

DAILY PRAYERS

The Word of God

Eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, grant us Thy Holy Spirit that He may write Thy Word upon our hearts, that we may receive and believe it, and that it may give us cheer and comfort into eternity. Glorify Thy Word in our hearts that by Thy holy inspiration we may think what is right and by Thy power perform the same, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by the patience and comfort of Thy holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which Thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Morning

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

Evening

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day; and I pray Thee that Thou wouldst forgive me all my sins, wherever I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Before Meals

The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them their meat in due season; Thou openest Thine hands and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

Lord God, Heavenly Father, bless us and these Thy gifts, which we receive from thy bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

After Meals

O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever.

We thank Thee, Lord God, Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, for all Thy benefits, who livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen.

CLC Daily Devotions



My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

John 10:27

June 4, 2018 - Sept. 1, 2018

Devotions taken from a collection of brief meditations written by several pastors of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. You can subscribe to daily devotions via email at: <http://www.redeemerclc.info/ministries>

Monday, June 4, 2018

2 Corinthians 13:14 - *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.*

THE GOD OF LOVE AND PEACE IS WITH YOU-- RIGHT NOW!

Through His Word God comes to you and makes His home with you. It is the triune God who desires to, " ... be with you all."

God the Father was reconciling the world to Himself through Christ Jesus; Christ Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; And we have also seen that God the Holy Spirit works through the Means of Grace, calling every sinner to repentance and to faith in Christ Jesus, not willing that any should perish, but that they should come to know their Savior.

So, it is that this blessing of grace, love, and communion with God is not just some nice wish or prayer. It is the will of God, and, through His own Word He wants to bring these blessings to you, for when God says that these blessings are given to be with you all, that is just what He means -- He means to bless you through this Word -- for it is in connection with His Word that God blesses you with His continued presence in your heart. Christ says that, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23).

Therefore, read with believing hearts, as the God of love and peace uses His Word to come to you and to make His home with you! " ... the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ ... be with you!" "The love of God ... be with you!" "The communion of the Holy Spirit ... be with you!"

Saturday, September 1, 2018

Acts 17:28 - *In Him we live and move and have our being.*

PROVIDER, PROTECTOR, AND PRESERVER!

The IRS defines a dependent as one who relies on his parents or someone else for more than half his support. According to God's family design "growing up", in most cases, involves moving from a state of dependency to a state of independence. Yet even the most independent among us realizes that term is purely relative, for all of us depend upon others in countless areas of our lives.

Our relationship to God gives new meaning to the term "dependent". "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Whether children, youth, adults, middle age, or senior citizens, we remain ultra-dependent, physically and spiritually, for everything we are and have. This humble dependent spirit pervades Luther's Explanation to the First Article, as he cites the three great "P's" which show our Creator-Gods ongoing hand of blessing in our lives. Our God is our Provider, Protector and Preserver.

Here's how Martin Luther summarizes this beautiful truth ...

"I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true."

-- From the "Lutheran Spokesman," May 1995.

Friday, August 31, 2018

John 9:4 - *We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.*

THE GIFT OF WORK; THE CHRISTIAN'S NUMBER ONE WORK

Clearly, Jesus is not here talking chiefly about one's vocation or job, but of the work of bringing to others the good news of salvation through faith in His redeeming work. Notice how Jesus includes His disciples ("we") in this saving work. As He would tell them after He died and rose, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." Just as we also "have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," we too have been sent to speak His peace to others.

This Labor Day weekend is a good time to remember that in the workplace the Holy Spirit often gives us opportunities to share the Savior with others. Sometimes this happens simply because our jobs put us in a position to befriend others. Sometimes this happens when the way we work reflects our faith and raises questions. Here's an example:

No one liked working the "return desk" at the large retail store where a certain Christian young woman worked. The people came in unhappy and even rude and seemed to blame the employee to whom they were returning the defective item for their difficulty. But this young woman handled returns with a cheery disposition and never seemed to "lose her cool." People went away feeling better about their situation. The woman's immediate superior asked what her secret was. She told him that her parents had taught her to treat people with kindness. The man in charge said he'd been taught the same thing but that there seemed to be something more involved with this young woman. She replied, "I try to treat each person as though they were Jesus." Plainly, this kind of encounter can lead to further discussion of Christ and the Christian faith.

That God chooses to use us believers in Christ to bring his saving truth to others is a wonderful and priceless privilege. That opportunities to do this often occur in connection with some other work or job should lead us to pray each day (on the way to work?) that the Holy Spirit would keep us alert to such opportunities and enable us to thoughtfully and thankfully use them.

Work is a gift of God through which He gives us a variety of other blessings as well. One of these may well be an opportunity to speak the good news of Jesus the Savior to hearts in need.

Tuesday, June 5, 2018

John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

FAITH'S FOCUS IS CHRIST CRUCIFIED

Jesus spoke these wondrous words to a leading Jewish Bible scholar of His day. With them our Lord emphasized the importance of faith. Nicodemus needed to learn that, despite the spiritual advantages of being born to the nation to whom God gave His holy Word, physical birth as a descendant of Abraham did not bring one automatically into the Kingdom of God. Unless there is a second, spiritual birth God's kingdom-rule cannot be established in the human heart. And as physical life is a creation of God, so too is spiritual life. As Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'" (John 3:5-7).

The hallmark of the new spiritual life created by the Holy Spirit through the Word is, of course, faith. And what is the heart of the focus of faith? That's what Jesus pointed out to Nicodemus in the words immediately preceding John 3:16.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

The Brass Serpent pictures the Savior lifted up in the likeness of the sinner-- providing rescue from death through faith in the promise of God. If John 3:16 is the Gospel in a sentence, here is the same Gospel in a picture-- a picture with clear parallels revealing the saving work of our Savior-God.

Sin of Israel = Our sin

Death by snakebite = Eternal death

(the great serpent Satan lurks here)

Brass Serpent = God's provided solution

(Jesus looked like part of the problem - a sinner)

Look of people = Faith

(saved not by the brass image but the Word of promise connected to it)

We are saved by Christ-- not from death by snakebite but from death eternal. And this salvation is received by that faith the Spirit works through the message of a Savior lifted up.

Wednesday, June 6, 2018

John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

O HOW WIDE IS THE IMMEASURABLE LOVE OF GOD!

Jesus Himself here reveals to us the very heart of our Savior-God. We see that in His love God's glory shines forth most brightly. And while the LORD's love is surely beyond our measuring, that does not mean it is beyond our meditation or praise. This is especially true when we remember that God's love is not mere emotion, but divine compassion-- full of understanding and commitment, purpose and action.

Consider how wide God's love for you is! Jesus says it is as wide as the world. Not the planet. The people. God's love embraces all the people who ever lived in the history of the world. (How could that love not include you?! Remember that when days are dark and your prayers seem unanswered.) Furthermore, God's love includes each of us, not in spite of our sinfulness, but because of it. We are so in need of God's love because we are so given to putting something else at our life's center-- in the place that belongs to God. We are all so undeserving of God's love-- yet God's love in Christ extends to us all.

Parents sometimes ask a young child "How much do I love you?" and then extend their arms as wide as possible and say, "This much!" -- and enclose the child in a loving embrace.

That's what God did to each of us individually-- when Jesus extended His arms on the cross!

O how wide is the love of God in Christ our Savior!

Thursday, August 30, 2018

Galatians 2:8 - *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God ...* **Ecclesiastes 5:19** - *As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor--this is the gift of God.*

FAITH REJOICES IN THE GIFT OF WORK

Faith in Jesus the Savior is the gift from God through which we receive the gifts of forgiveness of sin and Christ's own righteousness-- and along with them, eternal life.

Similarly, the ability to work is a gift of God through which we receive other gifts. Among these are the blessings of bodily provision and the personal satisfaction that comes with a job well done. Note that whether the gift is physical or spiritual, we rob ourselves of joy and blessing when we do not give thanks to God for His benefits and instead act as though we have earned or deserved what comes from His gracious hand.

When it comes to faith in Christ there are plenty of people encouraging us to think that we are the source of that faith; that we by an act of the will make a decision to believe in the Savior. We resist such encouragements to wrong thinking with the word of our God. When we do this, we find that the truth about faith enhances our ability to live as Christ's people.

There are also many who would have us see work only as a means to make money, and to think that somehow, we ourselves are the source of our talents and abilities. Here also we resist false and ungodly attitudes with the word of our gracious God. And here it is also true that right-thinking about work enhances our ability to joyfully live as Christ's people. When we remember that our gifts and abilities come from God, in faith we can rejoice in using the gifts he has given us rather than looking with envy on those He has given others.

So, look again at the two passages with which we began this meditation. With joyful heart give thanks that God has given you the gift of faith in Christ our Lord-- and the gift of work as well. Then let your work be an extension of your faith and an act of thanksgiving to your Savior-God.

Wednesday, August 29, 2018

Genesis 1:24-25 - *And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds--livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.*

LIKE FATHER ...

As part of his summer job a young college student was given the task of sanding both sides of rough-cut slices of pine about 6" across. The young man asked for more information. He wanted to know what the slices of pine would be used for. At first the foreman thought the young fellow was complaining about the job he'd been given. But then he realized that he wanted to know what he was helping to make, so that, visualizing the final result of his labors, he could do a better job. (A display of beautifully polished agate slices would hang from each sanded and stained slice of pine.)

In the same way a Ford assembly line worker may well focus on the fact that is not just tightening a series of nuts and bolts, but building a classic pickup truck.

As Christians we know that when it comes to making things, where we start is more wonderful than any finished product. For when we make things we are following in the footsteps of the heavenly Father who made us. When we can look at what we have made and find it good, that is a reflection on and a reflection of our Maker. After all, everything we make originates with Him-- from the raw materials we employ to the gifts and abilities we use in our work. Interestingly, even the LORD did not always "start from scratch" in His creative work. Sometimes He drew on what He had made earlier in that first creation week (cp. Gen 1:24).

Knowing that our Creator-God has not only made us but redeemed us as well, gives us a double motive to thank and praise him in and through the work we do. We are both wonderfully made and wondrously purchased-- to show forth His praises in everything we do.

All praise to God, who reigns above, The God of all creation,
The God of wonders, power, and love, The God of our salvation!

You who confess Christ's holy name, To God give praise and glory!
You who the Father's power proclaim, To God give praise and glory!

Thursday, June 7, 2018

John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

O HOW DEEP IS THE IMMEASURABLE LOVE OF GOD!

See the depth of God's love for you! See what God gives to reclaim you, to buy you back from death eternal. He gives His one and only Son from eternity. The Son whom He loves from forever the Father gives up for you and for me. And in order to do this He first gives Him to us-- permanently. At Bethlehem. The Son of God becomes the Son of Man as well in order to die for us. Indeed, the Son of God is the Son of Man still-- and will be forever. The Father gives His Son into the human family-- permanently, in order to make us part of His own family-- permanently.

"Whoever believes in Him will not perish." Will not be separated from God forever. "But will have eternal life," life with God forever. Like Adam and Eve had with God in the Garden before sin and its ugly power to separate entered in. The Father gave His Son who knew no sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). To what depths will God go for you? How deep is God's love for you? As deep as hell! Literally. For that is what the Son of God suffered on His God-forsaken cross for you.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10).

Friday, June 8, 2018

John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.*

O HOW LONG IS THE IMMEASURABLE LOVE OF GOD!

See the length of God's love for you! It reaches from eternity to eternity-- from the eternal councils of God before time began to the eternal life with God Jesus here promises to all who trust in His life and death in their place. Yes! Through the Holy Spirit's gift of faith, the eternal will and purpose of the Triune God, planned and promised in eternity (Ephesians 3:11) and carried out in time by Jesus, the eternal Son of God, becomes our own.

From our human point of view time-- that is, this universe's history-- lies between eternity and eternity. The eternal Son of God stepped into time when He was born to Mary of Nazareth in Bethlehem. In time, as part of our human story, He traveled with us and for us on His way to Gethsemane's darkness, Calvary's cross, and to the now empty tomb beyond. At just the right time, the time of God's choosing, the Son of God was delivered up for our sins and raised again to declare us "not guilty" (Romans 4:25). The Son of God came into time to offer Himself, once for all time, for all people of all time. No wonder the Apostle Paul calls this a mystery we come to know only by God's revealing.

See the eternal length of God's love played out in human history, and here in John 3:16, offered to all: "WHOEVER believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life." God's immeasurable love is made personal and through words like these God the Holy Spirit moves human hearts to take up faith's pen and fill in that WHOEVER blank with our own names.

Tuesday, August 28, 2018

Genesis 1:26-27 - *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness ..." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

AS CHRIST'S PEOPLE, WE DON'T "WORK LIKE THE DEVIL"

As the Labor Day weekend draws closer it's good for us to give thought to how God made us to be reflections of himself in the way we work. Unlike animals, we humans do not simply act on instinct, but give thought to what we do and why. Like God we plan and act and reflect on what we've done. (cp. Genesis 1:30, God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.)

Furthermore, as people reborn through faith in Christ, we know that what we do reflects our new relationship with God. We want to work in a way that honors the Savior who redeemed us and all we are to be his own. This is one of the things that make the Christian life rich and exciting.

Look closely at the simplest use of your God-given gifts and abilities and tell me if you don't see there wonderful evidence of our being made to reflect in our work the very nature of our Creator, the Triune God. (By the way, isn't that the simplest definition of work: namely, the things we do?)

When, like God, we use His creation to bless others, we 1) begin with a plan; and then 2) act out what we have planned; and 3) bring that resulting action into the life of the person being helped. Just think back on something the Lord recently led you to do for someone else, no matter how small, whether for a friend or family member or stranger. Now, maybe you're thinking, "True enough, but how does thinking on this three-step breakdown of work as a blessing to others help me to give thanks to God in the things I do?" Well here's one way. God has not only planned and carried out His plan and made personal that plan in creating us, the triune God has done the same in redeeming us. The Father planned our redemption in eternity. The Son of God fulfilled that plan when he "came down from heaven for us humans and our salvation." And the Holy Spirit through the word about Christ made the blessing of forgiveness and new life our own through the gift of faith in Jesus.

O give thanks unto the Lord that He permits us redeemed sinners to reflect His loving, saving nature in the things that we do-- in work-- even to the shining forth of His triune glory.

Monday, August 27, 2018

Matthew 28:18-20 - *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

COMMISSIONED

The "Great Commission" is the label given to these three verses from Matthew's Gospel. These words have become so familiar that most Christians can quote them from memory. The concept here is quite simple. Jesus commissioned His disciples then and us now to disciple all people by baptizing and teaching His word. And He attached promise that He would be with us always to the end of the age. This promise gives us strength and confidence.

Beginning today, each Monday's devotion will have a "Mission" theme as we focus on the great privilege each of us has as ambassadors of Christ. And what better place to begin this new series than with the account of our Savior commissioning His disciples for this wonderful task? For the next several weeks we will consider this passage phrase by phrase as the Holy Spirit works to give us encouragement and strength for this blessed privilege.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, thank You for the privilege of being Your child. And thank You for the courage and confidence that comes in knowing, by Faith Alone, that I am Your child. And that by Grace Alone You loved me, You called me, You washed away all my sins, and You made me Your very own. Thank You for revealing these truths to me in Your Word Alone. And now I pray that You would prepare me and use me to proclaim this glad good news to others that many more may rejoice in the forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life that my Savior, Your Son won on the cross for all sinners. Amen.

Saturday, June 9, 2018

John 3:16 - *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.*

O HOW HIGH THE IMMEASURABLE LOVE OF GOD!

How high is God's love in Christ? It reaches to the height of heaven even while it is rooted here in time.

Consider what the Lord, speaking through Isaiah the prophet (55:6-9), says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. God's pardoning love is far above any forgiveness we humans can conceive of. It not only begins in the heart of the holy God, it reaches down to us personally to bring us sinners forgiven into His eternal presence.

First, the eternal Son of God comes down to us from heaven to purchase forgiveness for with his own lifeblood, and then: The Spirit of God speaks to us in the great good news of Christ's redemption, speaks to our hearts in such a way (God's way!) that with newborn hearts we hold fast to what our Savior has done for us. In the third chapter of John it is of this rebirth through the Gospel that Jesus speaks to Nicodemus when He says, "You must be born again!"

The new life that is God's rule in the human heart is marked by confidence in God, that is, by faith. This new life even death can't destroy. This new life in Christ reaches to the heights of heaven for Jesus' life-giving forgiveness brings us into the presence of God for ever.

The one true God, the Triune God,

Is the Father who planned our salvation in eternity;

Is the Son who carried out this plan in time;

Is the Holy Spirit who brings us to trust in Jesus our Savior.

Monday, June 11, 2018

Colossians 2:17 - *These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*

WE WOULD SEE JESUS

The use of illustration has long been an important part of God's way of communication with us human beings. The Lord who made us knows we remember better and longer what we not only hear but see as well.

So, it is that the Old Testament is full of pictures of the Savior. They appear in Israel's history, in the words and actions of the prophets, in the lives of people like David and in the God-given worship patterns of His Old Testament people.

Consider the Passover Lamb, the Scapegoat, the Brass Serpent, the Good Shepherd or Jonah and the Great Fish. A number of these Old Testament pictures of Jesus involve narratives striking and memorable--dramatic interventions by the LORD in the lives of His ancient people. And yet, the intervention previewed is even greater and more memorable.

And isn't this one of the reasons the Spirit spoke of the Savior's person and work in pictures? The picture is never the real thing. When some wanted to make the Old Testament worship-pictures necessary to salvation the Holy Spirit led the Apostle Paul to write to the Colossians: "These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."

When light is behind an approaching individual their shadow precedes them. But a shadow is an outline, a kind of picture. The person is the reality. When we look at the Old Testament pictures of Jesus the Savior to come, as fascinating and instructive as they may be in themselves, if we do not move past them to Jesus we are not getting the message the Spirit would lay on our hearts.

The work of the Spirit is not just to tell hard-to-forget stories but to lead us to lean our hearts on Jesus Christ our Savior, to receive from Him forgiveness of sin, life and salvation.

Saturday, August 25, 2018

MAKING ENEMIES

There are all kinds of ways to make enemies: be rude, make a mean comment, don't keep your word, use other people for your own advantage. As children of God we don't want to do any of those things. The Lord points us in an entirely different direction: "Love your neighbor as yourself ... If your enemy is hungry, feed him ... do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing ... Consider others better than yourselves." We strive to befriend all people in love for the Lord.

So then how does it happen that one of the surest ways of making enemies is by speaking and living as a believer in Jesus? Jesus showed perfect, holy love toward all, yet was hated by many. He told the disciples they should expect the same treatment. That is true for us present day followers too. Why? Because, while everyone appreciates kind gestures and consideration, no one by nature wants to hear God's call to repent of sin and believe in Jesus as the Savior and the only way to eternal life. It means a denial of "self," a rejection of the world, and a complete turnaround in the direction of one's life.

It wasn't that Jesus had done something wrong to cause people to reject and resent Him. He mourned over Jerusalem: "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37). Yet in spite of His enemies, Jesus continued preaching and teaching, and finally went to the cross and sacrificed Himself for the sins of all people, even those who wanted nothing to do with Him.

Following Jesus will inevitably make enemies, but don't let that discourage you from letting His light shine out from you in love and forgiveness. For it is that very news of Jesus' holy life and sacrificial death which has the power to soften hard hearts, replace unbelief with faith, and transform enemies into friends and fellow believers. "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

In Matthew 10:34-42, Jesus tells us that we will have enemies, but that shouldn't discourage us from following Him, for "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

Friday, August 24, 2018

WHAT'S HE DOING?

Every time I weave around and through a construction site's traffic cones, the same thought runs through my mind: "What are they doing?" Or in translation: "They have no idea what they're doing. I know better." Of course, that's unfair. I haven't kept up with the Department of Transportation's master plan. I have zero experience in road construction and traffic management. I just jump to the conclusion that because it doesn't make sense to me and is an inconvenience, it must be wrong.

Don't we often react the same way toward God's working in our lives? He promises, "I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). He has wonderfully worked out our salvation and given us eternal life through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for the sins of the world. "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18). What greater proof could there be of God's loving purposes?

Yet when it comes to His direction of our daily lives, we end up thinking, "What's He doing?" We imagine we know a better route, one with fewer bumps, hills, and construction slowdowns. When the Lord leads us in a different direction than we envision, we complain and become discouraged. Do you ever leave Him behind to go your own way? But who are we to question God, the One who sees the end before the beginning, who has given us life, who loves us with an everlasting love, and who has made us His children in Christ that we might inherit heaven?

Let's go to the cross in repentance for our questioning of the Lord's direction and the complaining that goes along with it. Let's rejoice in His mercy and forgiveness, trust that He will fill our lives with His blessings, and then with renewed confidence gladly follow Him. May we echo the prayer of David: "Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths, guide me in your truth" (Psalm 25:4-5).

Tuesday, June 12, 2018

John 1:29 - *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

JESUS IS THE LAMB OF GOD

Many of the Old Testament pictures of the Savior were selected for special attention and emphasis long ago--selected by the Holy Spirit through John the Baptist, Isaiah the Prophet or Jesus Himself.

When John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God, his original hearers surely did not think of something cute and cuddly but rather of blood and death--and rescue from death. There were the morning and evening sacrifices at the Temple. There was the Passover Lamb.

The Passover Lamb was truly God's Lamb, wasn't it? A lamb selected and handled according to the LORD's specific instructions. A lamb sacrificed, put to a bloody death, so that people whose doorways were marked with its blood would not die--so that the Angel of Death would pass over.

A memorable night teaching a truth even more striking: It will take the shedding of the blood of a Sacrifice of God's choosing to save sinners from eternal death. Furthermore, the benefits of this divine intervention are received by faith.

Many a picture bears an inscription or title that focuses the mind on the meaning the artist has in view. The Spirit of God entitled the Passover Lamb with an unforgettable inscription when Isaiah wrote of the coming Savior: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

Wednesday, June 13, 2018

John 10:11-12 - *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So, when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it."*

THE GOOD SHEPHERD DOESN'T RUN

At Antietam, Maryland on September 17, 1862 more than 23,000 men were killed, wounded, or missing in some of the most horrific hours of the Civil War. It's just hard to imagine how wars in those days were fought. A horde of men would rush out into a field to meet another group head on. There were bayonets, guns, and hand-to-hand combat. Your best chance of survival in a battle like that was simply to run away as fast as you could. If you or I had been there, perhaps that's what we might have done. Sometimes retreat is the best option.

But when you retreat, then the enemy and his armies can close in on you much more easily. When you "fall back" you give ground to the opposition and make it easier for him to win the fight. In fact, sometimes retreat can turn into defeat.

That's what would have happened if Jesus had turned and run away from the cross. Had Jesus not laid down His life for the sheep but instead retreated into the mansions of heaven without completing His divine mission, we would have been the ones defeated. Satan and His accusations would have moved in and torn us to shreds. Our own guilt and sinfulness would have hung like a noose around our necks. The tide of battle would have turned and our hopes for eternal life would have been dashed to pieces forever. But this did not happen because the Good Shepherd doesn't run. When He saw the wolf coming, He did not head for the hills; He headed for the cross so that His dear sheep could be safe.

"O Soul, I take upon me now
The pain thou shouldst have suffered.
Behold, with grace I thee endow,
Grace freely to thee offered.
The curse I choose that thou might'st lose
Sin's curse and guilt forever."
(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 150:4)

Thursday, August 23, 2018

1 Samuel 15:22 - *Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.*

ROYAL OBEDIENCE

Our text takes us back to the time before David, when Saul was king in the land. The Lord had instructed Samuel to send King Saul on a special mission to destroy Israel's enemies, the Amalekites. The command was very specific: "Attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" (1 Samuel 15:3).

After the battle was over, Samuel went out to talk to King Saul. The Lord had told him that Saul had disobeyed the Lord's command. He and his men had destroyed everything worthless in the Amalekite camp, had killed all the people, but they had preserved the life of Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and they had not destroyed the best sheep and oxen.

Saul claimed that he had obeyed the Lord, but he had not, for he had done only part of what God had commanded him to do. He had kept the king alive, and kept some of the animals alive for sacrifice. But this is not what God commanded. Therefore Saul was rejected as God's appointed king.

After Saul's rejection God, chose someone else. That someone else was David, who at this time was still a young boy, working as a shepherd for his father Jesse. Now, how could David prove to be a better king than Saul? By simple obedience, by doing exactly what God told him.

In this respect David was certainly an improvement over Saul. But even David was not perfectly obedient in every way. He was far from being a perfect king. Only in Jesus, David's Son, do we have the real King over God's people, the perfect King, who carried out the will of His Father to perfection and was not disobedient like Saul. For what do we read concerning David's Son? "He humbled Himself, and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." Humility and obedience! What Saul lacked, Jesus, David's Son, displayed to perfection. What does this mean for us sinners? The apostle Paul answers: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

This is the kind of king we need, for through His obedience in our place we are counted as righteous and holy in the sight of God.

Wednesday, August 22, 2018

Romans 7:14 - *The law is spiritual.*

THE LAW FULFILLED

What does that mean? If the law were physical, then it could be satisfied by works, but since it is spiritual, no one can satisfy it unless everything he does springs from the depths of the heart. But no one can give such a heart except the Spirit of God, who makes the person be like the law, so that he actually conceives a heartfelt longing for the law and henceforward does everything, not through fear or coercion, but from a free heart. Such a law is spiritual since it can only be loved and fulfilled by such a heart and such a spirit. If the Spirit is not in the heart, then there remains sin, aversion and enmity against the law, which in itself is good, just and holy.

The works of the law are everything that a person does or can do of his own free will and by his own powers to obey the law. But because in doing such works the heart abhors the law and yet is forced to obey it, the works are a total loss and are completely useless. That is what Paul means in chapter 3 when he says, "No human being is justified before God through the works of the law."

But to fulfill the law means to do its work eagerly, lovingly and freely, without the constraint of the law; it means to live well and, in a manner, pleasing to God, as though there were no law or punishment. It is the Holy Spirit, however, who puts such eagerness of unconstrained love into the heart, as Paul says in chapter 5. But the Spirit is given only in, with, and through faith in Jesus Christ, as Paul says in his introduction. So, too, faith comes only through the word of God, the Gospel, that preaches Christ: how he is both Son of God and man, how he died and rose for our sake. Paul says all this in chapters 3, 4 and 10.

That is why faith alone makes someone just and fulfills the law; faith it is that brings the Holy Spirit through the merits of Christ. The Spirit, in turn, renders the heart glad and free, as the law demands. Then good works proceed from faith itself. That is what Paul means in Romans 3 when, after he has thrown out the works of the law, he sounds as though he wants to abolish the law by faith. No, he says, we uphold the law through faith, that is, we fulfill it through faith.

- Martin Luther

Thursday, June 14, 2018

Leviticus 16:9-10 - *Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.*

THE SCAPEGOAT

YOM KIPPUR, The Great Day of Atonement, was the highest Holy Day on the calendar God gave Old Testament Israel. This was the one and only day the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place to sprinkle the blood of certain sacrifices on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant.

On this day one of the most unique pictures of the work of the coming Christ was placed before Old Testament worshippers. Two goats were presented before the people. In solemn ceremony one was chosen to have the sins of the people confessed upon its head. This Scapegoat was then led away into the desert and left in an uninhabited region--never to be seen again.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us . . ." (Psalm 103:12).

Jesus Christ was chosen in eternity to be our Substitute, to have our sin and guilt placed upon His head--and to be led away to die. He suffered the banishment--the separation from the Father--which we by our sins deserved.

This striking picture still becomes a fact of our history when by the grace of God, we personally trust in Jesus as the One who takes away the guilt of our sins.

My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head, of Thine
While like a penitent I stand
And there confess my sin.
(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 156:3)

Friday, June 15, 2018

Matthew 12:39-40 - . . . *no sign will be given to [you] except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAH

During His earthly ministry our Lord used some surprising illustrations to teach divine truths. Drawing a parallel between Himself and the brass serpent Moses lifted up in the Sinai desert was certainly one of these (John 3:14-15).

Now, the man for whom Jesus drew this parallel came to believe that He was indeed the Christ. Nicodemus believed--and finally demonstrated his faith on the day His Lord was crucified (John 19:38ff).

But many of Nicodemus' fellow Jews did not believe Jesus was the promised Messiah--no matter what the message He proclaimed or the miracles He performed. Indeed, in the face of overwhelming evidence that Jesus was the Coming One, some of the Pharisees demanded He give them a special sign.

Jesus did give them a special sign--one that had been in the making for centuries: the sign of Jonah. Of course, this did not satisfy the demands of the unbelieving Pharisees. They wanted their demands met immediately. Unbelief always wants to tell God what to do--and is never satisfied with what He has done no matter how splendid or spectacular.

But we are thankful those men were so bold and presumptuous in their demands of Jesus. For it is unlikely we would have recognized that great event in the life of the reluctant prophet to Nineveh as an historical advance-picture of the Savior's victory over death and the grave if it were not pointed out to us by Christ Himself. But since He has drawn our attention to this Bible picture of His greatest triumph we are only too happy to sing:

All the earth with joy is sounding: Christ has risen from the dead!
He, the great Jonah, bounding From the grave, His three-day bed,
Wins the prize: Death's demise Songs of triumph fill the skies.
(*Worship Supplement 2000, 729:1*)

we know we have forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, and also the gift of the Holy Spirit to lead us on our Christian life.

Our love for God and for each other grows in only one way: as we are reminded of God's love for us in Christ. We love as we are loved. How great our love should be since we are so greatly beloved! And as far as wisdom and understanding are concerned, "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ." Since Christ is the Creator and Preserver of all things, there is nothing He does not know. He knows all science and mathematics; He knows all history and all geography, even that which shall be in the future. He knows the human heart. He knows, us, all the way to the innermost core of our being. Above all, He knows the secret of eternal life and how to give that life to us.

Him with all our hearts for His boundless love shown so incredibly in Jesus' saving work for us.

+ + +

Tuesday, August 21, 2018

Colossians 2:1-3 - *I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

HEART TO HEART

Most of Paul's letters were written to people he knew personally, but this one is an exception. Because they did not know each other personally, the Colossians might have thought that Paul could not be very much concerned about them, even though their pastor Epaphras had gone all the way to Rome to ask for Paul's advice on a problem in the congregation.

So Paul wants them to know that he does care about them and is greatly concerned about their welfare. "I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh." Paul calls his participation in their case a conflict, a struggle. He heard the news of Colosse and its problems from Epaphras, and the conflict intensified. He began to pray more earnestly for them, and he began to struggle with the question of how he could help them. Of course he must at least write to them, but for what purpose?

"That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Basically, they needed three things: stronger faith, more fervent love, and greater spiritual wisdom. All of these blessings are derived from Christ and His Gospel. This Gospel is called a mystery, because nobody can invent it or discover it or understand it on his own. God needs to reveal His mystery, and He does. The teaching about Christ is proclaimed, and the Holy Spirit works through this Gospel to encourage our hearts, to strengthen our faith in Christ, to assure us of God's constant love for us once and for all revealed in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our hearts are encouraged when

Saturday, June 16, 2018

Acts 4:32-33 - *And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.*

INCLUDE THE RESURRECTION

This congregation was united. In their frequent gatherings they were joyful. They were concerned for each other even to the point that people would voluntarily sell their possessions to provide for those in need. So where did this amazing unity come from? What drew these people together into such an intimate, compassionate fellowship? Their unity came from the resurrection of Christ. The first Christian congregation was what it was because the resurrection of Christ drew them together and united them like nothing else could.

If you read through the first six chapters of Acts you'll find the apostles preaching what we call the Gospel, or the Good News of Jesus, a number of times. That Good News says that Jesus died so that our sins could be forgiven and that all who trust in Him have this forgiveness. But if you go back and look, the apostles don't stop at Christ's death in the sinner's place. They include His resurrection from the dead in their message (Acts 2:32, 3:15, 4:10). The apostles didn't leave out the resurrection of Christ because it was proof that Christ's message was true. He was the Savior that God Himself had sent. All who look to Him for forgiveness are forgiven. And with sins forgiven, they are also set free from sin's ruling over them in life.

The resurrection means the same thing for me and you. If Christ is risen, our sins were paid for, and by faith we have received full pardon before God. When you share the Good News of forgiveness with people, don't forget to include the resurrection. It is key. Without it, the cross means nothing. With it, the cross means sure peace with God.

Monday, June 18, 2018

Psalm 11:1-3 - *In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me: "Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"*

COURAGE

In studying the history of famous military battles, it is difficult not to notice the courage of the warriors. When the allies invaded Europe at Normandy in World War II, many soldiers died -- and yet they did not shrink from the enemy but kept advancing until they met their objectives. The courageous person doesn't run away when trouble approaches but stands and meets the challenge.

David, the author of this psalm, once met the mighty Philistine Goliath in battle. Goliath was a giant and David but a boy, yet David did not shrink from the fight, but carried a few smooth stones and a slingshot against the mighty enemy -- one stone which would, of course, be guided to its target by the hand of God.

When the LORD is your refuge; when He is on your side; when He has taken you under His protecting arm, then you need not flee into the hills when the enemy approaches. When the wicked bend their bows against you and shoot their arrows at you from the shadows, there is no need to run away and hope to die as Elijah the prophet once did. Instead of running away from your enemies with your head in your hands crying, "Woe is me!" -- run to the LORD who is your refuge. He doesn't forsake those who trust in His Son. Those who have been redeemed with the very blood of Jesus can always go to the throne of God and appeal to Him for help and aid. He is your refuge from even the strongest foes. Therefore, have courage.

Monday, August 20, 2018

GOD'S FAULT?

It's a beautiful morning! The air is fresh and cool under a sunny sky. Lawns are a lush green and flowers are blooming everywhere. A perfect day? On the surface it might appear that way, yet we know better. Our world has deep underlying problems. Sunny skies can quickly morph into tornado-producing storms. The peace of inner city neighborhoods can be shattered by deadly gunfire. And who of us would claim that our own lives are picture perfect? We face anxiety at work, health problems, and family concerns.

No one is going to deny that the world has problems, but the question is why? Who is to blame? Nations blame the policies of other countries. One racial group blames another. Children accuse parents and spouses blame one another. Whose fault is it that you're not happy and that last week didn't go the way you thought it should?

Do you ever blame God? Many do. If God is all-powerful and in control, then when things go wrong in the world or in my life, it must be His fault. God must not care or He must not be all that powerful or what the Bible calls sin must not really be sin after all, because God either brought it about or allowed it. It's the way people have always tried to wriggle out of accountability before God. Adam blamed God for giving him Eve, who gave him the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But sin and all the problems and death it brings into the world cannot be laid at God's doorstep, for He is holy and all He wills and does is perfect. Sin was introduced into the creation through Satan's temptation of Eve to doubt God's word and goodness and to desire to be like God Himself. All of us are experts at shifting blame from ourselves to others, even to God, but His verdict stands: "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:20).

Still, it is a beautiful morning, because just as surely as the blame for sin falls squarely on us, so also the credit for salvation belongs entirely to our Savior Jesus. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Jesus fulfilled the law for us. He paid the price to fully reconcile us before God.

Instead of trying to argue or reason your way out of sin or blame someone else, anyone else, even God, the Lord urges us to simply confess our sins and receive His full and free forgiveness. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

That makes every morning beautiful. "His compassions never fail. They are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23). Rather than blame God, let's praise

Saturday, August 18, 2018

Romans 8:28 - *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose....*

WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD 6

The fact that all things cooperate for our good does not mean we will always like those "things" and never question God's ways.

Joseph didn't appreciate or understand it when his brothers sold him as a slave. Job hardly enjoyed all the trials and losses he, with God's permission, had to endure from Satan's hand. Yet the subsequent lives of both men prove how God had a master plan.

Years later Joseph told his brothers: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good..." (Genesis 50:20). The last chapter of the book of Job tells us: "Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning" (Job 42:12).

At State or County fairs some heavy-equipment companies bring models with part of the engine cut away. We watch with great interest as some gears go this way and others go another, but all "work together for good" to allow the vehicle or machine to go in the direction the operator wants.

So it goes in our Christian faith-life. Some things appear to go our way; some things appear to go against us. Though we often can't figure out how it all fits into the God's plan for our life, rest assured, Christian friend, He does.

And we can trust Him who so loves us that He gave His Son into death for us. As Paul says right after our text, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32).

Dear Christian,

The will of God is always best And shall be done forever;
And they who trust in Him are blest; He will forsake them never.
He helps indeed In time of need; He chastens with forbearing.
They who depend On God, their friend, Shall not be left despairing.

When life's brief course on earth is run And I this world am leaving,
Grant me to say, "Your will be done," Your faithful Word believing.
My dearest Friend, I now commend My soul into Your keeping;
From sin and hell, And death as well, By You the vict'ry reaping.
(*Lutheran Service Book, 758:1, 4*)

Tuesday, June 19, 2018

Psalm 9:2-3 - *I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. My enemies turn back; they stumble and perish before you.*

CONFIDENCE

I remember the days when I played high school baseball. We had fun but never had outstanding teams. We won some and usually lost more. The worst were the games where we actually arrived at the field with the expectation that we would lose. You could see it on everyone's face. We looked at an opposing pitcher who was throwing 80 miles an hour and our team lost their confidence before they ever walked up to the plate. It's hard to be confident when you can't even begin to imagine victory. Likewise, it's hard to be spiritually confident when you can't even begin to picture the battles that God has already won for you.

David shares with us his confidence in Psalm 9. He certainly had ups and downs in his life. There were times when he was safe. There were times when he was in great danger. But for as much trouble as he saw, he saw also the victories God won. If he only looked around a little, he could see that Satan wasn't winning every round -- God still had the upper hand -- God was still the victor and evil was still the ultimate loser. David said, "My enemies turn back; they stumble and perish before you."

When you lack confidence in the LORD, look around at the victories God has already won for you. He has already trampled your greatest enemies for you. By His mighty power He has brought you to faith in the Son of God so that you can be confident of your salvation. He has given you a new heart and the willingness to turn from the devil and serve Him. He has taken away the power of death by promising you a resurrection from the dead. He further promises that nothing in this life will be able to separate you from His loving care and He will continue to beat down your enemies each day.

"I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High!"

Wednesday, June 20, 2018

John 20:19 - *Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side.*

PEACE

Jesus' first words to His assembled disciples were a common word of greeting, "Peace be with you." SHALOM. But now those words were far from common-- coming from the lips of the Risen Savior. Jesus did not merely wish them some external peace, but rather gave them peace within.

Jesus had offered them His peace just 72 hours earlier, saying: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

That was late on Thursday night. Now it is Sunday evening. In between He was crucified. He was offered. He laid down His life to pay the terrible price of sin.

Now on Easter evening Jesus offers the very receipt, the evidence of the peace He won: "Look at my hands and my feet, your debt before God has been paid in full."

The peace Jesus gives doesn't change the world around us. This peace changes us within, removes our fear, even though trouble and danger still threaten, gives us peace by giving us faith's confidence, making us sure of our Lord's living presence and His victory over any danger which may threaten-- even death.

For this is not merely a peace that chases stress and worldly anxiety, but a peace of heart and mind that comes from the message of sins forgiven.

"This peace is nothing else than that the heart is certain that it has a merciful God and the forgiveness of sins, for without this it can neither stand in the time of need and danger, nor be satisfied by any earthly fortune" (Martin Luther).

Friday, August 17, 2018

Romans 8:28-30 - *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*

WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD 5

The Gospel proves God loves me, unworthy as I am, with a love surpassing any love I might know on earth.

Because of what my Savior Jesus has done for me, a poor sinner, how can I then doubt the heavenly Father's love if and when He asks me to endure tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword?

Yes, since I know God's unconditional love for me, I know that He intends also every painful experience or circumstance to be for my spiritual and eternal good. I can count it a blessing if God chooses to test and strengthen my faith through trials and reverses, pain and suffering, none of which happen by chance.

The book of Ecclesiastes says: "God has made everything beautiful in its time" (3:11). The word beautiful means more than outward beauty; it also means "appropriate" or "fitting."

God has made everything appropriate for its time. Though it may be difficult to understand and accept, each part of our life "fits" God's masterplan, for indeed "... we know [beyond a shadow of a doubt] that all things work together for good to them that love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

I leave all things to God's direction;
He loves me both in joy and woe.
His will is good, sure His affection;
His tender love is true, I know.
My fortress and my rock is He:
What pleases God, that pleases me.

God knows what must be done to save me;
His love for me will never cease.
Upon His hands He did engrave me
With purest gold of loving grace.
His will supreme must ever be:
What pleases God, that pleases me. *(Lutheran Service Book, 719:1-2)*

Thursday, August 16, 2018

Romans 8:28, 30 - *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose....*

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD 4

It's a frequent theme of the apostle Paul--the holy truth that God "called" or chose us to be His own from before the beginning of the world. To the Ephesians he writes: "... Just as He chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will ..." (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Praise God! If life's purpose and plan had been left to us--if it had been up to us to determine our own destiny--because of our sinful natures we would surely have chosen the ways of the prodigal, the ways of Satan, sin, and death.

But God by His grace called us to faith through the gospel. He arranged it that you and I hear the message which teaches that "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:5).

According to God's eternal plan, Jesus suffered and died for our sins. Having accomplished our redemption, He rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and regained the glory that was His from eternity. And it was all for our sakes--that we poor sinners might be "glorified" with Him.

"But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior'" (Isaiah 43:1-3a).

In ev'ry condition--in sickness, in health,
In poverty's vale or abounding in wealth,
At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea--
The Lord, the Almighty, thy strength e'er shall be.
(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 427:2)

Thursday, June 21, 2018

Psalm 6:1-2 - *O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony.*

MERCY

The Apostle Paul expressed the frustration of all Christians when he wrote in Romans 7:18-19, "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - - this I keep on doing." We struggle against sin every day and sometimes it seems like we're losing.

Perhaps we look back on something we've done and it literally makes us feel ill. David felt this way when he said, "My bones are in agony." We all have those times when we wish we could "do over" some foolish moment in our lives; when we wish we had made a better decision; when we are deeply saddened by the troublesome sin of ours has caused. Sometimes thinking on our sins makes us lie awake at night. We feel sick to our stomachs. We get weak and tired worrying about our failures. The struggle with sin can certainly end up affecting us physically as well as mentally.

What is the answer? The answer is to take your sins to the LORD. Appeal to the God of heaven for mercy. He can tell you "all is well." He can tell you that His wrath has been turned away from you. He will be with you so that the trouble your sin has caused does not overwhelm you. He can assure you daily that He does not hold anything against you -- because He held it against your substitute, Jesus Christ.

Friday, June 22, 2018

Ephesians 3:16 - *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being.*

KEPT

A few years ago, my wife and I planted a small garden in our yard. As I tend to have a "black thumb," I was excited when a couple rows of vegetables we put in actually came up. But then we went on vacation for 10 days and we forgot to have anyone take care of the garden for us. When we came back, the patch was an absolute wreck. The weeds had taken over everything, animals had chewed the leaves, and the garden didn't produce again that season.

Our faith in Jesus is like a growing plant. It must be watered with God's word. It must be fertilized, strengthened, and protected from weeds. Only when fed and cared for properly will it mature and bear fruit.

The Holy Spirit is the master gardener of our faith. He gives it a steady diet of that gospel which is so necessary. We've heard the message of Christ's forgiveness won at the cross, but we can be so doubtful and forgetful of the good news that we must be reminded of it constantly. We know we are going to heaven and the Lord will see us through every earthly trial, but the Spirit must preach this to us minute by minute when the storm clouds gather in our lives. He must give us the understanding and the grace to believe firmly in Christ and His promises. Day by day the Spirit of God shields our faith, strengthens it, helps it, and upholds it.

By the Spirit's mighty power may we say with the Apostle Paul when the last hour comes to us, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

Wednesday, August 15, 2018

Romans 8:28-30 - *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, there He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*

WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD 3

God "foreknew" us. He not only knew we would exist for a few short years on this planet, but He "knew" us according to a certain purpose or plan. He mapped out a series of events that would happen in our lives, with the goal that we might be "copies" of His eternal Son.

God "predestined" us. He made Himself the Author of our destiny. To accomplish this He called us, chose us, elected us to be His children. He did this not by our choosing Him, but by His choosing us.

So the call-for-decision preachers are dead wrong; they are false teachers. We do not choose God, but He chose us from before the beginning of the world.

Oh, the wonder of God's Gospel! Note the past tense of all these verbs: predestined, called, justified, glorified! Fellow believers, the thing is done! It's all finished and accomplished. Sin is atoned for, death has been conquered.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The gift of eternal life is as sure and certain as is the fact that Jesus Christ lives and reigns to all eternity.

Be still, my soul; the Lord is on your side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to your God to order and provide;
In ev'ry change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul; your best, your heav'nly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.
(*Lutheran Service Book*, 752:1)

Tuesday, August 14, 2018

Romans 8:28-29 - ... *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD 2

This holy word from God means more than "You gotta take the good with the bad" or "You gotta make the best of things, looking on the good side." (Yet, if a Christian believer puts it like that in simple faith, he or she has it right!)

When the apostle Paul writes, "...We know...", He says that not necessarily on the basis of personal experience but on the basis of God's revelation of Himself in His Word. "We know" because the Holy Spirit has convinced us that all things work together for our good. The Bible not only tells us God is love (1 John 4:8), but also that He has shown that love for poor sinners by sending His unique Son into this fallen world on a rescue mission.

Note carefully that all things work together--or cooperate--for the good of those "who are the called according to His purpose." Paul tells us what God's purpose is by taking us back even before the beginning of time, saying: "... For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."

Wonder of wonders, God's loving purpose is to make each of His children into images or copies of His own eternal Son! Jesus came into this sinful world, suffered and died an innocent death for our sins, and then rose as the firstborn from the dead. Now all who believe in Jesus shall follow Him through this life into life eternal.

Beloved, "It is well!" God's ways are always right,
And perfect love is o'er them all Tho' far above our sight.

Beloved, "It is well!" The path that Jesus trod,
Tho' rough and strait and dark it be, Leads home to heav'n and God.
(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 519:1, 4)

Saturday, June 23, 2018

Luke 7:5-8 - *He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."*

TRUST

The Centurion of this account got it. He understood who Jesus was and what that meant for Him, a believer. He trusted that Jesus had the power to heal his servant, so he asked Him to. He prayed. Those he sent to Jesus carried his prayer, and they humbly laid it before the Master's feet.

Jesus is alive today. He is powerful now. Jesus will not ignore the prayer of His followers. So, pray in every situation. Jesus wants to hear the voice of our hearts calling to Him. He wants to supply us with what we need. He wants to help us.

No, we can't see Him with our eyes; neither could the Centurion. But we can trust Him with our hearts, just like the Centurion. That's the most important part of this account, the part that Jesus found most remarkable. Jesus was astonished by the trust of the Centurion.

Let's be like the Centurion. Let's trust in Jesus when we pray, knowing that our prayer is heard. Let's trust in Jesus when we pray, expecting it to be answered. Jesus suffered and died to buy us back. If He was willing to give us His life, we can know He will not withhold what we truly need.

When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale My anchor holds within the veil.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.
(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 370:2)

Monday, June 25, 2018

Matthew 19:4-5 - *And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?"*

IN DEFENSE OF MARRIAGE

I've heard it said that "common sense isn't common anymore." The more I look at our current American society, the more I agree. More and more parents need to be encouraged not to try and be their children's peers, but their parents. More and more young people need to be encouraged to dress in such a way that glorifies God. More and more people have lost touch with basic scriptural principles. There are states in our union which have found it necessary to define marriage for their people and have gotten it wrong. Thank God He has given us His Word! God help each generation to return again to His Word, to listen to Him, to learn of Him, to understand aright.

It is apparent from Jesus' words (Matthew 19:4) that elemental Scriptural truths had also eluded some of the people of that day. Jesus had to re-direct them to God's written word, to answer their (pseudo-- they were trying to trick Him) questions.

Almighty God established marriage, and so He alone has the right to define it. God has defined it as: one man and one woman for life. It's this simple, Jesus said: "In the beginning God made them male and female." We shouldn't have to say it, but we will: God did not create "Steve" for Adam, but "Eve."

Furthermore, God intended that the man leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife (yes, a woman) and the two become one flesh.

We are to be beacons in this sin-darkened world. We shine brightest when we direct sinners to Christ, in whom there is forgiveness for all sins. But let us also stand in defense of God's principles, in defense of His truths. Let's stand up in defense of Christian marriage.

When we do, the world will notice, and may ask why we believe what we do. Then we will also be given opportunity to speak up in defense of our faith in Christ.

Monday, August 13, 2018

Romans 8:28-30 - *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*

WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD 1

One day a Christian walked and talked among her family and fellow Christians with a happy countenance, always willing to help in so many ways; the next day this same dear soul, having suffered a stroke, began a struggle to regain the simplest abilities to walk and talk.

The same week another long-time faithful member of the congregation-- in fact, one of its founding fathers-- took a turn for the worse. It appeared unlikely that, though hospitalized, he would ever again be able to walk and talk as before.

When such events occur, it's natural to ask the eternal "Why?" "Why would, or how could, God allow such a thing to happen?"

As Christians we know nothing happens "by accident." Our loving Lord and Savior Jesus Christ teaches that not a sparrow falls to the ground, or a hair from our head, without it being the will of our good and gracious heavenly Father (Mt. 10:29f). We also know that the Bible says "all things work together for good to them that love God...."

Yet we may wonder where is the comfort in that familiar statement? What is its basis? Where is the apostle Paul coming from when he makes it?

This week we will examine the setting for this familiar statement from what has been called the most comforting chapter in the Bible (Romans 8). In the process we will find a super-human source of strength to endure in the face of life's most difficult and trying circumstances.

Why should cross and trial grieve me? Christ is near With His cheer;
Never will He leave me. Who can rob me of the heaven
That God's Son For me won When His life was given?

From God's joy can nothing sever, For I am His dear lamb,
He, my Shepherd ever. I am His because He gave me
His own blood For my good, By His death to save me.
(Lutheran Service Book, 756:1, 4)

Saturday, August 11, 2018

Psalm 98 - *Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory. The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations. He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises. Sing to the Lord with the harp, With the harp and the sound of a psalm, With trumpets and the sound of a horn; Shout joyfully before the Lord, the King. Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell in it; Let the rivers clap their hands; Let the hills be joyful together before the Lord, For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, And the peoples with equity.*

SING TO THE LORD A NEW SONG!

The world can already see the glorious power of God in the roaring of the sea, in the might of the rivers, in the majesty of the mountains, and in the orderly expanse of the sky and the stars. Anyone who's honest with his own conscience knows that someone put all of this together, and so must come to the conclusion that there is a Creator. But it's only when that natural knowledge of God is coupled with the revealed knowledge of God's plan of salvation found in His Word that this natural knowledge can be converted into the saving knowledge of faith, for "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Only with saving faith does man look at the creation and recognize that the powerful Being who put all of this together, coupled His power and wisdom together with His mercy and compassion for the explicit purpose of saving every sinner from death and punishment.

It is only with that saving faith that the sinner can truly give all glory to God in shouts and songs, indeed in everything that he does in his daily life, and even at the end of life on this earth. Our text says, "He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, And the peoples with equity." And it's only with that saving faith that the sinner can face God's coming judgment, not with terror and submission, but with joy. When the believer hears the last verse of our text, he or she rejoices, for God judges the world not according to the righteousness of His Law but according to the righteousness of Christ Jesus, judging everyone not based on status or position, ethnicity or gender, but with equity, judging all people based on one thing: Faith in Christ which He freely offers to all people through the revelation of His Gospel. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That's the message that makes us break forth in a new song, a song that truly echoes in eternity.

Tuesday, June 26, 2018

1 Peter 3:3-4 - *Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel--rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.*

IN DEFENSE OF TRUE BEAUTY

It's an old proverb, first found in written form in 1613, but it is still said: "Beauty is only skin deep." We don't know who first coined the phrase, nor do we know what his wife thought of the saying, but we understand that the expression means that physical beauty is superficial.

One wonders just how many people would agree with that assessment today! In our American society what matters is how you look on the outside and what fashions you wear. Who determines the standard in our society? Hollywood! After all, the beautiful people live in Hollywood and are on display on the big screen.

So, consider for a moment the words given by the Spirit of God to Simon Peter written in his first letter. True beauty in God's sight is not determined by hairstyle, jewelry or whether the latest fashions are worn or not. True beauty in God's sight is a matter of the heart. God doesn't look upon the outward appearance of a human being, but on the heart. Those who trust in Christ are forgiven sinners and beautiful and cherished by God-- whatever the world says about their physical attractiveness.

It often happens that those considered attractive know it and take pride in it, associating only with those of like attractiveness. Others will laugh and poke fun of those not blessed with "their looks."

In opposition to this, Peter reminds us that true beauty in God's sight involves having a gentle spirit, one that is humble, considerate, meek and unassuming. True beauty involves having a quiet, tranquil spirit.

God help us that we not buy into this world's idea of beauty but remember that God looks at the heart. We are beautiful children of God, accepted by Him through faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26) however the world sees us. God loves us and cherishes us because of His Son.

Wednesday, June 27, 2018

Proverbs 13:24 - *He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.*

IN DEFENSE OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE

We live in a world where defenseless human beings are killed daily, while at the same time it is now possible for pets and animals to sue their owners for abuse! Should we be surprised then to find that children are told that they don't have to listen to their parents if what they say makes them 'feel bad'? Is there any surprise that the social structure God established appears to be crumbling in our country and world? Is there any surprise that 'discipline' is now a bad word, considered the opposite of love and equated with abuse?

Thank God that He has, by His Holy Spirit, separated us from our sins and dedicated us to His service. Thank God that He has transformed our minds so that we are enabled to show what is His good and perfect will. Thank God that He has given us His Word, which both mandates and blesses Christian discipline.

As mature Christians we strive to be our children's parents, not their peers. We recognize that our children are a blessing from God, a blessing that requires us to be responsible for their physical and spiritual needs. Thank God that he provides the means to feed both their bodies and souls!

He will also grant us the hearts to exercise Christian discipline. Christian discipline involves using both Law and Gospel. We will teach our children that God demands in His Law that they "honor serve and obey, and give us love and respect." When they disobey (provided we aren't telling them to disobey God) and dishonor us, they sin against God! We will not soft-pedal sin. We dare not.

We correct what is wrong IN GOD'S SIGHT and also teach them that Jesus has atoned for all their sins by His perfect obedience and willing sacrifice. We will endeavor to show them the love of Christ even when we discipline. We will return to them to confirm not only the reason discipline was necessary, but also our and the Savior's love for them.

Oh, blest the parents who give heed
Unto their children's foremost need
And weary not of care or cost!
May none to them and heav'n be lost!

Blest such a house, it prospers well,
In peace and joy the parents dwell,
And in their children's lot is shown
How richly God can bless His own.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 625:3-4)

Hebrew mother as nurse-maid; or a young shepherd boy volunteering his sling to bring down a Philistine giant; or a Child born in a stable in Bethlehem, growing up and paying for sin by dying on a cross? Even more surprising and unexpected, having paid for sin there on the cross, rising bodily from the dead three days later and guaranteeing that payment? So that it is written, "...if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins ... But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:17, 20).

When we are having problems and can't see any way out, remember not only that God knows about your problems, but that He knows how to work them out in surprising ways that you never dreamed of. And when you are having sin problems, look back to the cross and think of the surprising way that God delivered you from sin. Instead of requiring you to pay for your own sin and punishing you, God sent His own Son to take your punishment upon Himself, so that you could have free forgiveness of sins, and freedom from the oppression of sin and the prince of sin, the devil.

In faith, hear the message from God to you: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:14-18).

Friday, August 10, 2018

Judges 3:16-22 - *But when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. By him the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length) and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh. So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.) And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. But he himself turned back from the stone images that were at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." He said, "Keep silence!" And all who attended him went out from him. So Ehud came to him (now he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber). Then Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." So he arose from his seat. Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.*

THE LORD DELIVERS IN A SURPRISING WAY

The salute, the practice of two soldiers raising the right hand to each other, came from the assumption that everyone is right-handed. The right hand raised empty to another indicated that you meant him no harm. From that practice we also received the wave "hello" and the handshake. In fact, if a soldier raised his empty right hand, then produced a weapon with his left hand, that was considered to be unfair, or cheating. And so the word "sinister" which is from the Latin for "left" came to mean "fraudulent" or "evil" in English.

So when the Lord sent left-handed Ehud on his mission to deliver the children of Israel from Eglon, king of Moab, Eglon's servants missed the double-edged dagger that Ehud fastened under his clothes to his right thigh, the opposite side to which a right-handed person would hide a dagger. When Ehud asked to have a private word with the king, what could it harm? The servants knew he had no weapons.

Meeting Eglon in the cool, upper chamber, Ehud delivered "a message from God" to the king, a declaration of freedom for the children of Israel delivered via a surprise lethal thrust with a blade, and Eglon king of Moab was no longer a problem for Israel.

This would not be the last time that God would deliver His people in an unexpected way, out of left-field, if you will. Think of the baby Moses hidden in a basket and drawn from the river Nile to be raised by a princess with his own

Thursday, June 28, 2018

Proverbs 13:24 - *He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.*

IN DEFENSE OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE

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He will also grant us the hearts to exercise Christian discipline. Christian discipline involves using both Law and Gospel. We will teach our children that God demands in His Law that they "honor serve and obey, and give us love and respect." When they disobey (provided we aren't telling them to disobey God) and dishonor us, they sin against God! We will not soft-pedal sin. We dare not.

We correct what is wrong IN GOD'S SIGHT and also teach them that Jesus has atoned for all their sins by His perfect obedience and willing sacrifice. We will endeavor to show them the love of Christ even when we discipline. We will return to them to confirm not only the reason discipline was necessary, but also our and the Savior's love for them.

Oh, blest the parents who give heed
Unto their children's foremost need
And weary not of care or cost!
May none to them and heav'n be lost!

Blest such a house, it prospers well,
In peace and joy the parents dwell,
And in their children's lot is shown
How richly God can bless His own.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 625:3-4)

Friday, June 29, 2018

Acts 4:12 - *Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

IN DEFENSE OF THE NAME OF CHRIST

We live in a world where "political correctness" has run amuck! It is permissible to curse and swear and use the foulest of language on the big screen without any apology, but if you suggest that someone's god is a figment of their imagination you will be crucified (figuratively). It's politically correct to speak of the false religion of Islam as a peaceful religion (which it is not) while decrying Christianity as a militant religion (which it is not). As in the first century so now Christians are being told that they can't talk about their faith, but it's perfectly okay for everyone else to trample the name of the Savior when hurt or angry, or when they have nothing else to say.

It goes against every fiber of our being as Christians (at least it should) to sit and listen to people trample on the name of our Savior Jesus, our Lord and brother. The name Jesus is beautiful because it serves to remind us of all that He has done. We can't help but speak up when co-workers or teammates find it necessary to throw around the name of Christ as if it were so much garbage. "Will you please refrain from speaking like that? Jesus Christ is important to me." God forgive me for the times I haven't spoken in defense of His name.

May God the Holy Spirit make us bold to stand in defense of the name of Jesus the Christ! He is the Lamb chosen by God to bear the sins of the world, mine and yours (and everyone else too). He is the one sacrifice that turns God's anger from us. He is the difference between eternal life and eternal death. God help us to set a good example by using every divine name with the utmost reverence.

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, And drives away his fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole And calms the troubled breast;
Tis manna to the hungry soul And to the weary, rest.

Dear name! The Rock on which I build, My Shield and Hiding place;
My never failing Treasury, filled With boundless stores of grace.
(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 364:1-3)

Another day we'll hear how the Lord worked through Ehud to deliver the Israelites from King Eglon in a surprising way. Today, let's give thanks to God that things are not always as they appear. The "weak" Jesus of Nazereth who hung "helplessly" upon the cross was anything but helpless. The Lord God put Jesus right where He needed to be to willingly offer up the sacrifice to pay for sin and having accomplished that, to defeat death by rising from the dead and ascending to the right hand of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11 "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. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Whatever happens to the believer in this world, God has saved us from ourselves by calling us out of darkness. He has delivered us from eternal trouble by washing away our sin and conquering death. The judges were not simply interpreters of the law, or rulers. They were deliverers. And so also Christ Jesus is not simply our Judge. He is our Deliverer, our Savior from sin so that we are judged by God "Not Guilty!" and in Christ Jesus are judged to be inheritors of eternal life with Him.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

+ + +

Thursday, August 9, 2018

Judges 3:16 - *But when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.*

GOD'S "WEAK" DELIVERER

Left-handed people make up about ten percent of the world's population. Because the majority of the world is right-handed, the world naturally then tends to think of the left hand as the "weak" hand and the right hand as the "strong" hand. In ancient times it was an honor to be seated at someone's right hand. In modern days we see the same thing in referring to the best employee or a good friend as, "My right hand man." No one talks about, "The left hand of power," or depends on, "My left hand man!"

When the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, He didn't send the most impressive deliverer. Ehud's right hand was not as strong or as skilled as his left hand. So the tendency might be to question whether or not he was up to the task of delivering the children of Israel from Eglon, king of Moab. But, things are not always as they appear.

Consider Jesus, on trial before the chief priests and the elders, telling them, "... you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). Had they not considered this blasphemy, they surely would have laughed out loud at such a claim from this Rabbi from Nazereth standing tied before them, already beaten and bloodied, on His way to the cross. Why He had no power at all, much less God's Power! Later they did jeer Him as He hung upon the cross. They said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him!" (Matthew 27:42).

Saturday, June 30, 2018

2 Timothy 3:15 - *...from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

KEEP USING GOD'S WORD

You are children of God and you are growing up in Christ.

Scripture tells us that we are to, "grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ" (Ephesians 3:15). God the Holy Spirit causes us to grow in the faith by "speaking the truth in love," by avoiding the spiritual junk food of the world and speaking the Truth, i.e., speaking God's Word, holding to that Word, using that Word, using the Sacraments.

By the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, the child of God is constantly growing up into the Head, Christ. You are a part of His Body, His Church, and as you are growing in your faith you are growing into a more important part of His body. Following Christ your Head, you are being equipped to function in His Body, His Church, to help carry out the work of the Church, which is to proclaim the Gospel to a dying world. As you proclaim your unity with Christ and His Church, you are becoming adults in Christ.

We become adults in Christ when we arrive at a oneness of faith and knowledge of God's Word, when we, as Paul says in the verse prior to our text, "...all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Ephesians 4:13). That is what you studied for when you publicly affirmed your faith at your confirmation, proclaiming your agreement on the teachings of Scripture, proclaiming the commitment to the truth that has been worked in you by the Spirit through the Word.

With one accord, O God, we pray: Grant us Thy Holy Spirit;
Look Thou on our infirmity Through Jesus' blood and merit.
Grant us to grow in grace each day
That by this Sacrament we may Eternal life inherit.
(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 301:2)

Monday, July 2, 2018

1 Timothy 2:1 - *I urge ... that thanksgiving be made ... for kings and all those in authority.*

GIVE THANKS FOR THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES (1)

Tomorrow the citizens of America will celebrate Independence Day, the holiday commemorating the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. The day in history when the Continental Congress declared the thirteen American colonies to be a new and free nation, no longer part of the British Empire.

Be encouraged to set aside some time to reflect on the blessings you enjoy as a United States citizen. Our God, who has made us citizens of His eternal realm by bringing us to faith in Jesus and through Him has poured out on us priceless blessings for our soul, has gifted us with many temporal benefits too through the secular government, for which we also have reason to praise Him.

In the Bible verse above, Paul encourages us to do just that. For it is through the governing authorities (people like law enforcement personnel, courts and judges, state governors, members of Congress, the President) that He bestows such blessings on us as: roads to drive on, hospitals where we may receive medical care, armed forces to protect our country, schools to teach us (to name only a few). Blessings from the Lord that we ought not take for granted!

Before the Lord we bow, The God who reigns above
And rules the world below In boundless power and love.
Our thanks we bring, In joy and praise
Our hearts we raise To heav'n's high King.

The nation You have blessed May well Your love declare,
From foes and fears at rest, Protected by Your care.
For this bright day, For this fair land--
Gifts of Your hand-- Our thanks we pay.
(*Lutheran Service Book*, 966:1-2)

Wednesday, August 8, 2018

Judges 3:11 - *So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.*

GOD IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS

We're not told anymore of Othniel's mighty deeds beyond, "So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died." God sent a deliverer to save His people from their enemies and He gave them rest through the deliverer. But that deliverer eventually died.

Our text demonstrates that true salvation cannot be found in someone who simply delivers us from some wicked, worldly trouble. When Othniel died, his earthly service came to an end. Earthly deliverers can only help us so long as they're alive to help, and, as we know, everyone eventually dies, no matter how strong or just.

But when the Deliverer from sin, our Savior, Jesus, came and fulfilled God's Promise to His people, indeed, to all people, Christ died but He did not die never to deliver again. He rose bodily from the dead. His deliverance did not pass away when He died. Rather, that deliverance was accomplished by His death and was confirmed for eternity with His resurrection from the dead. We do not have peace only for forty years or only a hundred years, or even only for a thousand years. Through Christ Jesus, the Deliverer, we have everlasting peace with God, protection from our enemies, our true enemies, sin, death, and the devil, for eternity!

Along the way we fall into sin, and God uses His Law to call us to repentance, sometimes allowing problems to come into our lives to help curb our sin, and to help strengthen our faith by increasing our reliance on Him. But we know that while sin may be a constant companion in this world, our living Savior is our everlasting Companion, constantly here with us in Word and in Sacrament to assure us of the forgiveness of our sins.

And, along the way, God does provide us with earthly deliverance from trouble and pain and suffering, promising that "...all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). But, God's deliverance from earthly troubles may not always take the form of Othniel bringing evil-doers to justice. Because God's ultimate purpose is not deliverance from earthly troubles, but deliverance from eternal trouble, that deliverance may come by His calling us out of this world into eternal life in heaven.

when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:26-27).

Martin Luther puts it this way in the Small Catechism: "... The old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance and die with all sins and evil desires. It also means that a new man should daily appear and arise, who lives eternally before God in righteousness and purity" (Luther's Small Catechism, Baptism 4). As it is written, "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).

As believers, children of God, when we realize that we sin daily, we want to put aside sin through repentance, and look to God for forgiveness. In order to work contrition and repentance within us, God has given us His Law. But in order to save us from the sin and give us life, God has given us His Gospel.

So with the Israelites in our text. After eight years they came to realize where their sins had brought them. At first thinking they could do without God, they finally understood that without Him the wicked world would have its way with them until they were lost forever. They had gotten themselves into this, now they couldn't help themselves anymore. So they called on the only One they knew could help them.

The Law had curbed their sin, but only God's Good News could put them back on the right road of faith in Him. The Good News was He would not hold their sin against them, or forsake His Promise to them. He would raise up a deliverer who would save them, in the short term, the man Othniel to save their nation. In the long-term, eternal plan, God would raise the Deliverer, Christ Jesus, to save not just their bodies, but the body and the soul of every sinner.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15).

Tuesday, July 3, 2018

1 Timothy 2:1 - *I urge ... that thanksgiving be made ... for kings and all those in authority.*

GIVE THANKS FOR THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES (2)

Some years back I visited the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum in Springfield, Illinois. As I toured the museum I was able to view some interesting exhibits that recounted the life of Lincoln, including the history leading up to the Civil War before Lincoln's assassination by John Wilkes Booth. It brought home to me how richly God has blessed America through the years by giving us capable government leaders. He's also blessed us by giving us men and women who have been willing to make the supreme sacrifice of giving their lives to preserve our American way of life.

True, there may be government leaders whom we do not like. We may disagree with various policies they espouse and laws they enact. Yet despite all their flaws and defects God has seen fit to bless us through them in many ways. He's enabled us to live in a land where we can practice our faith openly and assemble at His house for worship each week. We can we read our Bibles without fear of reprisal. We can teach the saving truths of the Gospel to our children. We can join with our brothers and sisters in Christ in doing mission work.

When we view these blessings against the backdrop of the corruption pervading our society, the trampling on God's commandments, people living their lives in a way that gives no thought for the world to come, we must readily confess that the blessings we enjoy in America are due solely to the undeserved love God has shed on us. "He is patient with [us], not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Peace, prosperity, and health, Private bliss, and public wealth,
Knowledge with its gladdening streams, True religion's holier beams,
Lord, for these our souls shall raise Grateful vows and solemn praise.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 572:3)

Wednesday, July 4, 2018

1 Timothy 2:1-2 - *I urge ... that requests, prayers, and intercession be made ... for kings and all those in authority.*

PRAY FOR THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES (1)

Another word of godly counsel Paul gives Christians in this verse is that we remember to offer up prayers to the Lord in which we ask Him to bless our country with leaders who will govern wisely and well.

That may be hard to do when we don't like those occupying positions of authority in government and when they don't show themselves to be wonderful people. But let that not hinder us from praying for them. They need our prayers, for as Martin Luther says in his Large Catechism, those who occupy positions of leadership in government are up against some mighty foes. Not just political opponents but the super-powerful Foe that exists in the unseen spirit-world: Satan. He isn't satisfied with destroying spiritual government by leading souls astray by false doctrine and bringing them under his power. He also works to undermine the stability of earthly governments by causing contentions to arise, murder and treason, and by instigating wars. The devil is sorry if anyone has a morsel of bread from God and eats it in peace. If it lay within his power (if God didn't stop him) no citizen would be able to keep a straw in the field, a penny in the house, or their life for an hour. Especially those who love God's Word and want to live as Christians (Large Catechism, Luther's comments on the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer).

In view of this mighty Foe whom our government leaders are up against, how greatly they are in need of our prayers! Let us intercede for them regularly before the throne of our Father.

To Thee, our God, we fly For mercy and for grace;
Oh, hear our lowly cry And hide not Thou Thy face!
O Lord, stretch forth Thy mighty hand And guard and bless our fatherland.

The powers ordained by Thee With heavenly wisdom bless;
May they Thy servants be And rule in righteousness!
O Lord, stretch forth Thy mighty hand And guard and bless our fatherland.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 580:1, 4)

And when Jesus came and fulfilled God's Promise to His people, indeed to all people, Christ died and rose again. His deliverance did not pass away when He died. Rather it was confirmed for eternity with His resurrection from the dead. We do not have peace only for forty years or only a hundred years, or even only for a thousand years. Through Christ Jesus, the Deliverer, we have everlasting peace with God, protection from our true enemies, sin, death, and the devil, for eternity!

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Tuesday, August 7, 2018

Judges 3:7-11 - So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs. Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years. When the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the Lord delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim. So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO SAVE US ... FROM OURSELVES?

We talk so often about saving us from sin and death, but what do we really mean by that? We mean saving us from the condemnation that we have brought upon ourselves by our sin. Since the day of our conception we were dead in sin, under God's judgment. Dead in sin we were unable to free ourselves from the slavery of sin, and would have continued under God's condemnation had God not sent His Son Jesus to pay for our sin and free us from eternal guilt and punishment with the forgiveness of sins.

At our conversions God the Holy Spirit brought us to spiritual life and created in us a New Man, righteous and holy before God through Christ. But we do still have our sinful flesh, the Old Man. So we are Old Man and New Man in one person. The Old Man wants to serve the old ways, sinfulness, and so is continually working to get us to sin. The Apostle Paul writes, "I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest,

Monday, August 6, 2018

Judges 2:11a, 16 - *Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord ... Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them ...*

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES

The Bible tells us that, "... the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments ..." (Deuteronomy 7:9). Scripture tells us that, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). God keeps His promises because God is faithful.

In Joshua we find the people of Israel, obedient under the rule of Joshua, taking possession of the land of Canaan through trust in the power of God, and promising to serve the Lord always. In Judges, however, we find a disobedient and idolatrous people rebelling against the LORD again and again (2:7-10, 19). Thus what should have been Israel's Golden Age under God's gracious rulership, instead became a continuing, three-and-a-half century cycle of sin, chastisement (2:20-21), repentance, and deliverance (2:10-23).

Why did God deliver His people from the Canaanites? The bottom line is that He delivered their nation, delivered their bodies, because He is faithful to His promises. Ultimately, the Lord delivered their bodies so that He could deliver their souls, and the soul of every sinner, by preserving the Promise of the Savior who would be born a thousand years later in Bethlehem.

The Lord had promised that the everlasting Savior from sin would be born of the Seed of Abraham, from the Tribe of Judah, in the town of Bethlehem, born of a virgin, so that He could grow up sinless and offer Himself the Sacrifice for sin. And that having died to pay for sin, He would rise from the dead bodily so that His payment for sin and His deliverance from death and the power of the devil would be eternal.

How could all that have happened had the Israelites been snuffed out there in the Promised Land a thousand years before the Savior could be born? We're told that, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). The time was still being fulfilled for God to send forth His Son.

Thursday, July 5, 2018

1 Timothy 2:1:1-3 - *I urge ... that requests, prayers, and intercession be made ... for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

PRAY FOR THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES (2)

As Christians and children of God let us bear in mind the special reason why our heavenly Father encourages us to pray for those who occupy positions of authority in the State. When the governing authorities fulfill their God-assigned task to maintain the peace, keep the citizens safe, and uphold law and order, it facilitates the spread of the Gospel of salvation in Christ to the glory of God. Christians who are free from disturbances such as wars, persecutions, and civil unrest are able to share their faith more freely with those around them in the station in life where the Lord has placed them. They need not live in fear of telling others about their Savior who lived and died for them and rose again. The Holy Spirit will then use the Gospel message, which is the power to salvation, to work repentance and faith in hearts, so more people may become members of God's family, citizens of the heavenly country that will have no end. "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

Lord, while for all mankind we pray
Of every clime and coast,
Oh, hear us for our native land,
The land we love the most!

Oh, guard our shores from every foe,
With peace our borders bless,
With prosperous times our cities crown,
Our fields with plenteousness!

Here may Thy Gospel, pure and mild,
Smile on our Sabbath hours
And piety and virtue bless
Our fathers' home and ours.

Fly abroad, eternal Gospel; Win and conquer, never cease.
May Thy lasting, wide dominions Multiply and still increase!
May Thy scepter Sway th' enlightened world around!
(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 578:1-2, 4; 505:3)

Friday, July 6, 2018

1 Timothy 2:1:1-3 - *I urge ... that requests, prayers, and intercession be made ... for kings and all those in authority.*

PRAY FOR THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES (3)

It is well for us Christians to remember that we're the only ones who can offer prayers for the blessing of our government and country. All citizens, including atheists, can pay taxes. They can exercise their right to vote under the Constitution so good laws are enacted for the good of society. They can do much to benefit their nation outwardly by enlisting in the armed forces, by serving as doctors, police officers, builders of hospitals, highways, bridges, and things like that. But only Christians whose sins have been blotted out by the blood of Jesus, can offer prayers that are heard and answered by God for the eternal benefit of their fellow-citizens.

So, praise God for the earthly blessings you enjoy as American citizens, for the sacrifices made by brave men and women through our nation's history to safeguard our civil liberties. Above all, praise Him for the One whose sacrifice on the cross freed you from the oppression of sin and death, who broke the control that sin and Satan had over you, and has made you a citizen of His eternal realm. Then, petition Him to shed His grace on America so more people in our country and around the world-- through the preaching of the Word-- may come to know the freedom Jesus won for all sinners by His death and resurrection, and be blessed to live with Him, forever happy and free, in His heavenly kingdom.

And when in power He comes, Oh, may our native land
From all its rending tombs Send forth a glorious band,
A countless throng, For aye to sing
To heaven's high King Salvation's song!
(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 575:5)

And that is why, in our text, Jesus strictly warned the leper to say nothing to anyone about who had healed him. The leper couldn't keep his experience to himself, and we see what happened. "[The leper] went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction." Jesus did not want people to come to Him only for physical healing. He wanted them to come to Him as their Lord and Savior from sin. It was not His purpose to make our lives more comfortable in this world. He came to give us eternal life.

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Saturday, August 4, 2018

Mark 1:43-45 - *As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.*

CLEANSED BY GOD

We don't come to Jesus in prayer and worship primarily for the earthly things He can give to us. For example, we read our devotion every morning primarily to hear His Word and to receive the assurance of the forgiveness of sins in that Word. We seek first the kingdom of God, and after that we look to God for all the rest of the things that He can give us if He is willing.

But we know without a doubt the will of God regarding our salvation. "The blood of Jesus Christ [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin..." (1 John 1:7). Through Christ we stand before God and are declared to be cleansed, not guilty of sin because Christ fulfilled the Law for us and paid for our sin. This forgiveness is a testimony to all people that Christ is who He claims to be, true God as well as true Man, that He could and did do what only God can do, cleansing the unclean, adopting us, who were children of wrath, to be the children of God.

Jesus had such compassion for us that He took care of our greatest, most impossible problem. Surely, He is able to fulfill the rest of our requests. He is able and will give us answer according to His will, for He is our God and Savior, who is not only willing, but able to help us, as He has shown in cleansing us from our sin.

Friday, August 3, 2018

Mark 1:43-44 - *As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."*

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS IS GOD'S WILL

That is our response to God's help. But more than our response, the thing that we want to focus on here as we consider that all things are possible for God is the reason why Jesus helped this man. He was moved with compassion. God's compassion, His love, His grace for us sinners is the reason behind why God hears and answers our prayers. The guarantee of this is the fact that, moved by His grace, His undeserved love, God determined to save us from sin and condemnation.

Leprosy was a terrible disease, but it only affected the body. Sin is a leprosy of body and soul. No mere man can heal our sin problem. No man delivers us from God's judgment and the eternal punishment that we deserve for sin. Only God can help us. Only God can deliver us from hell by forgiving our sins. When a paralyzed man was brought to Jesus to be healed, the first thing that Jesus said to him was, "...be of good cheer! Your sins are forgiven you" (Matthew 9:2). All of our earthly problems pale when compared to our eternal sin problem. So, we might think that the greatest priority, our greatest need, is to be delivered from some problem in this world. Our focus might be on something that I need to make my life more comfortable. But, what problem do we have that is greater than sin? What earthly comfort could we have that would make us more comfortable in hell? So, God's highest priority on our list of needs is our sin problem. The greatest love that He could possibly show to us is to forgive our sins, to assure us that we will not go to hell, but to guarantee that we will go to heaven when we die. Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection are the guarantee of the love of God.

If you had a terminal illness and someone came to you and said, "What can I do for you? Anything at all?" The first response would not be, "I'd like a new car!" No, we'd say, "I'd like to be healthy!" After that, anything that we receive is an extra blessing. So it is with the leprosy of sin. God is willing that we be made clean. Jesus reached out and touched human flesh, becoming true Man, not afraid to touch our uncleanness, so that we might become cleansed of sin through Him. That is why He came into the world. That is how He wants people to know Him, as their Savior from sin.

Saturday, July 7, 2018

1 Peter 2:13-17 - *Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men-- as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*

LOVE YOUR COUNTRY -- IT IS GOD'S SERVANT TO YOU FOR GOOD

"God wills that we honor the government as His minister-- through which He bestows valuable blessings upon us ... If you knew that somebody had saved your child's life you would be heartily thankful to him. Why are you not thankful to your government which daily protects you, your wife, and children from murder? For if the government did not check the wicked people, when would we be safe? Therefore, when you look upon your wife and children, you should bear in mind: these are God's gifts, which I may keep by means of the government. And as you love your children, so you should love your country" (Martin Luther).

Prayer: Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage, we humbly beseech Thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of Thy favor and glad to do Thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those whom in Thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to Thy law, we may show forth Thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in Thee to fail; all this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Rev. George Lyman Locke)

Monday, July 9, 2018

Over the past three years the Lord has directed our congregation through hundreds of conversations and ideas, voters, council, subcommittee, architect, contractor, and numerous other types of meetings. All of these meetings were for the purpose of trying to re-purpose, remodel, and rededicate what our Lord Jesus has blessed us with in our church and school property. There was always one question that stood out:

WHERE SHOULD WE BUILD?

Matthew 7:24-25 - *"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock."*

As with any construction project, knowing where to build and what needs the most attention is key to a successful project that will last. Jesus of Nazareth, who grew up a skilled carpenter, but at the same time the very Son of God, spoke quite frankly about building projects. In Jesus' day the temple in Jerusalem was THE place to worship. But Jesus warned His disciples about putting trust in earthly structures. "Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, 'These things which you see -- the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down'" (Luke 20:5-6). As important as we think it is to have a nice church building to worship in, Jesus spoke towards the end of His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) what was really about faith-building and the importance of building on a rock. Matthew 7:26-27, "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

Where should we build? That has been our question as we look to take care of the Lord's house and school He gave us here in our neck of the woods. But eternally more important than that is how Jesus instructs us how to take care of our faith building as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Don't build on the shifting sands of this world's philosophies, false hopes and beliefs, and the man made self-righteous religions of this world. "There is no Rock like our God" (1 Samuel 2:2). Jesus is our rock! Build your faith on His Word alone. He is your Lord and Savior! Because on Christ alone, we will stand in this life and in our eternal life to come!

Thursday, August 2, 2018

Mark 1:40-42 - *Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.*

"I AM WILLING!"

But is He willing to grant our requests? John writes, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). That is to say, if we ask anything according to His will, He gives us a favorable answer.

In the case of the leper, he prayed, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."

We may think that the best thing would be if God says "yes" to our request. But we don't know what God knows. He has His reasons for doing what He does, and He doesn't always tell us what they are. But whether God answers "Yes" or "No," God always answers prayer in a way that glorifies Him, for we are assured that, "All things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Knowing this, we can pray as the apostle instructs us when he writes, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6f). Such an attitude of faith brings peace from God because we understand that because of our relationship to God as His children through faith in Christ Jesus, no matter what we ask, no matter how seemingly impossible the request, if it is God's will, He will grant the request.

Had the leper asked anyone but Jesus to heal him, the answer would probably have been, "I'd like to help you, but I can't." We may be moved with compassion to help someone, but we are not able to help. But Jesus, moved with compassion, says, "I am willing; be cleansed." And we read that, "As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed." Jesus then commanded him to go to the temple, as prescribed in the Law, and show himself to the priest to receive a clean bill of health, as well as to offer thanksgiving to God, as commanded in the Law. Besides the fact that this was commanded in the Law, such a response to God's help is a fruit of faith, as the LORD says in the Psalms, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will glorify Me" (Psalm 50:15).

Wednesday, August 1, 2018

Mark 1:40-42 - *Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.*

"IF YOU ARE WILLING..."

Had the leper asked anyone but Jesus to heal him, it would have been considered to be an outrageous request. "Do you know what you're asking?" But Jesus did not reply this way, because with God all things are possible. Like the leper, we can ask anything of God because we know that with God all things are possible.

There is nothing too big, or too small for that matter, that God cannot do for us. The apostle tells us to, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God..." (Philippians 4:6). And don't be afraid that your request is too minor for God to deal with. After all, Jesus tells us that God has numbered the very hairs of our head, and that if God takes care of the little birds in nature, surely He will take care of you, His own child (Matthew 10:30).

Note also how the leper prays. He does not demand that Jesus make him clean. He says, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." So also, when we pray, we know that our request will be granted if it is according to God's will.

When we ask another person for help, we understand that they will help us-- first of all, if they are able, and second, if they are willing. Of course, that is assuming that they heard us in the first place. We have already seen that God can help us because He can do all things. But does He always hear us when we pray? Jesus tells us that, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you" (John 16:23). The answer from God's own Word is that God hears every prayer that is offered in faith, as again Jesus says, "...all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22). So, no matter what our request, we know that God hears us who are His children through faith in Christ.

Tuesday, July 10, 2018

We recently found online a nice, big conference table for our church conference room. It was out of town, so we got a truck, trailer, and some volunteer members to go pick it up. When we got there, it was even bigger than we determined and it was clear we would have to take it apart. Because of its size, there were at least a couple dozen long screws that needed to be removed. But I didn't bring a screwdriver! Thankfully, one of us thought to bring his cordless drill which did exactly what was needed in quick order.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT TOOL?

In working on any project, you need to have the right tools. The wrong tools can make a mess quickly and lead to more frustration and discouragement. Can you imagine how the disciples felt? After Jesus had risen from the dead, He walked with His disciples for 40 days. During that time, He promised them that after He ascended into heaven, He would send them the gift of the Holy Spirit to help them with His Great Commission to share the Gospel to all the world (Acts 1:4-8). What a project! What's the right tool for that?

Acts 2:1-4 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Jesus kept His promise. The Holy Spirit brought the Apostles the gift of tongues and languages to be able to share the Word of God to every nation, people, and tongue. But even more than that, Jesus gave them what to speak "as the Spirit gave them utterance" to share God's Holy Word and Christ crucified for sinners like you and me! Jesus gives us still today the right tools for His project He has commissioned us for: The sharing of the Good News of our Lord Jesus' work on the cross for our salvation! The Bible is the ONLY tool that's going to fix and build up a faith in Jesus. The work of Christ is the ONLY message and gift that will get us to heaven.

Like that big table, so often we feel unprepared for the "big" task of sharing our faith with others. We don't always feel gifted or qualified for talking about death, life, and our Savior. But Jesus has already given us the right tools. He's given us a faith in His Word and He has promised to be with us and bless us like He did for the Apostles. After all, like them, we also are His tools to use for this great and glorious purpose!

Wednesday, July 11, 2018

Genesis 6:12-14 - *So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch."*

IS THAT A SAFE WORKING ENVIRONMENT?

One of the headaches of our recent building remodel at our church was that we were trying to complete it during the second half of our school year. One of the questions that was often raised (including the fire marshal) was about the safety of the students and teachers during the construction. We can become frustrated with codes and regulations. Or we might be impatient on an eight-month project that "seems" to have no end. But imagine Noah and his family building the ark, that gigantic boat! Not only do many Bible scholars believe it took them 50-75 years to build, but Noah, "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5) no doubt endured mockery, ridicule, and persecution while they built the ark. What kind of working environment would that have been like?

Yet, "Noah did everything just as God commanded him" (Genesis 6:22). And the LORD saved Noah and His family from that terrible flood He used to judge the godless world. In a similar way, we too are eternally safe as we build on God's Word of command and promise. Proverbs 29:25 encourages, "Whoever trusts in the LORD will be kept safe." Noah and his family were delivered from God's wrath by the wooden ark the LORD had planned and promised. We too will be delivered from God's wrath against sin on the last Day. God's Son Jesus Christ, who took on our flesh and was born and laid in that wooden manger, who suffered and died on that wooden cross for our sins, has delivered us from God's wrath by His death and resurrection. He is our ark of safety no matter what trials, mockery, ridicule or persecution that we may face in this short life. So, we rejoice in our blessings, our safety, and most importantly in our Savior Jesus, who keeps us like He did Noah in His loving and gracious care as we too faithfully proclaim Christ's righteousness.

Tuesday, July 31, 2018

Mark 1:40-42 - *Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.*

DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK

Because there is nothing that we can ask of God that God would reply, "I'm sorry, but that's impossible."

Had the leper in our text come to anyone other than Jesus with his request, he would have been told, "I'm sorry, but it is impossible to cure leprosy." Leprosy was an incurable disease that disfigured the sufferer and ended with a painful, lonely death. Really, a miracle was the only hope that a leper had of being cured.

A miracle is defined as an extraordinary event brought on by divine intervention. In other words, it's something that can only happen if God Himself does it. Had the leper asked anyone but Jesus to heal him, they would have replied, "Who do you think I am? God?" But Jesus didn't scoff at the request, because He is, in fact, God, true God and true man in one person. It seems likely that the leper had heard of the many healings that Jesus had done. As Jesus told John the Baptist's disciples, "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:5). But this leper's request of Jesus was more than just the hope that Jesus could help him. He didn't ask, "If you can do it, make me clean." The leper knew that only God could help him, and so he went to God, offering a prayer to God the Son, saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean!" He asks in faith. He knows that Jesus can heal him because He knows that Jesus is God. On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus was revealed in all of His heavenly glory. What the disciples saw with their eyes on the mountain, this leper saw with the eyes of faith. He knew Jesus, not only as a healer, but as His Savior, the promised Messiah, true God as well as true Man.

When we approach God in prayer, we also approach God in faith, asking in the name of Jesus. When we come in the name of the One who is the Mediator between God and man, who has made peace between God and man by paying for sin, we can approach God with the confidence that He will hear and answer our prayers. After all, we are told that we are, "... the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). Therefore, we can, as Martin Luther says, "Ask God as dear children ask their dear Father."

Monday, July 30, 2018

Mark 10:25-27 - *Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."*

WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

We can all appreciate how small the eye of a needle is. Late in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus tells His disciples that, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25).

Jesus was telling us that having a lot of earthly wealth is a special obstacle when we are talking about becoming members of God's kingdom (coming to faith). The disciples were shocked. They said, "Who then can be saved?" (Mark 10:26). After all, who doesn't want to be rich? If it's easier to get a camel through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into God's kingdom, what about the rest of us? Who can enter God's kingdom if that's true? Christ's answer? "With men it is impossible, but not with God..."

Christ's answer reveals that man doesn't bring himself to faith. Whether rich or poor, male or female, God works faith in the human heart. Unlike sinful man, God knows no limits to what He can do.

Knowing this, don't be afraid to bring any request to your Heavenly Father because there is nothing that we can ask of God that God would reply, "I'm sorry, but that's impossible." He has already done the impossible by sending His Son Jesus into the world to open the narrow gate of heaven to us sinners, washing away our sins so that we can go through that gate clothed in His perfect righteousness.

Thursday, July 12, 2018

It has been interesting to watch our building contractor and all the subcontractors work together along with our congregation in our remodel project. Onlookers to any type of project, event, or work setting notice a lot about the workmanship, craftsmanship, and relationships between workers. We often make quick comparisons to others when we see these qualities (or lack thereof), and find ourselves questioning...

WHAT KIND OF A WORKER ARE YOU?

The Apostle Peter spoke about working and serving with the gifts God has graciously given us. But under divine inspiration he uses the word "minister" (which means, "to serve"), in how we use our God given gifts.

1 Peter 4:10-11 - *As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever.*

Peter reminded the Christians in and around Jerusalem that God has given every single person a variety of gifts, and he tells them "minister it to one another." In other words, use those God given gifts to serve others, to serve God! We have the sinfully selfish habit of using God's gifts to only think about and serve ourselves. Whether it be an attitude of only focusing on our career and income, or the attitude of pride and a holier or better than thou attitude with our service. That's why Peter goes on to use those God given gifts so that "God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

What kind of a worker was Jesus? He lived to glorify His Father in Heaven by doing His will and completed the selfless, sacrificial work of the cross to pay for our debt of sins with His holy and precious blood (the only thing that could). When Jesus spoke, He did exactly as Peter encourages all Christians to do, with "the oracles (Scriptures) of God." After all, as we are reminded again today that our purpose is to continue to serve Christ our Savior by building up His kingdom. That is done when we share the Word of God with others. That is done when we lead them from their sin to their Savior just as Jesus did for us!

Like construction workers or any other kind of worker, let's let our gifts and attitude serve Christ our Lord as we remind ourselves this is our good and reasonable service and duty to Him, "to whom belong the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen!"

Friday, July 13, 2018

The best part about the foreman of a building project is that he is the "go to" guy for all your problems and questions. If you have a concern about one of your requests, he'll get it answered for you one way or another.

WHO IS THE FOREMAN WHO CAN FIX ANYTHING?

Psalm 50:15 - *Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.*

We were blessed in our recent church and school remodel to have a couple of good foremen who responded to our needs. However, not all foremen are created equal, are they? The same can be said about the various "gods" of this sin filled world. If you have studied any of the ancient Egyptian gods (many of which are mentioned in the Bible), or the Roman mythological gods, or the thousands of Hindu gods still worshiped today, you'll find they are all very limited and very specific in what they can do. They were certainly not all created equal, because they all were built or created by man.

Jehovah, the one and only true God is the Triune God of the Bible. He sets Himself apart from the rest of the gods of this world. He is eternal, not created. He displays and demonstrates more love than any other god in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of the whole world. And He continues to show His answers to our daily prayers. Our Lord gives us every reason to trust in Him for salvation and when we call on Him for any of our problems or questions. He says, "I will deliver you, and you will glorify Me."

Like the foreman of a building project, Jesus Christ is our Foreman. He is Lord and Master over all. He is our Savior from sin and our rebellion against God's commandments. He is the only one who can literally fix anything. Our problems, our worries, our fears, our struggles, our daily needs, our guilt, our anxiety, our depression, and even our facing off with death. Jesus is the one who teaches us through His raising of the dead (like Lazarus in John 11 and others), or when He Himself rose from the dead (as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15), that He has power over all things, even death itself! And this Jesus, our Lord God, is the one who works and lives to serve you.

Remember Psalm 50:15. Call upon Jesus for anything. Trust in His good and gracious will and that He'll answer your prayers in His own perfect time and perfect way. Think of Jesus as your Foreman who works to serve you. Because He's even more than that, Jesus is your Friend. He is your brother. He is your Savior! And He loves you more than anything else!

Saturday, July 28, 2018

GOD'S HIDDEN WISDOM--THE GOSPEL (6)

This week we have been contrasting God's wisdom with man's (based on 1 Corinthians 2:6-13). Here's how Dr. Martin Luther expresses it (from "What Luther Says," Vol. II, p. 1455f):

Commenting on Psalm 119:99 ["I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation"], he wrote: "We can find the wisdom of God nowhere but in His Word. Whoever loves and values it and constantly studies it is not only a doctor enlightened by God and an approved man superior to all world-wise and learned people but a judge of all the wisdom and teaching of devils and man."

Commenting on 1 Timothy 1:17 ["Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."], he wrote: "Those who have the Gospel have the wisdom of God and are wise in and from God. Where you do not find the Word, there God is not present, nor wisdom, but mere folly.... Wisdom is in Holy Scripture; it is the Gospel, and it teaches you to know God and the counsel of God in the Son of God, made flesh for you. This wisdom is hidden from the world; faith alone perceives it."

Commenting on Colossians 2:3 ["In (Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"], he remarked: "All the wisdom of the world justly retires before the knowledge of Christ. For what is more wonderful than to have a thorough knowledge of Christ? Wonderful and unspeakable is the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature and so lowered Himself as to be 'found in fashion as a man.'"

So, we sing with Luther in his familiar Reformation hymn:

Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word;
Curb those who by deceit or sword
Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son
And bring to naught all He has done.

Lord Jesus Christ, Your pow'r make known,
For You are Lord of lords alone;
Defend Your holy Church that we May sing
Your praise eternally.

O Comforter of priceless worth,
Send peace and unity on earth;
Support us in our final strife
And lead us out of death to life.
(*Lutheran Service Book*, 655)

Friday, July 27, 2018

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 - ...*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

GOD'S HIDDEN WISDOM--THE GOSPEL (5)

Since the Holy Spirit has opened our hearts and minds to the secret, hidden wisdom of God, to heavenly and spiritual things, we have a different spirit from the world.

The spirit of the world says man is god or science is god. That spirit is capsulized in "isms" like secularism, humanism, relativism, postmodernism--all of which are intolerant of the Bible's absolute truth.

One conservative critic has written: "We can only mourn the degree and rapidity with which postmodern philosophical notions have invaded and corrupted ... the visible church that once used to share with us a commitment to God's objective truth as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. How sad it is to think that many will be directed to seek comfort in 'personal journeys of discovery,' and in 'visions and still small voices' rather than in God's revelation of Himself in the objective means of grace!"

In these philosophically dangerous days, may God help us by His Spirit to keep our and our children's lives grounded on the hidden Wisdom revealed in His Word--the heart of which is the gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

As the apostle writes, "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

O Word of God Incarnate, O Wisdom from on high,
O Truth unchanged, unchanging, O Light of our dark sky--
We praise You for the radiance That from the hallowed page,
A lantern to our footsteps, Shines on from age to age.
(*Lutheran Service Book*, 523:1)

Saturday, July 14, 2018

One of the best things about work or any kind of project is enjoying the fruits of your labors. Not just that you earned a paycheck, but the fruit of accomplishing something needed. As we conclude our building remodel at our church and school, our congregation is starting to enjoy the fruits of our labors and the fruit of the work of those we hired to help us with this task. This task, when all the dust literally settles, was really all about taking care of what the Lord has blessed us. But how do can we enjoy the fruits of all these labors? We can join the Psalmist in saying: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD'" (Psalm 122:1).

BUILD ON A FOUNDATION THAT YOU WILL ENJOY FOREVER!

We serve the Lord by using our hands to work, to provide for ourselves or our families, or as we take on projects and tasks around the home, school, and church. We serve the Lord by displaying a joyful and glad attitude to serve others with our time, talents, and treasures God has provided to us, and even more so to our Lord and Savior. In doing these things the glory always belongs to the Lord! All of it. He gives us the ability to work, to build, to eat or drink, to rest, and to accomplish our daily goals and activities. At the end of the day, really the only thing that truly matters is how Christ has and still serves us with what we need most. His Word both convicts us, and comforts us through His law and gospel. He serves us with His tough love as well as His mercy and grace. And, He allows us to be a part of His building project and enjoy the fruits of His labors through us!

1 Corinthians 3:9-11 - *For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

As we go on about our day and week keeping busy with our various tasks and responsibilities, let us remember that our first calling is building on Christ our Lord and Savior. And let's pray that the Holy Spirit would continuously make us glad to be a part of God's family through Christ! Be glad that He has put us to work sharing His Good News of Sinners Saved! We can enjoy the fruits of His labors for us now, and into eternity, forever!

Monday, July 16, 2018

Acts 12:11 - *Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating."*

SIMON PETER'S RESCUE

Simon Peter was a practical man who packed a weapon along to Gethsemane and was ready to use it. But now he thinks he's dreaming! Perhaps he thinks the angel is taking him to Abraham's side in paradise. But suddenly he finds himself in the street. Then Peter realized that it was no dream.

Why is he so surprised? Didn't he think the Lord would answer his prayers from prison? He surely did! That's why he could sleep on the night before his fatal trial. Once before he had slept in Gethsemane when Jesus had asked him to watch and pray. That was weakness. But this is strength, to trust God enough to sleep before his own execution. "I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8). You see, when Peter prayed, he did not have to stay awake to see if God would do what he asked. He simply left the matter in God's gracious hands, and went to sleep.

Have you taken something to the Lord in prayer? Then also leave it with Him. You can do so with confidence even if you do not see how He might answer your prayer. He that spared not His own Son for you will surely spare nothing else to deliver you, to help you, and finally to bring you to the fulness of joy. And if there is still suffering involved, you will not suffer alone. When you pass through the waters, He will be with you.

Thursday, July 26, 2018

1 Corinthians 2:10-11 - *... But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God...*

GOD'S HIDDEN WISDOM--THE GOSPEL (4)

If even the highest IQ minds of this world are unable to discover God's secret wisdom, where does this leave you and me? How did you and I discover this "hidden wisdom" that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, our Savior? There can be only one answer to that question. God has graciously revealed it to us by His Spirit.

As Paul puts it, who knows what the thoughts of our mind are at any given time? Only we ourselves know the thoughts which are "hidden" within us, and only our spirit can reveal them to others.

That is equally and more so the case with regard to God and His wisdom. Only the Holy Spirit, as God, is all-knowing. Only the Holy Spirit can know the "deep things" of God--such as who God is, what God thinks, what God plans, how He brought the world into being, how He would save the world of sinners, how He governs the affairs of the world, and yes, how He, in His loving and providential care, governs our individual lives.

Simply put, it's all to the credit of the Spirit, as we sing in the hymn:

All our knowledge, sense, and sight,
Lie in deepest darkness shrouded
Till Your Spirit breaks our night
With the beams of truth unclouded.
You alone to God can win us;
You must work all good within us.
(*Lutheran Service Book*, 904:2)

Wednesday, July 25, 2018

1 Corinthians 2:8-9 - ...Which [wisdom] none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered in the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.

GOD'S HIDDEN WISDOM--THE GOSPEL (3)

Over the years I have listened to (and a couple times attended in person) debates between Bible-believing Creationists and evolutionary scientists. The former rarely score any points with the latter who, with all their "knowledge," remain blind to and ignorant of the "wisdom of God in a mystery," including the saving gospel of Jesus.

It's frightening to think about: all the combined human wisdom in the world brought about the crucifixion of the Son of God. Think of the earthly rulers when Jesus walked on this Earth--like Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, the entire Jewish Sanhedrin. Would they have crucified God's eternal Son had they known He was the Lord of glory, their God and Messiah? Would they have howled for Jesus' crucifixion if they had known that His death would save untold millions of people?

We know and confess that according to our sinful nature we are no better. We too are spiritually blind unless and until the Spirit reveals to us, by simple faith, "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

We pray, as did Jesus: "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight" (Matthew 11:25). May we ever be among the "babes," and sing:

I know my faith is founded On Jesus Christ, my God and Lord;
And this my faith confessing, Unmoved I stand on His sure Word.
Our reason cannot fathom The Truth of God profound;
Who trusts in human wisdom Relies on shifting ground.
God's Word is all-sufficient. It makes divinely sure;
And trusting in its wisdom, My faith shall rest secure.
(Lutheran Service Book, 587:1)

Tuesday, July 17, 2018

Acts 13:44-45 - On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of God. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting what Paul was saying, and blaspheming.

IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES

It was a diverse group to which Paul spoke in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia. But Paul's presentation did not discuss the material differences between them. He did not discuss cultural differences: food, medicine, housing, educational systems. There was no political discussion about Roman authority.

Instead, Paul dealt with the things that are central to all humanity: God, life, and what separates people from them, sin. It was not that Paul held material things in contempt. He himself was not ashamed to work at a trade. But he was not there to show them how to make tents. The Savior that he proclaimed went beyond the incidentals by which people differ from one another.

That is why both Jews and non-Jews could be interested in the Jewish history that Paul presented, and why the next Sabbath most of the town was gathered to hear Paul and Barnabas. That's when the Jews began to show their jealousy, and some important differences appeared. The Jewish contingent began contradicting to the point of reviling the Savior and the grace of God. They were jealous, but the Gentiles were glad to hear the good news.

There are many material differences between people that are really immaterial. But there are some differences which can come between us and the God who gives us life. As we consider the lives that we have been given and that still lie before us, God grant us the wisdom to discern the importance of the eternal blessings, and to "continue in the grace of God."

Wednesday, July 18, 2018

Acts 14:21-22 - *They preached the good news in that city (Derbe) and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.*

BLESSED ENCOURAGEMENT

Now this is truly amazing! "... they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch."

Paul was at the last new city on his first missionary journey. It had been a rough tour: having been opposed by a sorcerer on Cypress, John Mark having deserted them in Pamphylia, having been run out of Pisidian Antioch, having discovered just in time the plot to kill him in Iconium, and finally having been stoned in Lystra.

In Derbe at last their ministry appeared peaceful, and then it was time to return home. Nearby was the Cilician pass through the Taurus Mountains, the "freeway" home. But no! Instead of the quicker, easier way, Paul and Barnabas turned around and went the opposite way twenty miles "over wild and dusty plain" back to Lystra, the place of stones. Then they went back still further, forty miles to Iconium, and another sixty some to Pisidian Antioch.

Why go home from peaceful Derbe by way of tumultuous Lystra, Iconium and Antioch? You know the reason, don't you? It was not because Paul and Barnabas were looking for something that would benefit them, but they went back to encourage the believers there -- "Yes, this is the way to God. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Even though the road leads through many hardships, much tribulation, God is still ruling, this is the Kingdom Road." This was the kind of encouragement that Paul and Barnabas brought, the reason they returned.

Tuesday, July 24, 2018

1 Corinthians 2:6-7 - *...However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory....*

GOD'S HIDDEN WISDOM--THE GOSPEL (2)

Let's explore further the concept of spiritual maturity.

Most briefly, the spiritually mature are they who have come to know the gospel of Jesus "who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption--that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the LORD'" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

We tend to think maturity is all about age, but it's not necessarily so. A child who learns and believes that a Savior came from heaven to pay the ransom price for sinners shows a marvelous maturity. Such have a wisdom, says Paul, which is higher than that "of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing." In fact, they have a maturity, a wisdom, which puts the worldly wise to shame.

With all their seeking after wisdom, the Greeks hadn't discovered God's wisdom. And why? Because it was a "hidden wisdom." Yes, the wisdom of God remains "hidden" and a "mystery" to us all until His Spirit opens our heart and mind to the blessed truth that "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

What love! What wisdom!

I pray Thee, dear Lord Jesus, My heart to keep and train
That I Thy holy temple From youth to age remain.
Turn Thou my tho'ts forever From worldly wisdom's lore;
If I but learn to know Thee, I shall not want for more.
(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 655)

Monday, July 23, 2018

1 Corinthians 2:6-7 - *We speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory....*

GOD'S HIDDEN WISDOM--THE GOSPEL (1)

The people of ancient Corinth, Greece, were noted for their wisdom. In the first chapter of his epistle to the Christians there, the apostle Paul addressed the subject in great detail, contrasting worldly wisdom and God's wisdom.

Most basically, does worldly wisdom lead one to know, accept, and confess God and His wisdom? Hardly! Just the opposite. In an earlier verse the apostle writes: "For since, in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe...."

Yes, the sad fact is that worldly wisdom considers the wisdom of God, His Word and His gospel, foolishness. Who could believe, after all, that an eternal God-Man came into the world and allowed Himself to suffer at the hands of mortal men and then be crucified--not for His own sins, but for the sins of others!? That just doesn't make sense. It is utterly ridiculous, pure foolishness.

Here in our text Paul challenges the assertions of those who were intolerant of his gospel preaching. He teaches that the spiritually mature are they who understand that God's wisdom is true wisdom. The spiritually mature understand that Paul's message of a Christ-centered, cross-centered gospel is true wisdom, sheer wisdom.

By God's grace alone the spiritually mature say and sing:

Wisdom's highest, noblest treasure, Jesus, is revealed in You.
Let me find in You my pleasure, And my wayward will subdue.
Humility there and simplicity reigning, In paths of true wisdom my steps ever training.
If I learn from Jesus this knowledge divine, The blessing of heavenly wisdom is mine.

(Lutheran Service Book, 536:3)

Thursday, July 19, 2018

Acts 15:28 - *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ...*

WHAT IS GOOD?

What an arresting expression this is! It comes from a letter written by the church at Jerusalem.

You see, our sinful human nature doesn't figure that way. Our human nature concentrates first on what seems good to us. From little on we know what foods we like, our favorite color is, our favorite television show. Of course, there's nothing wrong with having a favorite kind of pie, but for our sinful human nature, what seems good to us always comes before what seems good to the Spirit.

If it seems good to us that people who have hurt us should not find forgiveness too easily, then we are tempted to think that the Spirit of God is not fair. If it seems good to us that the wicked ones in this world should never have material prosperity, then we may judge God to be unfair when they seem to be getting away with murder, or cheating, or lying.

The temptation is first to decide what seems good to us, and then to see if the Word of the Spirit matches up. For many, it seems good that people should have some measure of good within them, or that newborn infants should have no sin, and when the Word of the Spirit doesn't match up, guess which opinion gets the boot!

How different in Christ's kingdom! First one sees what is pleasing to the Spirit, and then tries to match that. If it pleases God to let His children suffer for a time, the disciples rejoice to be considered worthy of suffering for the name of Christ, and consider it nothing compared to the glory which is coming in connection with Christ.

Friday, July 20, 2018

Acts 15:28 - *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ...*

IT'S A MIRACLE!

Yesterday we noticed that the Spirit's opinion comes first, but we should not take that second part "and to us" for granted, either. How often it happens that even when something seems good to the Holy Spirit, it still does not seem good to us.

As one man once put it, "You can't just go out there saying that Jesus died for all sins, or people will take that as an invitation to go out and sin." ... "But that is what the Bible says." ... "That may be, but think of the effect it will have."

Our human nature does not like the Spirit's word of forgiveness for several reasons. One, because when the Spirit proclaims forgiveness, that implies that we need it, that we are poor, wretched sinners who cannot save ourselves. Two, because if we ever do come face to face with our true sinfulness, the Spirit's gift seems way too easy, since it doesn't require a payment on our part. The good news has no teeth in it, no threats or even a reward for people who straighten up and fly right.

But for those who believe that their sins were laid on Jesus, that He willingly died their death, a love is kindled in their heart for that Savior, and it makes them want to please God, so that what seems good to the Spirit also seems good to them.

It is truly a miracle of the Spirit, then, when we can say, "It seemed good to the Spirit AND TO US..."

Lord grant us such a faith as this,
And then whate'er may come,
We'll taste even now the hallowed bliss
Of an eternal home.
(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 396)

Saturday, July 21, 2018

GUIDANCE

We all need guidance many times in our lives. So did the Apostle Paul and his little group of missionaries as they made their way across Asia Minor. And guidance they received as they "traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to" (Acts 16:6-7).

Astonishing! Here was the man to whom Jesus had appeared outside Damascus, whom God had blinded and given sight to at the same time, to whom God had sent Ananias, baptizing and welcoming him into God's vineyard. The Lord had seemingly gone out of His way to make Paul His preacher, and now the Spirit keeps him from preaching the Word!

Of course, now it is clear to us that it was NOT that God did not care about the people of Asia and Bithynia, but that He had something else in mind for Paul. So, He prevented Paul from doing something that in itself would have been good.

Sometimes the guidance of God comes in a negative way, doesn't it? Sometimes we might even be prevented from doing something good. When the apostles could not both preach and wait on tables, they elected deacons for the tables.

Sometimes following God's Word prevents us from preaching the gospel here or there. For example, when it would mean joining together with those who split from the Life-giving Word, God says, "Don't compromise my Word, even to preach the Gospel." But, even then, as with Paul, God has a positive purpose, that the nations might receive an unmutated Christ as their Hope of Salvation!