sacred ground of Jesus' cross with all of those who have gone before us. It is where we see the Lord and what He has done for us as He has fought and won for us our salvation. Each Sunday, you have that great reunion where you, Joshua, my dad, and all the faithful are seated around the Lamb's kingdom which has no end. Until then, we hold on to the covenant of Jesus' blood for us. It is veiled but revealed to you through the Word and Sacraments. This is wisdom for the ages; it is the Lord's ongoing gift of love and forgiveness for you. It is and will be a beautiful thing. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Sixth Saturday After Pentecost

JULY 6, 2024

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 7 - Psalm 132:13-16; antiphon: Psalm 34:8

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 24:1-31; Judges 1:1-36; Acts 13:1-12

For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provisions; I will satisfy her poor with bread. (Psalm 132:13-15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Scriptures talk about several times where the people of God built a place for God to live with His people. In Isaiah, we read, "Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?" (Isaiah 66:1, NKJV). Although God doesn't live in houses built by humans (Acts 7:48), He comes to live among His people.

God dwelt with His people in the Old Testament in many and various places. In the New Testament, we hear how the Holy of Holies has become flesh for us. The Holy Gospel tells us: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14, NKJV).

Today, we don't have the Old Testament temple or even Jesus in the flesh living among us, but this doesn't mean He is not present. This Sunday's Introit teaches that God promises to live with His people even today. That's why we go to church; that's where God dwells among us.

At the church I serve, we have a quote from Genesis right outside of the entrance to the nave and sanctuary. The quote is from Genesis 28:17, which says, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" When you enter into the Divine Service at your church, you are entering into that place where heaven meets earth. By His Word, He is present at the altar, font, and pulpit as He speaks to you His forgiveness, washes you of your sins, and feeds you His wonderful provision of His Body and Blood.

Angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven are with you as you gather around the feast of the Lamb in His kingdom that Has no end. Just as the Lord chose Zion for His dwelling place, your church is the resting place of the Almighty present before you to bless and keep you all the days of your life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

JULY 7, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 6:1-13

Daily Lectionary: Judges 2:6-23; Acts 13:13-41

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. (Mark 6:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Being offended is a common occurrence these days. Talk about your favorite music, politician, sports team, or food; inevitably, someone will get offended. You and I are no better. Everyone finds offenses, yet they cannot see what is in front of them in terms of God's abundant blessings. This is because we are too focused on ourselves as individuals. We want what we want, and God better act the way we want Him to act; otherwise, the offenses fly. This is not new. It was also the case with Jesus in His hometown of Nazareth. People took offense at His presence and actions, even though He was using the right words to teach God's love and truth. This led Him to say, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." (Mark 6:4, NKJV). The offended people prevented Jesus from helping others, except for a few healings. Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith.

Despite the offense, Jesus continued to show compassion, mercy, forgiveness, healing, and even resurrecting people from the dead. These actions were all offensive to many people, to the point where they cost Him His life. On the cross, Jesus became the greatest offender in the history of the world. He took on your sin and offenses against God and paid the price. On the cross, He was so despised and offensive that even His Father turned His back on Him, leaving Him alone and dead. Christ did all of this so that we could be accepted and pleasing in the sight of God. By shedding His blood for us, there is no more offense or condemnation in God's sight. We are now holy, innocent, and blameless in the sight of God, and all things are in agreement and in perfect order between us and God.

The disciples were sent out with nothing but the Gospel, and Jesus told them there would be times of acceptance and offense. Today, the church is given the Gospel and nothing more. The world is offended by the Gospel. As we are brought into this new reality of life, we are called to practice things that offend many. We are called to love, help, consider others above ourselves, and serve without our own interest. Christ does this in and through you. You will be offensive; you will be offended. Our Lord says it Himself: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:11-12, NKJV). Confess your sins and pray the Lord would not find offense in you but that He would heal and forgive. Pray that He would strengthen your faith in Him and fervent love towards one another. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Seventh Monday After Pentecost

JULY 8, 2024

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 2:1-5

Daily Lectionary: Judges 3:7-31; Acts 13:42-52

And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. (Ezekiel 2:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We often consider Biblical figures like Ezekiel as "powerhouse" models of faith and devotion. However, when you stop and look at our reading today, I bet that Ezekiel wasn't exactly thrilled at what God told him to do. God called Ezekiel to serve as his prophet. However, how God called him seems troubling. It could be described as disheartening. God says, "I send you to nations of rebels who have rebelled against Me." He warns Ezekiel that they may not listen and not only won't listen but will be stubborn about it.

It is easy to point fingers at those who are rebellious or stubborn, but take a long, hard look in your mirror. In your sins, you have been rebellious and even stubborn about it, wanting to have your own way all the time. Paul puts it this way: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God." (Romans 8:7-8, NKJV). God doesn't need to seek you out. He doesn't need to call you back to Him. In your rebellion, He has every right to fight back and destroy you. Yet, just like Ezekiel, God sends those to seek you out with His forgiveness and restoration. Just as He sent prophets and teachers, today, He sends you pastors to call you to repentance and to be restored by the blood of Christ.

God sent Ezekiel to point His people to the promise of restoration through the Messiah. No matter the response to Ezekiel, God would seek and save His rebellious people. In the Office of the Ministry, your pastor is sent to point you to Jesus. Your pastor places before you Jesus, who comes to you no matter how rebellious or stubborn you are. Through the grace of Jesus, you are brought back into His Kingdom not as a rebel but as a beloved child and heir of everlasting life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God of the prophets, Bless the prophets' sons; Elijah's mantle o'er Elisha cast. Each age its solemn task may claim but once; Make each one nobler, stronger than the last. (LSB 682:1)

The Seventh Tuesday After Pentecost

JULY 9, 2024

Today's Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Daily Lectionary: Judges 4:1-24; Judges 5:1-31; Acts 14:1-18

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
(2 Corinthians 12:9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. You must accept the truth that you live and breathe for yourself. You crave control, demand things to go your way, and expect everyone to bow down to you. You are your own little planet revolving around you. But let's face it: your life is miserable, full of pain, suffering, guilt, and shame. Your world seems to be falling apart, and you feel helpless. The Christian faith doesn't promise to restore your world to your satisfaction. It demands your complete self-destruction. God's Law is designed to break you down and put you to death. But the more God tears down your world, the more you'll become aware of His infinite love for you. He breaks you down to build you up into His holy dwelling. He shifts your focus from yourself to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. But don't mistake this for a means for everything to go all smooth and easy. God is not in the business to make you succeed, to be healthy, or to be wealthy. That's not the purpose of building you up. God is your success, health, wealth, and life, even when Satan ravages you in body and soul. All of this was made possible by the blood of His precious Son, who died for you. This is what it means to live under the cross of Jesus. In your Baptism, you inherit the Kingdom of God, and you're given faith. Faith is about trusting God to be everything you need in life despite your sins and your own world falling apart. He is your strength when you're weak and your health when you're ill. His grace is sufficient for you, and His power can only be made perfect by your weakness. Your world may be destroyed, but take heart: you have inherited the Kingdom of God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts that He may rule and direct us according to Your will, comfort us in all our temptations and afflictions, defend us from all error, and lead us into all the truth, that we, being steadfast in the faith, may increase in all good works and in the end obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Prayer for the Holy Spirit, LSB 310)

The Seventh Wednesday After Pentecost

JULY 10, 2024

Today's Reading: Judges 6:1-24

Daily Lectionary: Judges 6:1-24; Acts 14:19-15:5

And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man." (Judges 6:15-16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever felt weak? It's not a feeling we like to admit, especially in a world that values strength. We're told to play to our strengths and never to show weakness. But what if weakness is exactly what we need? In Judges, the Midianites overpowered Israel for seven years until God chose Gideon, the weakest of the weak, to save his people. And God promised to be with him. It's a reminder that we don't have to rely on our own strengths or abilities. Jesus is the greater Gideon, who came in weakness for us and our salvation.

Paul puts it this way: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:5-8, NKJV).

Jesus is the ultimate source of strength and victory by being the weakest among us. He has fought and won your greatest battles against sin and darkness, telling us, just like Gideon, "I am with you always..." (Matthew 28:20b, NKJV). When you enter into the Divine Service, you acknowledge your weaknesses and sins and surrender them to Jesus through repentance of all sins. Note how many times you hear in the Divine Service: "The Lord be with you." This is a powerful declaration that you are in the presence of the Almighty, who fights for you, forgives you, and strengthens you through His Word and Sacraments. The world calls the sacred Scriptures: water, bread, wine- weak; but for us, they are the strength of Almighty God, who is here for you. "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;" (1 Corinthians 1:27, NKJV). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous; Bright with Thine own holiness, Glorious now, we press toward glory, And our lives our hopes confess. Alleluia, alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send! Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia without end! (LSB 578:3)

The Seventh Thursday After Pentecost

JULY 11, 2024

Today's Reading: TCatechism – What is Confession?

Daily Lectionary: Judges 6:25-40; Acts 15:6-21

What is Confession? Confession has two parts. First that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. The sacred Scriptures tell us, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23, NKJV). Does that really matter to you? You know you have sinned, you know you have fallen, you know you deserve death and damnation, but do you even care? Many of us act like it doesn't even matter. We show little regret and are mortified if we have to fess up to our sins.

If you ever read about people who commit terrible crimes like murder, you will find that almost all of them felt an undying urge to tell someone what they had done. The more they kept their crimes to themselves, the more they had to tell something to someone. This is how God deals with us, as His Law is written on all of our hearts. By His Law, our consciences are seared by the sword of His Word. We may act confident, but deep down, we are in chaos and terrified. The Law speaks to everyone those words spoken to our first parents in the Garden, “Where are you and what have you done?” whether you want to hear them or not. This is why the Law of God is good for us– it reminds us that sin is a part of our very nature. We will not be entirely free from it in this life.

This is why God has given us the gift of Confession and Absolution. Confessing sins probably doesn't seem like a gift; who wants to admit they are wrong? Yet God does not give us this gift to make sure we feel poor and miserable all the days of our life. He gives us confession to take our sins and to lay them on Jesus on the cross so that He may do away with them once and for all.

You may notice in movies or books that criminals who are sentenced to death are usually visited by a priest or pastor for the condemned to confess and receive forgiveness in Christ. This is why you have your pastor. In our sins, we stand condemned to death. Yet your pastor stands ready to hear your confession privately and fully confidential. He stands ready to proclaim that Christ has died and risen to take all of your sins and death and bury them in His tomb, never to return. The Absolution your pastor speaks is the greatest gift you can ever receive; it is your sentence of life that is to be lived eternally and without fear in the Glory of God. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

The Seventh Friday After Pentecost

JULY 12, 2024

Today's Reading: Galatians 1:1-24

Daily Lectionary: Judges 7:1-23; Judges 7:24-12:15; Galatians 1:1-24

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Imagine sitting in a church, and your pastor starts the sermon by greeting you with “Grace and peace to you,” but then suddenly switches to a serious tone and asks, “What are you people thinking? Have you lost your mind? Have you gone crazy?” You would probably be taken aback, right? But that’s exactly what the apostle Paul did with the Galatians. And there was a good reason for it.

The Galatians were on the verge of losing the only true Gospel to save them from eternal damnation. False teachers had distorted the Gospel of grace in Christ into a religion of works, and the Galatians had fallen prey to it. Paul’s stern tone was meant to shock them into realizing the gravity of the situation, and he went on to explain why only one Gospel saves.

This message is just as important for us today as it was for the Galatians back then. False teachers are still out there, trying to twist and distort the true Gospel of Christ into something else.

Paul simply points the Galatians back to Christ, who gave Himself for our sins. By His death on the cross, He delivered us from “the present evil age.” He took the punishment we deserved and suffered death under God’s judgment in our place. He is our righteousness, our redemption, and the atonement for our sins.

Paul was rather serious with the Galatians over their corrupt gospel. It simply was not acceptable in his sight or the sight of God. Likewise, your pastor might seem serious and even narrow-minded when teaching and preaching the Gospel. There is a reason for all of this; no other Gospel can save us apart from our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Seventh Saturday After Pentecost

JULY 13, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 143:1-2, 8a; antiphon: Psalm 143:11

Daily Lectionary: Judges 13:1-25; Ruth 1:1-4:22; Galatians 2:1-21

Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! (Psalm 143:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus, Amen. Someone once said, “We don’t pray so that God can hear us; we pray so that we may hear God more.” Have you ever felt like your prayers are going unanswered? Are you just talking into thin air? King David knew that feeling, too, so he began his prayer with a simple yet powerful statement: “Lord, hear my prayer.” There is no other request, there is no begging or negotiating with God.

But David didn’t just stop there. He knew that God was faithful and righteous. That’s why he rooted his prayer in God’s character, knowing that God had made a covenant with His people and would be faithful to it. And because of God’s grace and mercy, God’s ears were opened to David and Israel’s prayers.

This Psalm reminds us that we have no right to be in the presence of God apart from His faithfulness and righteousness. But because of Jesus, who fulfilled God’s covenant and granted us His righteousness, we can come to God with our desperate pleas. In the Divine Service, you hear your Lord speak to you! Forgiveness, mercy, and strength are yours. Now, in your life of prayer, you are given the words to pray back to God. We, too, do not beg or negotiate with God. We simply pray, “Thy will be done.” You may notice in the Divine Service that we pray, “Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer” or “Let us pray to the Lord, Lord have mercy.”

Our prayers are rooted in God’s grace and mercy given to us by the new and eternal covenant found in Jesus’ blood. Jesus has answered your greatest prayer for forgiveness, life, and salvation on the cross, and He speaks to you, “It is finished.” Your prayers rise to the throne room of God like incense, thick billowing, sweet-smelling smoke that God takes delight in. He has shown you mercy; He has shown you righteousness in His Son. Even when our prayers fail, Jesus’ blood now speaks on your behalf before the throne of God day and night, for He is faithful to you. In the Name + of Jesus, Amen

Rise! To arms! With prayer employ you. O Christians, lest the foe destroy you; For Satan has designed your fall. Wield God’s Word, the weapon glorious; Against all foes be thus victorious, For God protects you from them all. Fear not the hordes of hell, Here is Emmanuel. Hail the Savior! The strong foes yield To Christ, our shield, And we, the victors, hold the field. (LSB 668:1)

The Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

JULY 14, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 6:14-29

Daily Lectionary: Judges 14:1-20; Galatians 3:1-22

But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." (Mark 6:16))

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. While John the Baptist was the first figure to appear on the scene in St. Mark's gospel (Mark 1:4), his ministry and witness were abruptly halted when Herod had him arrested. We wouldn't have even known that John had been arrested, except that Mark reported it as a timestamp for the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Mark 1:14). In today's reading, John has already been beheaded, and the body of the text recounts the events of his martyrdom at the hands of Herod. We should note from the start that Herod didn't know what to make of Jesus. He was more open to believing that John had risen from the dead than the possibility that there could be another preacher following after him! This is a timely reminder that, in St. Mark's Gospel, no one in the account really understands who Jesus is until the centurion sees Him dead on the cross and confesses Him to be the Son of God! But let's get back to John. From Herod's guilty conscience concerning John, the narrative steps back in time to John's arrest for his preaching against Herod's adulterous marriage to Herodias. Herod is here depicted as conflicted with regard to John. Sure, he imprisoned him, but he held him to be a prophet. It apparently never resulted in repentance, but he was, for a time, unwilling to put him to death. All of that changed on Herod's birthday when a risqué dance and a foolish vow revealed just how spineless Herod truly was. John was reduced to a party favor for a puppet king. But Jesus says, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." (John 15:18). Jesus promises Christians that we "...will be hated by all for [His] name's sake, but the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Mark 13:13). Persecution would be a terrifying prospect if our hope weren't rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ! Since Christ is risen, we know our lives have been hidden away in Him through the waters of Holy Baptism. Death has no dominion over us! God grant us to joyfully pray: "Lord, it belongs not to my care Whether I die or live; To love and serve Thee is my share, and this Thy grace must give. If life be long, I will be glad That I may long obey; If short, yet why should I be sad To soar to endless day?" (LSB 757:1-2) In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, You granted Your prophets strength to resist the temptations of the devil and courage to proclaim repentance. Give us pure hearts and minds to follow Your Son faithfully even into suffering and death; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Eighth Monday After Pentecost

JULY 15, 2024

Today's Reading: Amos 7:7-15

Daily Lectionary: Judges 15:1-16:3; Galatians 3:23-4:11

Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' (Amos 7:14-15)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. I don't envy Amos. If you haven't read the book lately, I'll briefly remind you of what this minor prophet was given to proclaim to God's people. The book is nine chapters long. There are five verses of Gospel promise given at the very end of the book. For 136 verses, the full force of God's law and judgment pour forth from Amos' lips. Like most of us, I can't imagine that Amos relished his calling to be the bearer of such bad news. And yet, this was his calling from the LORD. In our reading today, he makes it plain that none of this was his idea! God called him to leave behind his sycamore fig trees and his flocks in Judah. His ministry would be in the Northern Kingdom, pruning the calloused hearts of Israel, who had, in large part, forsaken the LORD. You may remember hearing about the "sin of Jeroboam" throughout the pages of 1 and 2 Kings. Jeroboam set up "high places" for the Northern Kingdom to worship (instead of traveling to the Temple in Jerusalem). If that weren't enough, he created two (that's right, two!) golden calves in Israel, instructing the people to worship the LORD at these. This is the state of things when Amos sees his vision of the plumb line. This tool is essentially a string with a weight at the bottom. Its job is to show whether or not something is pointing straight up and down. Going to build without one? You might wind up with a leaning tower of Pisa. When God showed Amos the plumb line, the message was clear: Israel was out of plumb. Such a structure must be torn down and rebuilt! But, you know...the Gospel promises in Amos speak to this very image: "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old..." (Amos 9:11) The LORD Himself will rebuild His people through the resurrection of His Son, David's heir! In Him, we are built up, straight and true, a plumb delight in the eyes of God! In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Anoint them prophets, men who are intent To be Your witnesses in word and deed, Their hearts aflame, their lips made eloquent, Their eyes awake to ev'ry human need. (LSB 682:2)

The Eighth Tuesday After Pentecost

JULY 16, 2024

Today's Reading: Ephesians 1:3-1

Daily Lectionary: Judges 16:4-30; Judges 17:1-21:25; Galatians 4:12-31

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him... (Ephesians 1:3-4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. "What was God doing before creation?" the confirmation student asks his pastor. The pastor leans back and replies, "Well, St. Augustine answered that question like this: 'He was preparing a punishment fit for those who ask such trifling questions...'" I think we can all hear the sarcasm in that answer... But in all seriousness, our lesson today gives us some insight into the mind and heart of God. "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." (Ephesians 1:4). Now, before we get carried away, let's make a few careful observations about this reading. First, when Paul talks about election/predestination, he's always talking about "us." It's a conversation of comfort and joy for Christians— not a statement about those who don't believe. Re-read the lesson, and notice how many times "our," "we," and "us" pop up! Second, pay close attention to that little preposition "in Him." We're not the elect of God apart from Jesus but IN HIM. It's crucial for us to see that any time Paul's talking about those who are saved, it's always IN CHRIST. This corrects that error that some folks slip into when they teach that if you're elect, you'll be saved— one way or another— as if there could be a possibility of salvation apart from Jesus! Finally, pay attention to when all this stuff takes place. (It may be helpful to go back and read it one more time!) You've got God saving us in Christ from before the foundation of the world; you've got God giving us redemption through the blood of Jesus shed on Good Friday; and you've got God sealing us with the promised Holy Spirit when we heard the word of truth and believed it. This little section of Ephesians is packed full of blessings for you, dear Christian. If you ever doubt that God could love a sinner like you, flip to Ephesians 1 and take comfort in the knowledge that, before God said, "Let there be light," you were on God's mind: He has blessed us in Christ to the praise of His glory! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty Father, in Your Son You loved us when not yet begun Was this old earth's foundation! Your Son has ransomed us in love To live in Him here and above: This is Your great salvation. Alleluia! Christ the living, To us giving Life forever, Keeps us Yours and fails us never! (LSB 395:4)

The Eighth Wednesday After Pentecost

JULY 17, 2024

Today's Reading: Galatians 5:1-26

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 1:1-20; Galatians 5:1-26

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Well? What's next? That was the question in the churches of Galatia when Paul continued on his second missionary journey. They had come to faith in Christ when they heard the gospel that Paul proclaimed, but shortly after Paul left, other teachers arrived, suggesting that Paul had only given them the basics of the faith...now it was time to make their commitment to Jesus a little more serious. That's how they get you. I've heard it called the "Jesus plus" problem. When Christianity tries to add something to Jesus, you wind up losing Jesus and putting your faith in whatever that other thing is (your works, your effort, your emotions). Paul heard about the Judaizers who were drafting right behind him and poisoning the well. It's no wonder that Galatians is among Paul's most emotionally charged letters! The whole book could be summed up in his questions, "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:2-3). You didn't save yourself! What makes you think you're going to keep yourself saved?! Of course, Paul isn't anti-good works. But good works belong in the proper place, in freedom. The Christian church in America is often tempted to ask, "What's next?" We foolishly think that we could ever graduate from the simple truth of the Gospel: Jesus loves you; He died for you; He lives for you. Paul sets us free in his letter to the Galatians– not free to live however we want– but free from the burden of keeping God's law! What do we do with freedom like that? Paul says it like this: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) So your life as a Christian is less and less about you and more and more about Christ. As John the Baptist put it, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30) And as Christ increases in us, the fruit of the Spirit buds, blossoms, and blesses our neighbor. Go forth in freedom, for Christ is alive in you! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Fruitful trees, the Spirit's sowing, May we ripen and increase, Fruit to life eternal growing, Rich in love and joy and peace. (LSB 691:1)

The Eighth Thursday After Pentecost

JULY 18, 2024

Today's Reading: Catechism - What sins should we confess?

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 1:21-2:17; Galatians 6:1-1

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (John 20:23)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. The conscience. It's our concept of right and wrong. It's the referee that tells you whether a thought, word, or deed was in or out of bounds. It's the TV chef who tells you whether the dish that is your life is a delicious masterpiece, pleasing in God's eyes, or whether it should be tossed in the trash and ridiculed mercilessly. Maybe that was a bit of a stretch. But we've all felt the weight of our sins pressing on us. We've all had those moments when we've felt utterly alone in that sin, ashamed to tell another soul just how bad we are. And in times like those, more often than not, our conscience just isn't capable of delivering the goodness of the gospel that we need to hear. Don't get me wrong; God gave us our consciences when He wrote His law on our hearts. But like so many of God's good Gifts, our conscience is often co-opted for the evil plans and purposes of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature (The Lord's Prayer– Third Petition Explanation). So what can we do? Where do we turn? Fortunately, the Good News isn't something that we find inside ourselves, but in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus—all of which are applied to our wounded souls with words. Whether spoken or written, language is the vehicle God has chosen to combat the devil's wiles. And to speak such words, God has ordained pastors. He has sent His Church into the world with the command to forgive sins and to speak peace into the turmoil of lives wrecked by guilt and shame. If you've never been to Confession, talk to your pastor about it! Most of the times that I've heard folks' confession, it started out as a "Pastor, can we talk about something?" conversation. And in most cases, when someone needs to talk with their pastor, sin is at the root of the problem. Private Confession is almost like when you go to your doctor and he instructs you to "tell me where it hurts." Whether you've committed sins or you've been sinned against, sin hurts. It damages consciences. It makes us "know and feel" sins in our hearts—but we don't have to carry these sins alone! Burdens like these were atoned for at the cross, and Holy Absolution proclaims the very same. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, on You I cast my burden— Sink it in the deepest sea! Let me know Your gracious pardon, Cleanse me from iniquity. Let Your Spirit leave me never; Make me only Yours forever. (LSB 608:4)

The Eighth Friday After Pentecost

JULY 19, 2024

Today's Reading: 1 Samuel 2:18-36

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 2:18-36; Acts 15:22-41

And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever. (1 Samuel 2:35)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. This past school year, I taught Old Testament class at our local Lutheran High School. When we made it into the book of 1 Samuel, we were still in the “Judges” mindset of things, when “there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” (Judges 17:6, 21:25) And this seemed to be the case in the early chapters of 1 Samuel, too. Eli was the priest and judge at that time, and the young boy Samuel was in his care. But Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phineas, were worthless. That’s not my opinion, it’s in the text! (1 Samuel 2:12) They were worthless because they took larger portions of peoples’ sacrifices than they were authorized to take (2:13-16); they took advantage of the women who served at the tabernacle (2:22); and if all that wasn’t enough, we’re told that they didn’t know the LORD (2:12). Priests who didn’t know the LORD?! How could that be?! Believe it or not, there are “pastors” in “churches” today who teach a kind of agnosticism that says there “might” be a God...MIGHT?! Maybe you can tell that I’m a little fired up about this. It turns out that, in the case of Hophni and Phineas, Eli’s parenting was to blame. He attempted to correct them... but it didn’t work; it wasn’t enough. God’s will was to raise up another... a faithful priest to serve Him. Now, we’re tempted to think this is Samuel. I mean, he takes over the priesthood after Eli and his sons die. He’s a faithful priest, prophet, and judge. But this is one of those times when widening our gaze to look beyond the first likely candidate is helpful. And yes, looking past Samuel, we see the perfect Priest, Prophet, and King– Jesus Himself. In Christ, God has established His house forever. You, dear Christian, and all who call upon the name of Jesus for salvation have been given a place in that household, free from the fear of ever being deemed worthless; God delights in you for the sake of His righteousness! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and most gracious God and Father, we implore You to turn the hearts of all who have forsaken the faith once delivered to Your Church, especially those who have wandered from it or are in doubt through the corruption of Your truth. Mercifully visit and restore them that in gladness of heart they may take pleasure in Your Word and be made wise to salvation through faith in Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Eighth Saturday After Pentecost

JULY 20, 2024

Today's Reading: Introit for Pentecost 9 - Psalm 147:7-11; antiphon: Psalm 145:16
Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 3:1-21; Acts 16:1-22

You open your hand; You satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Psalm 145:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The antiphon for tomorrow's Introit should be familiar to us: "You open Your hand; You satisfy the desire of every living thing." In the Small Catechism, this verse and the one before it, "The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due season" (Psalm 145:15), are spoken before each meal prayer is offered. This is the appropriate mindset for all Christians: to recognize that God is the Giver of every good and perfect Gift. His provision sustains all of creation. We don't have eyes to see or ears to hear creation respond to God's generous Gifts. And far too often, we fail to lift up our voices in thanksgiving and praise to God. This shortsightedness and thanklessness is sin. Part of being the pinnacle of God's creation is that we are appointed to offer acceptable praise to Him for all His goodness to us and to all of creation. And yet, thankfulness doesn't always come naturally to us. We simply forget that God, in His wisdom, sends rain on the wicked and the just... and sometimes He withholds rain from the wicked and the just, just the same. God created the predator and the prey. It's easy for us to forget the scope of God's perfect attention to detail, His active hand in every atom in creation. What is the remedy for this forgetfulness? Thankfulness. Giving thanks to God for the good that He has done. And widening our gaze to see that He has done good, not only for us but in every corner of creation for every second of its existence! God does more than satisfy the desires of every living thing; He sees that we are well-supplied beyond our wildest dreams! Put another way, He loves us with the perfect love of a Father. He has seen to all of the details and overseen the greatest needs that exist in creation. And in every instance, He has done what He always does! He opens His hand to feed us. He gives us what we need, even before we've asked. He supplies us with more than we need for this body and life— He supplies us what we need for eternity. He has given a Savior from sin, an antidote to death, and His Spirit to dwell inside us, perfecting our prayers and tuning our thanksgiving so that our voices may be added to the whole heavenly host, giving thanks to God forever! Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! His steadfast love endures forever! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Feed Thy children, God most holy; Comfort sinners poor and lowly. O Thou Bread of Life from heaven, Bless the food Thou here hast given! As these gifts the body nourish, May our souls in graces flourish Till with saints in heav'nly splendor At Thy feast due thanks we render. (LSB 774)

The Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

JULY 21, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 6:30-44

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 4:1-22; Acts 17:1-34; Acts 16:23-40

When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. (Mark 6:34)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Sometimes, I read a passage of Scripture, and it's so familiar to me that I struggle to hear it as if it were the first time. Does that ever happen to you? Sometimes, we're afflicted by an "I already know how this one ends" attitude. One of the things I've found helpful over the years is to zoom in on the details of a familiar account, not losing sight of what the main point is, but giving special attention to the way the Spirit moved the authors to tell their story. Today, we take up Jesus' feeding of the 5,000. It begins with Jesus inviting the disciples to join Him in a desolate place that they would reach by boat. The crowds had been intrigued by Jesus, and it seemed as if Jesus was trying to give His guys a breather. But the crowds followed them anyway...into a place where there wasn't any food. Jesus cared for them the way a shepherd cares for sheep, showing compassion. After a back-and-forth conversation about who should give the folks something to eat, Jesus instructed them to give them something to eat. "200 hundred days' wages couldn't feed this mob of people!" They replied. "What have you got?" He asked. He gave thanks over the five loaves and the two fish...and then the disciples distributed them so that everyone had their fill. There were twelve basketfuls of leftovers, one for each disciple. Just like the disciples, we get worked down by the circumstances of this life. We are hard-pressed on every side. But Jesus has not left us alone nor desolate; like a shepherd, the Good Shepherd, He has compassion on us. He gives us more love than we can even fathom. His forgiveness and provision know no bounds. And the desolate place turns out to be the place called the Skull. How can there be life in such a place as this?! Look to the cross—to the place where the Shepherd lays down His life for you. Flowing from that innocent death are life and salvation, life overflowing into eternity. The Lord provides. Taste and see that He is good! Or, better put: take and eat, take and drink. This Shepherd's Body and Blood are yours as a guarantee! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Heavenly Father, though we do not deserve Your goodness, still You provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may acknowledge Your Gifts, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saint Mary Magdalene

JULY 22, 2024

Today's Reading: John 20:1-2, 10-18

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 5:1-6:3, 10-16; Acts 18:1-11, 23-28

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her. (John 20:18)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Mary Magdalene gets an unfair rap if you ask me. Scripture tells us that Jesus had driven seven demons out of her (Luke 8:2)—she may have been the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-50), but that's speculation. Church tradition suggests some other sinful things about her past, and I'm not really here to disagree with the Church's handed-down tradition, but let's remember Mary Magdalene for what she got right—it's really important. Mary, not to be confused with any of the other Marys in the Gospels, was there at Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection! While the disciples were running, hiding, and denying, she stood by and watched it all happen! While the disciples were in a grief-stricken stupor early in the morning on that first day of the week—and indeed the First Day of the new life that is in Christ for all who believe—she made provisions and journeyed to the tomb. No doubt, she was stricken with grief, eyes weary from tears, and when she saw the stone rolled away, she ran and told Peter and John. After they saw the empty tomb, they went their own ways. But not Mary. She stood there, lost in thoughts of what this could possibly mean, and then she saw Jesus. She knew Him when He called her name. Isn't that just the greatest thing? Blinded by grief and unfamiliar with the resurrected face of Jesus, He calls her by name. He names us, too. That's the blessing of Baptism. Your name is spoken out loud, not so that the congregation can hear it, and certainly not because God needed to hear it...but because you do. Yes, Christ appoints pastors in His stead and by His command, but Jesus calls your name as you are baptized into His name—and His death and resurrection, too! And our response is just the same as Mary's: we go, we run, we spread to anyone and everyone we can find, and we joyfully announce that Christ—who was crucified, dead, and buried—is alive again forever! Or, as Mary so beautifully put it to the apostles whose hearts were broken: "I have seen the Lord!" In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We sing Your praise for Mary, Who came at Easter dawn To look for Jesus' body And found her Lord was gone. But, as with joy she saw Him In resurrection light, May we by faith behold Him, The Day who ends our night. Amen. (LSB 855:11)

The Ninth Tuesday After Pentecost

JULY 23, 2024

Today's Reading: Ephesians 2:11-22

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 6:19-7:17; Acts 19:23-21:14; Acts 19:1-22

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (Ephesians 2:19-21)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. This is going to be a dangerous rhetorical question...Have you ever felt like you didn't fit in? Just so that question doesn't hang out there in the void, I'll answer: YES! YES! A thousand times, yes! There were times when I tried doing the popular things, and sometimes it worked, other times it didn't. There were times when I didn't do the popular thing, opting for what I knew to be the right thing, and that didn't make many friends, either. In our reading today, we're reminded of a distinction that existed in the first century that we don't really experience today: Jewish vs. Gentile Christians. There are, unfortunately, divisions among Christians today, but it's hard to imagine the kind of animosity that existed among those who had the promises, the covenant, the lineage, the Scripture—you get the idea. From their perspective, these Gentiles had always been unclean, even idolaters and enemies of God. And now they were just going to receive the same salvation as God's people of old?! Without any kind of sacrifice?! Without any obedience to the law of Moses and the traditions of the elders?! But that's the beauty of Jesus' perfect, innocent blood. It brings people into the family of God. It tears down the division lines between those of Abraham and those of every other family on earth (remember that they would be blessed in Abraham's offspring, too! Genesis 12:3, 28:14). Paul continues by saying that not only are Gentiles brought into the family of God through the blood of Christ, but God is using all believers to build Himself a house, a Temple, in which His glory dwells, established on the preaching of the apostles, with Christ Himself as the cornerstone, and you and me and all Christians fitting perfectly into the places that God has intended for us from before the foundation of the world! With a place like that, who could ever hope to fit into this world that's passing away?! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Paschal Lamb, by God appointed, All our sins on Thee were laid; By almighty love anointed, Thou hast full atonement made. All Thy people are forgiven Through the virtue of Thy blood; Opened is the gate of heaven, Reconciled are we with God. Amen. (LSB 531:2)

The Ninth Wednesday After Pentecost

JULY 24, 2024

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 23:1-6

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 8:1-22; Acts 21:15-36

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'" (Jeremiah 23:5-6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. One of my favorite introductions in the Bible belongs to King David. You probably remember the scene. Saul had been rejected by the LORD, and Samuel was sent in secret to Bethlehem, to Jesse, and each of Jesse's sons passed before him. None of them were pleasing in God's eyes. "You have any more of those sons, Jesse?" You can almost hear the worry in Samuel's voice...this was supposed to be the place, right?! But there was one more—he was watching the sheep. That boy would become the King of Israel. He would shepherd God's people, and he would own the words of the 23rd Psalm, taking comfort by confessing, "The LORD is my Shepherd!" By the time the prophet Jeremiah lived, Israel had been ruled by a long line of kings who were anything but shepherd-like. So God intervenes. God Himself would step in to shepherd His people. He would gather them from the places they were scattered. He would lead them and feed them. But then He would raise up other shepherds. Better shepherds. Well, One Shepherd in particular. Jesus came as the fulfillment of this prophecy, and where David and the rest of the kings of Israel failed by sinning, Jesus didn't. He came to bring righteousness to all who believed in His name. He came to be the righteousness of God through His perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection. All of this He did for YOU! Think about it like this: God surveys the scene of those who have been set apart to serve as His shepherds. One by one, He sees that their lives are marred by sin, and they themselves have wandered like sheep! God's great love sent Jesus to be the last and ONLY shepherd we'll ever need. He has been through the valley of the shadow of death. He has emerged on the other side, alive again forever...and you, His dear sheep, will live in His house forevermore! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Savior, like a shepherd lead us; Much we need Your tender care. In Your pleasant pastures feed us, For our use Your fold prepare. Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, You have bought us; we are Yours. Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, You have bought us, we are Yours. Amen. (LSB 711:1)

Saint James the Elder

JULY 25, 2024

Today's Reading: Mark 10:35-45

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 9:1-27; Acts 21:37-22:16

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. I think it's fair to say that James and John act and behave in the way that we likely would if we had no filter. What I mean by that is most of us would have a little restraint before we asked Jesus something like James and John did in Mark 10. They effectively ask, “What's in it for us?!” Most of us were raised better than that! Right?! Maybe the sons of Zebedee's raising should be called into question since, in Matthew 20, in a very similar situation, James and John's mother made the same request of Jesus, only on their behalf. If we're being honest, I think we all want some sense that what we get out of something will be “worth it” in comparison to what we've put into it. It only makes sense that the result and reward would line up with the sacrifice required. But that's why the Christian faith is earth-shatteringly different from every other religion in the world. What you put into it doesn't have any bearing on what you get out of it. All of your works, whether wicked or righteous, are filthy in the eyes of God. But the same is not true of Jesus. His works are perfectly pleasing to God. His works are exactly what God has commanded of His creation. And His works are exchanged to all who trust in Him for salvation. Jesus wasn't concerned with giving out seats at His left or His right. He was concerned with preparing places at His wedding banquet. And that's the beautiful thing about our Lord! He came to serve US! We all too often get things backward. Jesus sets things straight by coming not to be served but to serve. To give His life as a ransom for many—even for all! What's left is for us to look all the more to Jesus, not asking for more, but trusting that He has in store for us exactly what's best for us. Lord, give us such eyes of faith to see! In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O gracious God, Your servant and apostle James was the first among the Twelve to suffer martyrdom for the name of Jesus Christ. Pour out upon the leaders of Your Church that spirit of self-denying service that they may forsake all false and passing allurements and follow Christ alone, Who lives with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Ninth Friday After Pentecost

JULY 26, 2024

Today's Reading: Catechism - What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 10:1-27; Acts 22:17-29

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. What is it?! That's the question I hear children ask their parents at the Communion rail all the time. I'll admit that I've heard a wide range of answers whispered into those little ears in response. There are a few I've heard that have left me thinking, "Don't cringe!" Recently, I heard an answer that actually made me grin. "He's right here," said the little boy's grandma, as she held the host in her hand, "and in heaven, too." Perfect. I love it. Praise God. We shouldn't budge an inch on this. "What is this bread?" one of our hymns asks... "Christ's body risen from the dead!" comes the answer! We have here, from our Lord Jesus, the food from the table He prepares before us— the meal from the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom. When Jesus instituted this Blessed Meal, He did so that we might receive the great benefits of His Gospel in a tangible way through one of the most common experiences we can imagine: eating and drinking. Bread is a nearly universal staple of mankind; this began with Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden. "By the sweat of your brow, you will eat bread," God told our first father. Bread is the food of the Fall. It requires multiple steps, processes, and preparation to create, and it is fleeting. Israel learns that man can't live by bread alone in the wilderness, and the manna God gave them spoiled in a day's time! But Jesus takes this food and repurposes it. Just as man lives by the Words that proceed from the mouth of the Lord, we are given daily bread that will never spoil but endures to eternity! Just as Christ's body is given for us Christians to eat, so also is His precious blood poured out for us to drink, trusting His words. Paul reminds us that eating and drinking the bread and the cup is a participation in the Body and Blood of Jesus. We are connected to Christ through eating and drinking in faith. So come, dear Christian, to the altar. It is Christ. It is for you! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, our God, in Holy Baptism You have called us to be Christians and granted us the remission of sins. Make us ready to receive the most holy Body and Blood of Christ for the forgiveness of all our sins, and grant us grateful hearts that we may give thanks to You, O Father, to Your Son, and to the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Ninth Saturday After Pentecost

JULY 27, 2024

Today's Reading: Psalm 145:1-3, 6-7; antiphon: Psalm 145:5

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 12:1-25; Acts 22:30-23:11

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. (Psalm 145:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Do you meditate? In our Psalm today, David does! It's important for us to distinguish the meditation that Scripture extols from the meditation that the world would teach us. Meditation, as the world understands it, is usually intended to empty our minds or to broaden our minds to the point that we're free from constraints. In God's Word, meditation doesn't "free our minds" but draws us deeper into His Word! Being empty-headed is not seen as a goal but as part of the problem! So, when David meditates on God, his attention is focused on the "glorious splendor of [God's] majesty" and "[God's] wondrous works." In other words, what does it mean for God to be God? And what does this look like in time and space? David answers the first by saying that God is "unsearchably great!" That's not usually a phrase we use, but it's the truth. No amount of searching, contemplating, or imagining could adequately describe how great the Lord is! But, in a way, you should expect nothing less than an answer like that. After all, if a god isn't beyond understanding, almighty, majestic—he's not much of a god, is he? That's why the second part is so very important for our own meditation upon the Lord! What is God like? Let me tell you what He has done! That's what the rest of Psalm 145 essentially says. You know what God is like because of what He has done for His people. God's actions speak plenty loud—they shout His great love for us! They show us His redemptive work, time after time. And these actions are chiefly known through the sending of His Son. Do you want to know what kind of a God we have? Look to the cross. Peer into the empty tomb. Listen to Jesus' words of peace and forgiveness. Hear Jesus as He tells us that He goes to prepare a place for us. Trust that He has restored you into the favor of God as dear, forgiven children. It shouldn't surprise us that Christian meditation isn't about us at all. It's about Christ. We fix our eyes on Him, lest we become distracted by the temptations and allures of this world. God has invited us to meditate upon this unsearchably great majesty, on these wondrously loving works. And that meditation keeps us anchored in Christ! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Before You, Lord, we bow, Our God Who reigns above And rules the world below, Boundless in pow'r and love. Our thanks we bring In joy and praise, Our hearts we raise To You, our King! Amen. (LSB 966:1)



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