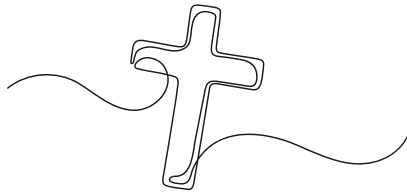


I'll find a way to praise You
From the bottom of my broken heart
'Cause I think I'd rather strike a match, than curse the dark
Yeah I'll find a way to thank You
Though bitterness is real and hard
'Cause I'd rather take a chance on hope, than fall apart
I don't think I'm ready to surrender into the dark, no



Chris Llewellyn / Gareth Gilkeson / Matt Maher
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God called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 2:14

Called Us by the Gospel

Yesterday, we celebrated the Feast of Pentecost. During the Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples, giving them unique gifts that helped in the work of spreading the gospel. This week, we will examine the gifts that the Holy Spirit has poured out upon us through His work. Today, we consider His work of calling. This calling is done by the gospel in Word and Sacrament. As the Apostle Paul points out to the Thessalonians, the Holy Spirit has chosen the means of the proclamation of the gospel to call us to faith. Like Paul, we also can proclaim the gospel by which the Holy Spirit calls others to faith.

Paul also points out that the call's purpose is "for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." This purpose is to bring us to faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. By nature, we are sinners. There is absolutely nothing that we could do to change our relationship with God. However, God graciously provided a way of salvation through Jesus Christ. The calling of the Holy Spirit not only invites us but actually brings us to faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. The result is that we obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ with all its blessings. Because of this change in our relationship with God by faith, the calling of the Holy Spirit is also called conversion, regeneration, and quickening. Conversion means to be turned 180 degrees, regeneration is being reborn, and quickening is to be made alive. All these describe what happens when the Holy Spirit calls us by the gospel.

**Come, oh, come, Thou quickening Spirit, God from all eternity!
May Thy power never fail us; Dwell within us constantly.
Then shall truth and life and light Banish all the gloom of night.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 226:1

*It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness,
who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the
knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

2 Corinthians 4:6

Enlightened Us with His Gifts

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit poured out upon the disciples unique gifts, such as performing miracles and speaking in tongues. Although these gifts were certainly great blessings in spreading the Word of God, these gifts disappeared after the first-century followers of Jesus. Even though these gifts are no longer present, the Holy Spirit still pours out gifts upon us. Through calling us by the gospel, He gives us gifts of forgiveness, peace, joy, hope, and comfort. All of these are spiritual gifts that become ours through faith.

The Apostle Paul speaks to the Corinthians concerning being enlightened by the Holy Spirit. He speaks of it as the Holy Spirit bringing us out of the darkness of unbelief into the light of faith. The gifts that we receive by faith are the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His work of salvation for us. This knowledge is that our sins are forgiven, that we have spiritual peace with God, and that we have the certain hope of eternal life. This knowledge also provides us with joy and comfort in the truth that our sins are forgiven. These gifts from the Holy Spirit are certainly wonderful.

Holy Ghost, with light divine
Shine upon this heart of mine;

Chase the shades of night away,
Turn the darkness into day.

Let me see my Savior's face,
Let me all His beauties trace;

Show those glorious truths to me,
Which are only known to Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 234:1-2

And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Galatians 5:24-25

Sanctifies Us

The work of the Holy Spirit is called sanctification. To sanctify means to set apart. It is a term used in Scripture to speak of something or someone set apart for God. When the term is used regarding the Holy Spirit's work, it can speak of all His work or of the specific aspect of having us live holy lives filled with fruits of faith. Fruits of faith are anything that a believer does that flows from faith and conforms to God's Word. Therefore, a fruit of faith is empowered by Jesus Christ's ruling in our hearts, motivated by God's love, and guided by God's Word. The Holy Spirit leads us to live lives that are set apart for God with fruits of faith.

The apostle Paul reminds the Galatians of the Holy Spirit's work of sanctifying us. Those who belong to Christ are believers, such as us. They put to death their sinful flesh with its passions and lusts. Jesus has put sin to death, and now we daily put to death our sinful flesh by contrition and repentance. With our sinful flesh put to death, we live to follow the will of God as found in His Word. But before we take any credit for our sanctification, we need to be reminded that the Holy Spirit leads us to hate sin and to live lives that are pleasing to God, filled with fruits of faith. The Holy Spirit's work of sanctification causes us to live as believers on this earth.

Holy Spirit, all divine,
Dwell within this heart of mine;

Cast down every idol-throne,
Reign supreme, and reign alone.

See, to Thee I yield my heart,
Shed Thy life through every part;

A pure temple I would be,
Wholly dedicate to Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 234:5-6

God would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man. Ephesians 3:16

Keeps Us in the True Faith

As we consider the work of the Holy Spirit, we have examined His work of calling us by the gospel, enlightening us with His gifts, and sanctifying us. These aspects of His work are done by bringing us to faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. However, the work of the Holy Spirit continues even after we are brought to faith. If left to ourselves, we would revert to living in the spiritual darkness of sin, for we are sin-addicts by nature. Therefore, the Holy Spirit's work continues by keeping us in the true faith of Jesus Christ as our Savior. He strengthens our weak and floundering faith so that with His aid we can defeat the attacks of the devil, the evil world, and our sinful flesh. Through the strengthening of our faith, the Holy Spirit renews our desire to produce fruits of faith.

The Apostle Paul prays that God would grant that the Ephesians' faith will be strengthened by the Holy Spirit. We ask that God would grant our faith also to be strengthened. Paul's prayer references the spiritual fight in each of us as the forces of evil battle against God's Spirit within us that desires to do the will of God. The Holy Spirit fights against the forces of evil, namely the devil, the evil world, and our sinful flesh. Since this spiritual battle will continue until our dying moment, the Holy Spirit's work of keeping us in the true faith continues until we reach eternal life in heaven. Strengthening us in our faith in Jesus Christ is a continuous work of the Holy Spirit as He causes us to grow spiritually.

Thou holy Light, Guide Divine,
 Oh, cause the Word of Life to shine!
 Teach us to know our God aright
 And call Him Father with delight.
 From every error keep us free;
 Let none but Christ our Master be
 That we in living faith abide,
 In Him, our Lord, with all our might confide.
 Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

The Lutheran Hymnal 224:2

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. Ephesians 4:4-6

Gathers Us

The psalmist David writes, “God sets the solitary in families.” (Psalm 68:6) The same is true of the work of the Holy Spirit, gathering the believer into a family. This family is often called the Holy Christian Church. The last work of the Holy Spirit that we will consider is the Holy Spirit gathering us. As believers, we are called children of God and members of His family. The Holy Spirit gathers all the believers into God’s family with Jesus Christ as our Brother. This family is synonymous with the Holy Christian Church, the assembly of all believers everywhere. As members of this Church, we are united together in one body, one Spirit, one calling, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, and one God and Father. All these “ones” stress the spiritual unity that results in being gathered into the family of God. The Holy Spirit’s work of gathering us into the Holy Christian Church is a wonderful blessing.

The Holy Spirit also gathers us into our local churches or congregations. He gathers us into these earthly organizations to hear the Word of God, partake of the Sacraments, and practice fellowship with fellow believers. This last purpose of having fellowship with others is important. Like a single twig is easy to bend and break, a bound group of twigs is hard to break. Similarly, one believer is easy prey for the devil; however, congregational members help each other with encouragement and admonishment. The Holy Spirit gathering us into our congregation is a blessing that helps us as we strive against the attacks of the devil, needing the encouragement to live Christian lives.

Elect from every nation, Yet one o’er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation One Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy name she blesses, Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses, With every grace endued.

The Lutheran Hymnal 473:2

Weekend Rest Journal

1. This week, we have considered the work of the Holy Spirit bringing us and keeping us in the true faith of Jesus Christ as our Savior. This is not the only work of the Holy Spirit. Read Genesis 1:1-2. What event was the Spirit of God (or the Holy Spirit) involved in?
2. Read Luke 3:21-22. At Jesus' baptism, in what form does the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus? This event shows that the Holy Spirit descends and remains on Jesus as John the Baptist states (John 1:33).
3. This coming Sunday is Trinity Sunday, during which we consider the Triune God. Read 2 Corinthians 13:14. What does the Apostle ask in this blessing to be with each of us? Consider what the communion or fellowship of the Holy Spirit entails.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." Genesis 1:26 ESV

The Importance of Pronouns

I'll admit it. I occasionally talk to myself. I don't answer back, but I still talk to myself.

When I talk to myself, I usually use the first or second person. "Wow, it's 8:58, I better get going or I am going to be late." "Didn't you see what time it is? You better get going!" I realize that there is only one of me, but I still talk to myself.

The book of Genesis doesn't set out to convince us that God exists, but rather it assumes that because of the natural knowledge of God, we all know that God exists. If we pay attention, we note already in the first two verses of the Bible that God isn't like us. He (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth. He (Spirit of God) was hovering over the face of the waters. If we only had those two verses, we might (wrongly) conclude that there are two gods.

When God tells us about the creation of the first human beings (male and female), He reveals something about Himself. When God speaks to Himself He uses the first plural pronoun, He says, "Let US make man in our image." For while there is one God, that God is also three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the "reasonably unreasonable conclusion" we draw from simply listening to God's Word.

I can't fit God into my little round head, but I trust that He is as He reveals himself. I'm glad that He knows and loves me better than I comprehend Him!

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea.

Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!

God in Three persons, blessed Trinity!

The Lutheran Hymnal 246:4

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20 ESV

Great Commission... Great Equality

When Jesus first called a collection of fishermen, zealots, and a tax collector to follow Him and become His students, they probably had little idea what they would learn. But learn they did. They learned about God's plan to save sinners, yet one wonders what they really understood in real time on Good Friday.

After the initial shock of the resurrection, Jesus filled in the blanks and built up their understanding. The Emmaus disciples received a seminar on the Messiah they didn't really know on the way to their little village. Jesus' students had forty days with Him to be prepared for the work He was leaving them to do.

Then, before He ascended into the heavens to be given the highest position of honor and glory, He gave them and every other disciple their marching orders. As you go, make disciples. Baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These are not three different baptisms or three gods. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are the three-in-one God. In His command, Jesus placed them side by side as equals, none greater or lesser than the other. They are as the Athanasian creed declares "three incomprehensibles".

Our gracious God. The Father loved us from eternity. The Son redeemed us in the fullness of time. The Spirit made us children of God. To God alone the glory.

**Glory to God the Father, Son, And Holy Spirit, Three in One!
To Thee, O blessed Trinity, Be praise now and eternally!**

The Lutheran Hymnal 245:6

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

2 Corinthians 13:14 ESV

The Apostolic Benediction

It's sometimes referred to as the Apostolic Benediction. Even though it was put into words by the Spirit of God through one Apostle who considered himself born "out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8). This benediction wasn't written by the Apostles and neither is the Apostles' Creed for that matter, despite the old tradition that each of them contributed a phrase on Pentecost.

What is of note is that these words are plainly Trinitarian; they underscore what God has revealed about Himself. He is one God in three persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

After urging the Corinthian Christians in the last chapter of this second letter to examine themselves to see whether they were in the faith and that Jesus Christ dwelt within them; he explained that he longed to come to them to build them up in faith. They lived in a thoroughly unbelieving city, one steeped in the worship of many 'so called gods.' No doubt their friends and neighbors would speak to them of their human-like gods.

The Apostle urged them to stay together, to comfort one another. He reminded them in closing that they possessed God's undeserved love in Christ. They had evidence of God's Love in Him. They had the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. The gods of stone their neighbors promoted could help no one. The living God that they had come to know was really and truly with them and they had everything.

To the great One in Three Eternal praises be Hence evermore!

His sov'reign majesty May we in glory see

And to eternity Love and adore!

The Lutheran Hymnal 239:4

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:16-17 ESV

Put One and One and One Together

Many of you were baptized as infants, brought in arms by your parents to the baptismal font. Some of you were baptized as adults, after having been told about what the Son of God did for your salvation.

We are baptized because of our need. We are born of sinful parents and are in need of cleansing that only God can work through His Word. It was different with Jesus. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary and was without sin. He came as our representative, to live under the law and to fulfill all righteousness for us.

When Jesus of Nazareth stepped from the water of the Jordan River, the three-in-one God revealed Himself. The Spirit of God descended from the heavens in the form of a dove, a testament to Jesus' being anointed for His work and as confirmation of His person. A voice from heaven declared that Jesus of Nazareth was His Son, the Beloved One. God was well pleased in Him and had every reason to be. By faith in Him and His completed work is God well pleased with us.

We rejoice to know this God of Love, who declares us righteous by virtue of the righteous life of the Son and grants this gift to us by the working of the Spirit of God. To God alone be the glory.

Within the Jordan's crystal flood

In meekness stands the Lamb of God

And, sinless, sanctifies the wave,

Mankind from sin to cleanse and save.

The Lutheran Hymnal 131:3

God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend. Job 37:5 ESV

The Incomprehensible One

One God in three persons. This truth troubles some people.

The cults misrepresent the teaching of Scripture and claim that the Trinity is of heathen origin, teaching a religion of three gods. Like in so many other matters, they are in error. The Scripture declares both that there is one God and that God is Father, Son, and Spirit. It doesn't make sense to human reason.

Should we be surprised that the incomprehensible God doesn't fit into a neat little box to fit in a nice little cubby in our heads? Instead of changing Him to fit into our reasonably composed preconceived ideas, shouldn't we humble ourselves and admit that He is greater than our understanding?

We cannot comprehend the things that He has done. We can't fathom how He created the universe and all that is in it by simply saying, "Let there be". His infinite wisdom and power are incomprehensible.

I understand in a general way how the radio works in my vehicle. I don't have to be able to explain it with a schematic to know that it works. I don't have to comprehend my Creator to know that He made me and provides for me and preserves me and loves me.

All I need to know is that He's my King.

He's my Father. He loves me.

Defend Thy truth, O God,

and stay This evil generation;

And from the error of its way

Keep Thine own congregation.

The wicked everywhere abound

And would Thy little flock confound;

But Thou art our Salvation.

The Lutheran Hymnal 260:6

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Memorize one of these texts that shows the nature of God and look for opportunities to make it known to friends, acquaintances and family. Give thanks to God for every opportunity.
2. In Baptism and the Lord's Supper God works to cleanse of sin and to confirm the forgiveness of sins in Christ. Consider how these things look to human reason. Faith is not reasonable, but a work of God the Holy Spirit. Trust God and live confidently!
3. Consult a concordance if you have one and look for some other proofs of the Trinitarian nature of God. Take a moment to fight off the goosebumps as you realize that an incomprehensible God describes Himself to puny creatures as us because He wants us to know Him.
4. Read Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22 and John 1:32-34. Notice that God doesn't want us to miss the point of Jesus' person.
5. Read through the Athanasian Creed. Notice how careful early Christians were to go no further than Holy Scripture in describing the nature of God.

On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. Leviticus 23:5-6

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Passover commemorates when the family of Jacob officially became the nation of Israel. The tenth and final plague on Egypt was when the destroyer “passed over” the houses marked with the blood of a lamb and killed the first-born of everyone else: from the son of Pharaoh who sits on the throne, to the lowest of servants, to even cattle (see Exodus 11-12). Exodus 12:33 tells us “The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste.”

At first, it seemed that God was not listening to Israel's cries for deliverance from Egypt. In fact, the people even complained to Moses that he only made things worse. But when deliverance did come, it came quickly. That's the point of the week-long feast of Unleavened Bread that follows the Passover.

Unlike the other feasts that we will consider this week, the Passover contains unleavened bread eaten with bitter herbs. This reminds the participants of how bitter life was in Egypt. The feast of Unleavened Bread that follows it is a bit more joyful, but the Passover itself is more solemn in its memory and praise to the God who delivers.

And then Jesus came. On Maundy Thursday, Jesus and His disciples were celebrating the Passover. During the meal, Jesus took the bread and said “This is my body, given for you... This is my blood, poured out for you.” (Luke 22:19-20) Jesus' death was already set in motion. But there was no bitterness—only love. The blood of The Lamb cleanses us from all sin. Jesus upgraded the Passover to a much better New Testament sacrament!

**Draw nigh and take the body of the Lord
And drink the holy blood for you outpoured.
Offered was He for greatest and for least,
Himself the Victim and Himself the Priest.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 307:1

Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. Leviticus 23:27-28

The Day of Atonement

Today we are going to fast-forward six months, to the “seventh month.” The number seven is a holy number to Israel. Consider: the seventh day was a Sabbath day, on which Israel was to do no work or chores. The seventh year was a Sabbath year, in which fields were to get “rest.” After seven “seventh years” (every fiftieth year) came the Year of Jubilee, when slaves were to be released and property restored. So it is not surprising that the seventh month would also take on significance.

Since at that time, there were no calendars (or cell phones), each new month was introduced by the blowing of trumpets (cf. Numbers 10:10; Psalm 81:3). But the seventh month marked the end of the agricultural year, and the beginning of a new civil year (a.k.a. “Rosh Hashanah”). Thus the seventh month began with the Feast of Trumpets (see Friday’s devotion).

On the tenth day of this “seventh month” was the Day of Atonement. Leviticus chapters 16-17 spell out the regulations for priests for this day, but Leviticus 23 points out what the people were to remember—in a nut-shell: “Not all the blood of beasts On Jewish altars slain Could give the guilty conscience peace Or wash away the stain.” (TLH 156:1) They still needed a scapegoat.

And then Jesus came. On Good Friday, God laid on Him the iniquity of us all. His one New Testament sacrifice did what all the other sacrifices combined could not. His sacrifice purges the sins of the whole world! (1 John 2:2) Your sins and mine, all purged by Jesus’ blood shed on the cross. That is fantastic. It’s awesome, It’s... well, it’s Good!

**But Christ, the heavenly Lamb, Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name And richer blood than they.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 156:2

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest... You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. Leviticus 23:10,14

The Feast of Firstfruits

We are now back to the “first month” (Abib / Nisan = March or April on our calendar). In the first month the “later rains” would ripen a wheat, barley and flax harvest. As the firstborn of man and beast belonged to the Lord, so also on the sixteenth day, the people were to bring the “firstfruits” of the land to the priest. It is worth repeating (v. 14) that the people were not to eat any of their harvest until they first presented their firstfruits to the Lord.

This was a confession of faith. The God who provides the harvest will make sure that we too will get what we need. Sad to say, Israel was not always faithful in giving God the firstfruits. After Solomon, the corrupt nation neglected this feast until Hezekiah re-established it. (2 Chronicles 31:5) Nehemiah also tried to encourage this offering after the Babylonian captivity. (Nehemiah 10:35-37; 12:44)

And then Jesus came. What “firstfruits” did Jesus offer, you ask? “Easter” is the answer! During Holy Week, the Feast of Firstfruits fell on Easter Sunday! “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.” (1 Corinthians. 15:20-23 ESV) Jesus took the Feast of Firstfruits and upgraded it—as a promise to you!

May we Thy bounties thus As stewards true receive

And gladly, as Thou blessest us, To Thee our first-fruits give!

The Lutheran Hymnal 441:2

And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord. You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the Lord. Leviticus 23:15-17

The Feast of Weeks

Again with the sevens! The Sabbath was the seventh day, and after seven of those seventh days after the Feast of Firstfruits, Israel would celebrate the Feast of Weeks, sometimes called The Reaping. With the final harvest of the later grains came (or should come) thanksgiving to God. This, like the Passover, required people from all Israel to journey to Jerusalem for a big Thanksgiving feast.

This feast is perhaps somewhat unfamiliar to us because we celebrate our Harvest of Thanksgiving in November, and the fields lay barren for the winter. In Palestine, the fields lay barren during the hot summer months, so their “Thanksgiving” happens in the Spring (Sivan = May or June). Besides, the Feast of Weeks does not reflect any historical significance to the Exodus and the formation of Israel. Traditionally, the Jews use this feast to commemorate God’s giving of the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, but that doesn’t really fit with the timeline God established. So does this feast have any significance for us?

Well, Jesus came. You have surely heard of what happened “fifty days” after Easter. The Greek name “Pentecost” brings it to light. Jesus did not come to bring in a harvest of fruits and vegetables. Rather, He brought in a harvest of souls. In Acts chapter two we read about three thousand souls being added to the church in one day. And the numbers keep growing. Jesus took the Feast of Weeks and upgraded it to the harvest of souls. You are that harvest.

Even so, Lord, quickly come To Thy final Harvest-home;
Gather Thou Thy people in, Free from sorrow, free from sin,
There, forever purified, In Thy garner to abide.
Come with all Thine angels, come, Raise the glorious Harvest-home.

The Lutheran Hymnal 574:4

Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the Lord... You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.’ Leviticus 23:34,42-43

The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths)

On Tuesday (when we talked about The Day of Atonement) we mentioned briefly that each month began with trumpets, but the Seventh Month (Ethanim / Tishri) began with a Feast of Trumpets throughout the land. This feast was to present Israel before the Lord for His favor. It certainly helped the people to prepare for the great Day of Atonement (day ten). After the solemnity of the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Booths (days fifteen to twenty-two) was intended as a joyous celebration—a reminder that the people were forgiven and chosen by God. This was the third “required feast” of pilgrimage.

God gave this feast from Mt. Sinai one month after the Exodus. God supplied all their needs, as the people wandered in a desert wilderness for forty years. Today we still confess: “I’m but a stranger here, Heav’n is my home.” Even if “Danger and sorrow stand Round me on every hand;” we know that “time’s wild wintry blast Soon shall be overpast;” so we “murmur not.” (TLH 660)

And Jesus will come again. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.” This trumpet will not be used to issue in a new month, but a whole new life. Not a one-day earthly feast, but an eternal heavenly feast. If you think that what Jesus did to upgrade the Old Testament to the New Testament is impressive, just wait until you see what He does for you in the new world!

Jerusalem the golden, With milk and honey blest,
Beneath thy contemplation Sink heart and voice opprest.
I know not, oh, I know not, What joys await us there,
What radiancy of glory, What bliss beyond compare.

The Lutheran Hymnal 613:1

Weekend Rest Journal

1. In Lev 23:3 God confirms what He had stated in the 2nd Commandment: keep the Sabbath Day (or “Day of Rest”) holy! (i.e., Don’t work your job or do chores, focus rather on God’s Word.) The Jews of Jesus’ day re-interpreted this into not exerting energy.

Journal below as many circumstances as you can remember where the Jews accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath, and how Jesus responded.

2. Read: Matthew 12:1-8 and John 5:1-17. Note how Jesus responded to those accusations in merciful love.
3. In what ways do our Christian Sundays compare or contrast with Israel’s OT Sabbaths?

*Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.*

Psalm 119:105

A Light to My Path

Perhaps you are like me: you could fall down just as easily going up the stairs as going down. Some of us are prone to making clumsy mistakes like that. I also know that if I would pay more attention, I would see my surroundings and act accordingly.

The unknown psalmist of Psalm 119, inspired by the Spirit, composed a rather unique chapter of Scripture. There are twenty-two stanzas with eight verses each, by far the longest chapter of the Bible. Yet not so unique is its message, one shared throughout the collection of sixty-six books of Scripture. The message is one of love for God and His law, as well as the reminder that God's love is the love that compels Him.

Had God not revealed Himself to the world through His Word, the psalmist would not have the light he describes in verse 105. In His gracious love, God made Himself known, sent His only-begotten Son to the world in the flesh, and sent the Spirit to work through the means of grace so that the light would burn all the brighter for the path of believers.

God's Word is described as a "lamp" and a "light." One is a straightforward device that beams light. The other is the very thing we need to see. Sin may have darkened the world and left sinners grasping at nothing, but in Christ, we lay hold of salvation by faith, and we see the way clearly by the Word given to us.

The Word shows the bad. It shows us our natural selves that are dead and defeated apart from Christ. But more importantly, it shows us the gospel truth: that Jesus Christ lived, died, rose again, and reigns eternally as our Lord and Savior. It shows us that we stumbled and fumbled in vain, but He went the same path in perfect obedience, and won for us the victory.

How precious is the Book Divine, By inspiration giv'n!

Bright as a lamp its doctrines shine To guide our souls to heav'n.

The Lutheran Hymnal 285:1

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them in the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give light to them, so as to go by day and night. Exodus 13:21

A Pillar to Lead

Ancient architecture is astounding to look at. There seems to be a certain bias with each generation that the previous ones were less knowledgeable. Yet we need only look at older buildings to see that the engineers of old were formulating plans to build these structures, many of which still stand today!

Pillars have long been used to uphold the weight of certain buildings. The pillar of cloud and fire out in the wilderness certainly upheld tremendous weight as well! The Lord who delivered the children of Israel from the bondage was in this very pillar! His presence did not depart from them. He stood resolute, never abandoning His promises.

The pillar in the wilderness would lead them on the path ahead. His guidance and protection was of the utmost importance, something the Israelites would have to learn the hard way time and time again. Unfortunately we have taken those roads before too. But there is only one right path, and that is the path He is on. Fire would also beam from the pillar at night. God's presence was there to cut through the darkness, literally then and spiritually even today.

The presence of God would be fully realized in Jesus, who took on our humanity and dwelt among us. He is the Light of the world. In His own words, Jesus says, "He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (John 8:12) His light shows us the way to heaven. His light shines bright for us in the gospel through the Word and Sacrament. This pillar still leads through the wilderness of this life, and cuts through the darkness to give us His light.

Pillar of fire, thro' watches dark, Or radiant cloud by day;
 When waves would break our tossing bark,
 Our anchor and our stay:
 Word of the ever-living God, Will of His glorious Son;
 Without thee, how could earth be trod Or heaven itself be won?

The Lutheran Hymnal 291:3-4

Thus Solomon had all the furnishings made for the house of God: the altar of gold and the tables on which was the showbread; the lampstands with their lamps of pure gold, to burn in the prescribed manner in front of the inner sanctuary.

2 Chronicles 4:19-20

A Constant Light

King Solomon built the temple of the Lord down to the letter. Part of that included the “prescribed manner” mentioned in 2 Chronicles, which lays out the many details God provided for its construction. Before the building of the great temple, Israel worshiped elsewhere, and earlier on, in the Tabernacle. Even then, the Lord had certain guidelines that were to be met. It would be the dwelling place of the Most High, after all.

“And you shall command the children of Israel that they bring you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to cause the lamp to burn continually.” (Exodus 27:20) Pure olive oil would ensure that the smoke output from the lamps would be next to nothing. It would be as pure a fire as naturally possible. The lamps in the tabernacle and the temple were golden and stood in the holy place.

This constant light would be a reminder of God’s presence there. On the other side, at the Holy of Holies where none were allowed except the high priest once a year, God dwelt among His people.

When Jesus, our Immanuel, was born of Mary, God dwelt with His people. When Jesus had made the satisfactory payment for our sins, the light of the temple could reach beyond the veil which was torn in two (Mark 15:38). There is now One Mediator between God and men, “the Man Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 2:5)

The constant light shows not just the eternal light of God, but the eternal light which clearly shows the Christ. He was the God of the Tabernacle and the Temple. He remains the constant Light of the Holy Christian Church wherever she congregates in His name.

**Christ, whose glory fills the skies, Thou the true and only Light;
Sun of Righteousness, arise, Triumph o’er the shades of night,
Dayspring from on high, be near; Daystar, in my heart appear.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 359:1

Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. Isaiah 60:1-2

A Shining Light

Not everyone is a “morning” person. Some people do not like to get up early. Others cannot function until they have had their cup of coffee. Others still need to get revved up with some morning routine.

Spiritually, no one could say that they were a “morning” person. In a natural state of sin, the curtains are closed. It is a perpetual state of night. There is a tiredness that will not go away. For the congregation at his time, and for believers now, the prophet Isaiah flings open the curtains. He shows you the Light that has broken through the darkness. He shows that there is indeed life beyond the confines we sinners found ourselves in.

This promise Isaiah shares with them is a promise of the Messiah. This Messiah, who has been revealed as Jesus of Nazareth, is the Light of the world! “[God] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:13-14) It is a truth for Jew and Gentile alike.

Though the world may still have the curtains up, groggily wondering what to do next, we have the answer clearly shown to us in the Word. Isaiah says to “Arise, shine!” The Light has been given to you! “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” (John 8:12) Now reflect that light to those still in the darkness! “You are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men.” (Matthew 5:14,16)

Rise, Thou Light of Gentile Nations,
 Jesus, bright and Morning Star;
 Let Thy Word, the gladsome tidings,
 Ring out loudly near and far,
 Bringing freedom to the captives,
 Peace and comfort to the slave,
 That the heathen, free from bondage,
 May proclaim Thy power to save.

The Lutheran Hymnal 498:1

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 2 Peter 1:19

A Light to Shine in the Darkness

By definition, darkness is just the absence of light. Things are only visible if light can touch them. Have you ever been somewhere that was pitch black? It can be an eerie feeling and even unnerving.

One might be able to get used to pitch blackness, but being used to it is not a long-term solution. The same can be said of sin. For a time, one might get by. It is not permanent though. Judgment Day will come, and all will be expected to answer for their deeds.

Thanks be to God that He has revealed Himself to us through His Word! The rich, timeless Word shows us the depravity of sin, the extent that sinners fell into, and then shows the even greater extent that God went through to ensure reconciliation, forgiveness, and salvation. This prophetic Word spans generations, it includes dozens of authors, and different genres of work. Yet at the heart of the Word is the light that points to Jesus Christ, the Son of God and man, who was crucified, died, buried, and risen again! Now He reigns forevermore!

In this Word, we see the necessary picture of our Savior, which we receive by faith through the Holy Spirit. It is confirmed! It is true! Not only do we see this by faith but we can also see the creation which tells us of the glory of its Creator, and the histories of the world make mention of the One from Nazareth.

Until that glorious day when He comes again as He promised He would, we have the light of His Word to show us Him and His way. It truly is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path! (Psalm 119:105)

**We have the sure prophetic Word,
by inspiration of the Lord;
And tho' assailed on every hand,
Jehovah's Word shall ever stand.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 290:1

Weekend Rest Journal

1. What other pictures of light do we see in the Bible? What hymns use that imagery?
2. What would be some good “morning” Bible passages to wake up to each day? Do they mention light in any way? What significance does light have with the morning?
3. “Darkness is the absence of light.” Write down a few things which God’s light has revealed from darkness.

Hannah had no children ... She prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life. 1 Samuel 1:2, 10-11

Hannah: To Be or Not to Be

Parenting is a large responsibility. It is a calling from God that is to be pursued purposefully and with careful intent. It is not an exercise in vanity and self-fulfillment for the parents, but a responsibility to nurture redeemed souls. God provides insight for the parent-child relationship through prayers that are offered by parents in God's Word. The devotions this week will consider some of these "Parent Prayers."

Hannah fervently desired a child. Society's view toward children was different in those days, so Hannah experienced mockery and ridicule since she was barren. But it was neither mere societal influence nor selfish desire that led Hannah to pray for a son. Hannah's prayer came from the intense desire to have a child whom she could raise to be a faithful servant of God. Hannah would "give him up" at a young age, if only she would be granted a son to bear and nurture.

Determining "will I or won't I" be a parent, or the number of children I will have is not a "me" decision. It is a God decision which we commend to His wise, gracious, and good will. As with every other prayer, God promises to answer this parent prayer according to His love; and if He does not give a child, He will provide other ways of service to Him and give other joys.

Once Hannah poured out her heart to the Lord, bringing her burdens and requests, she "went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad" (1 Samuel 1:18).

**To Hannah, praying childless Before Your throne of grace,
You gave a son and called him To serve before Your face.
Grant us her perseverance; Lord, teach us how to pray
And trust in Your deliv'rance When darkness hides our way.
Amen.**

Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel ... Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her to the house of the Lord in Shiloh. And the child was young. Then they slaughtered a bull, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, "For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore, as long as he lives he shall be lent to the Lord." So they worshiped the Lord there. 1 Samuel 1:20, 24-28 (alt)

Hannah: Thanksgiving

Tears may flow when parents send their child to the first day of school. These teary-eyed goodbyes are one thing, but leaving a three-to-four-year-old son in the care of a priest far from home to only see him once each year thereafter? Really? There's no reason to believe that Hannah did not shed tears when she left young Samuel in Eli's care. Yet, any tears of sorrow were overcome by the joy of simply being a mother. "Hannah prayed and said: 'My heart rejoices in the Lord; My horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, Because I rejoice in Your salvation. No one is holy like the Lord, For there is none besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God.'" (1 Samuel 2:1-2)

Notice that Hannah's song is not about her, nor about choices she made. It is one hundred percent a song of praise and honor that declares who the Lord is, what He has done, and how her joy is connected to Him, rooted in Him, and flows from Him. Hannah's parenting prayer was thanksgiving and praise to God.

Just imagine what the effect would be if all of our parenting tasks began, continued, and ended with thanksgiving to the Lord. Imagine if parents always looked beyond themselves to pursue what nurtures their children's souls. The joy of thanksgiving rooted in the heart enables parents to make hard decisions and sacrifices even while teary rain falls from their eyes.

**Happy the home where prayer is heard,
And praise is everywhere,
Where parents love the sacred Word,
And its true wisdom share.**

Worship and Rejoice 607:3

When a spirit-possessed boy saw Jesus, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood ... if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” Mark 9:17-24

The Unnamed Father: Parental Wisdom

Some parental decisions are straightforward, simple, easy. Others are agonizing. All are important. Some decisions might seem trivial, but every decision a parent makes has an impact on his child. God Himself tells parents, “Train up a child in the way he should go” (Proverbs 22:6) and nurture him “in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Parenting is a gospel ministry to redeemed souls that includes providing earthly support. When we consider this, we may well say with the apostle Paul, “who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:16)

The father with the spirit-infested boy desperately wanted his son to be healed for both their sakes—have compassion on us and help us, was the father’s plea. When Jesus told the man, “all things are possible to him who believes” the man instantly knew his insufficiency and offered the parent prayer: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

Parents are flawed, broken, and weak sinners just like their children. Yet they have been given a tremendous responsibility. They are called to lead, make decisions, nurture, and show the Savior to their children. There is just so much! The wise parent diligently goes to the Word of God to gain a heart of wisdom and to pray, “Lord I have foolishness, give me wisdom. Lord, I’m scared, give me courage. Lord, I am confused, give me clarity. Lord, have compassion and help us. I believe, help my unbelief.”

**Christ Jesus, teacher sent from God, through whom all blessings flow,
You are the wisdom that we seek, to whom else shall we go?
You have the word that sets us free to give us life eternally.**

Christian Worship 755:1-2 (adapted)

Job's sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day ... And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually. Job 1:4-5

Job: Spiritual Welfare

Parents are spiritual gate-keepers for their children's souls. Parents cannot believe for their children, but they can bring them to the cleansing waters of baptism and nurture new faith with early and regular instruction in God's Word. Parents cannot repent for their children's sin, but they can use God's Word to reveal sin and point children to the Savior who has redeemed them from their sin. Parents cannot take the place of their children on Judgment Day, but they can prepare them for that day by modeling Christ's love in words and actions alongside instruction in God's Word. Parents do this out of love for their children—wanting their children to spend eternity in the presence of Jesus. They do this in faithful love toward God who has given parents the responsibility to “watch out for their [children's] souls, as those who must give account” (Hebrews 13:17).

Parents' concern for the spiritual welfare of their children does not expire when a child turns eighteen. Job is a model for this ongoing interest in his children's spiritual well-being. Even when they are adults, he still offers sacrifices and prays for them. There is indeed a time when there is no more “tucking-in” at night and children leave home. However, parenting continues in the realm of prayer, counsel, encouragement, and if needed, correction. This is something that brothers and sisters in Christ do for one another regardless of earthly family ties, so how much more should it not be true in a parent-child relationship?

Lord, bless Your Word to all the young;
 let them, your truth possessing,
 Declare Your praise with heart and tongue,
 their faith in Christ confessing.
 From birth Your firm embrace has held them in Your grace.
 Baptized into Your name, redeemed and free from blame,
 As Your dear children keep them.

Christian Worship 762:1

Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, “Go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac.” ... The servant arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. And he made his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water. ... Then he said, “O Lord God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day. ... Let it be that the young woman to whom I say, ‘Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink’—let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac.” And it happened, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah came out with her pitcher on her shoulder. Then Rebekah did and said all that the servant had asked of God.

Genesis 24:1-4, 10-12,14-15 (alt)

Abraham: Spouse

Abraham’s servant offered the “parent prayer” at the well, but he was acting on Abraham’s behalf, asking for the Lord’s guidance and blessing in choosing a wife for Isaac. The servant understood the importance of what he was doing. He was finding a life-long partner for Isaac—a wife through whom the Lord’s promise would be fulfilled leading to a great nation and eventually the Messiah. The Lord needed to lead and bless this endeavor!

It is hard to imagine a greater decision in one’s life than whom to marry. The bond and blessing of having a Christian spouse is modeled and eclipsed by our Savior’s relationship with sinners like us. (Ephesians 5:22ff)

How could a parent not pray for his child to find a faithful spouse? Or, if God’s will is not to give a spouse, then to pray for their children’s purity and service in their singleness. (1 Corinthians 7:7-9) While parents are nurturing their son or daughter, somewhere other parents are doing the same for their child’s future spouse. The parental prayer is for the child, for the future spouse, and for the parents who raise them.

**Lord, if You are not the builder, Then the house is built in vain,
For a home without Your presence Shall without true love remain.**

**Yet when You within a marriage Come and dwell with grace divine,
There You fill the empty vessels, Changing water into wine.**

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read all of 1 Samuel 1:1-2:10 to review the full account of Hannah and Samuel. As you read Hannah's whole prayer in chapter two, notice how the same theme continues—praise and thanks and glory to the one true God.
2. Read 1 Kings 3:5-9. Solomon offered a “king's prayer” as he undertook the leadership of God's chosen people, Israel. Compare the responsibility that Solomon felt and the prayer he offered to the responsibility and prayers of parents.
3. Read Genesis 24 which is the account of Isaac and Rebekah's courtship as God brought husband and wife together. Reflect on how God guided the whole process and how Rebekah and Isaac humbly submitted to God's will. Also consider how the same attitudes, trust, and demeanor can be carried into today's dating and courtship practices.
4. We heard only five parent prayers this week. Make a list of additional topics that you as parents/grandparents can add to your prayer list for your children/grandchildren. Or, as children/grandchildren what are topics about which you would like your parents/grandparents to pray for you? Share the lists.

“For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD.” So they worshiped the LORD there. 1 Samuel 1:27-28

The Blessing Of Godly Parents

Samuel was a faithful prophet of God. He was born at a spiritual low point in Israel’s history when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 21:25) God, in His grace, saw to it that Samuel had godly parents. Every year his father, Elkanah, took the whole family to Shiloh where he would worship and sacrifice to the Lord at the tabernacle. Samuel’s mother, Hannah, had been unable to have children. She asked God to let her have a son. If He would, she promised to dedicate her son to a life of service to Him. God gave Elkanah and Hannah a son, Samuel. They brought him up learning God’s Word and learning about the promised Savior. After a few years his parents took him to Shiloh where they presented him to the Lord.

Scripture admonishes fathers, “Bring [your children] up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4) Moses told God’s people, “These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7) Through regular church and Sunday School attendance, family devotions, and talking to their children, parents are responsible for their children learning God’s Word and learning about their salvation in Jesus.

How many of us came to know Jesus as our Savior because our parents brought us to church and Sunday School and talked to us about Him? What a blessing God gave Samuel in his godly parents. What a blessing God gives in our godly parents.

Oh, blest the house, whate’er befall,
Where Jesus Christ is all in all!
Yea, if He were not dwelling there,
How dark and poor and void it were!

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 625:1. 4

*Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times,
“Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for Your
servant hears.” 1 Samuel 3:10*

Listen To God’s Word

When Samuel was a boy, few of his fellow Jews wanted to hear God’s Word. It was rare that God spoke directly to anyone as He had done long before with Moses. Samuel had learned about God and heard His Word from his parents. But he “did not yet know the Lord,” that is, he had never heard God speak to him directly. One night as Samuel was serving in the tabernacle, God called him. Samuel mistakenly thought that the priest Eli had called him. This happened a few more times until Eli told Samuel to reply to God, “Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening,” which Samuel did. God spoke to Samuel, and Samuel listened attentively to God’s words.

God speaks to us through the Bible. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” (2 Timothy 3:16) The Bible is the Word of God. When we hear or study the Bible, we need to humbly, attentively listen to what God says. “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105) Through His Word, God teaches us right from wrong and shows us the way to go in life. “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” (Romans 1:16) Through His Word, God teaches us about our sinfulness and our salvation by faith in Jesus who died for our sins on the cross and rose again. God tells us, “My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them.” (Proverbs 4:20-22)

Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.
Speak, O Lord, Thy servant heareth,
To Thy Word I now give heed;
Life and spirit Thy Word beareth,
All Thy Word is true indeed.
Death’s dread power in me is rife;
Jesus, may Thy Word of life
Fill my soul with love’s strong fervor
That I cling to Thee forever.

The Lutheran Hymnal 296:1

The Lord was with Samuel and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord.

1 Samuel 3:19-20

God Gives Us Faithful Ministers

What a blessing God had given His people in Samuel. Before Samuel, there were very few men who faithfully taught God's Word. Scripture says that "the Lord was with [Samuel] and let none of his words fall to the ground." (1 Samuel 3:19) God spoke to Samuel, and Samuel spoke God's words to the people.

God tells ministers, "He who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully." (Jeremiah 23:28) God doesn't want ministers preaching and teaching what they think. God wants ministers to preach and teach what He says in the Bible; no more and no less. As Paul told Timothy, "Preach the Word!" (2 Timothy 4:2)

Paul told the Corinthians, "I did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified... that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." (1 Corinthians 2:1-2, 5) Paul didn't try to impress his hearers with how smart he was or how well he could speak. Paul preached and taught God's Word. Paul wanted his hearers to place their faith in God's Word alone. He wanted them to trust in Jesus Christ alone, who sacrificed His life on the cross for their forgiveness and salvation.

Thank You, Lord, for giving us ministers who faithfully preach and teach Your Word!

Preach you the Word and plant it home
 To those who like or like it not,
 The Word that shall endure and stand
 When flow'rs and mortals are forgot.
 Preach you the Word and plant it home
 And never faint; the Harvest-Lord
 Who gave the sower seed to sow
 Will watch and tend His planted Word.

Worship Supplement 781:1.5

Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. ... But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice. 1 Samuel 8:1,3

Teach Your Children About The Lord

Samuel was not a failure as a father. He was a sincere believer who faithfully walked in God's ways. He raised his sons to believe in the Lord and walk in His ways, too. What a heartbreak it was for Samuel to see his sons turn their hearts away from God and walk in the ways of sin.

Of all the things we can do for our children, the greatest is to teach them about Jesus their Savior and His Word. Our greatest hope for our children is that they believe in Jesus, walk in His ways through life, and go to heaven one day. It can happen that in spite of all our efforts and prayers as parents, our children turn away from God. This does not mean we are failures as parents. As we have opportunity, we still witness to our children. We keep praying for our children.

God tells parents, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6) God can restore someone who has strayed from Him. "The Lord is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) We love our wayward children. The Lord loves our wayward children even more. We want our wayward children to return to the Lord. The Lord wants it even more. As it says in the story of the prodigal son's return, "When he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." (Luke 15:20)

Lord, bring our wayward children back to You in repentance and faith. Amen.

So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him!" But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:6-7

God Sees The Heart

God sent Samuel to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be the future king. Samuel looked at the brothers' outward appearances. God didn't, telling Samuel, "the Lord looks at the heart." God chose David, calling him "a man after My own heart, who will do all My will." (Acts 13:22) God had given David a believing heart that was devoted to Him. He repented over his sins and trusted in God's forgiveness. The Spirit led David to faithfully lead God's people in His ways.

God doesn't look at outward appearances. What God looks for in us are hearts that believe in Him and are devoted to Him. The faith God looks for in us, He works in us. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God..." (Ephesians 2:8) God tells us, "I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart. ... I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

Jesus, thank You for being so devoted to us that You gave Your life to save us. Give us believing hearts that are devoted to You, that repent of our sins and trust in Your forgiveness, and that are motivated to lead others to You.

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my will, and make it Thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart; it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne.

The Lutheran Hymnal 400:1, 5

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read Deuteronomy 6:5-9 and Ephesians 6:1-4. How can parents apply what God says here in raising their children?
2. Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17 and Psalm 119:105. What is God telling us about His Word in these verses?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. What does God expect of His ministers, and of His people who hear them?
4. Read Luke 15. What comfort does God offer parents whose children have strayed from Him?
5. Read Ezekiel 36:25-27. What assurances is God giving us here?

I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High. Psalm 9:2 NIV

Rejoicing in Freedom

My wife and I enjoy taking our boat out on the local lake over the Fourth of July weekend. Boats are festively decorated with flags and banners, patriotic songs are blaring from boats and shore, people are laughing and enjoying various water activities. As darkness falls, we look to the sky and see an awesome display of fireworks synchronized to music playing over the radio. It is a fine way to celebrate the many freedoms we have in our nation. It is a good time to remind our kids (and now grandkids) how blessed they are to live in our great nation.

The shepherds of old also looked to the sky with great awe when an angel appeared to them with the great news of the freedom they now had through the birth of the Christ Child. “I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!” (Luke 2:10-11) The sky was then filled with an awesome display of angels, synchronized in “praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:13-14)

These shepherds recognized with joy that this was the promised Savior come to set them free from the bondage of sin and death. We are told that with joy they “made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.” (Luke 2:17-18)

Just as we recognize the blessings of living in a free nation, let us recognize the great gifts of freedom won for us by Christ, and like the shepherds, go and spread the good news of freedom through Christ!

Love caused Your incarnation, Love brought You down to me;
Your thirst for my salvation Procured my liberty.
O love beyond all telling, That led You to embrace,
In love all love excelling, Our lost and fallen race!

The Lutheran Hymnal 58:4

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

The Cost of Freedom

If you wonder about the cost of our nation's freedom, all you need to do is walk through Arlington National Cemetery in our nation's capital. Buried there are thousands of men and women who served in our nation's armed forces. This cemetery is a reminder that our freedom was won and continues to exist at a great cost. Special attention is given throughout the cemetery to show the high value we Americans place on the sacrifices these men and women made for our liberty.

If you wonder about the cost to free you from Satan's tyranny, all you need to do is look at this verse. You are loved so much that God was willing to nail His own Son to a cross to gain you back from Satan's clutches. God didn't do this because we were people who deserved this gift of freedom, but He acted in love "while we were still sinners". What a comfort this is for us who are troubled (or enslaved) with worry, temptations and sin. Jesus was willing to sacrifice Himself to free us from Satan's prison, despite our sinfulness!

This freedom from Satan's power comforts us as we continue dealing with worry, temptations, and sin. "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 4:6-7)

What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!
 What a privilege to carry Ev'rything to God in prayer!
 Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear,
 All because we do not carry Ev'rything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
 We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer!
 Can we find a Friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share?
 Jesus knows our ev'ry weakness-- Take it to the Lord in prayer.

The Lutheran Hymnal 457:1,2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12:2

Transformation Through Freedom

Foreigners who apply for citizenship in America quickly and happily adjust to their dream of being able to express their opinions without fear of being thrown into prison, to practice their faith without fear of government reprisal, to drive hundreds of miles without checkpoints or passports, etc. Becoming a citizen of America changes these people from living in fear to a joyful and peaceful enjoyment of life.

Likewise, becoming a citizen of the Kingdom of God transforms people: The economic or emotional worries that threaten to overwhelm us disappear when we realize God's promises to never leave or forsake us are true. Those who are locked in an addiction to sin find strength to recover through the Holy Spirit. The guilt and shame over past sin is gone, trusting in our loving Lord, who willingly sacrificed Himself to redeem us.

In Christ, we find freedom from the bondage of sin, fear, and condemnation. This spiritual freedom allows us to live in joy and peace, knowing that we are no longer slaves but children of God. We trust that the Holy Spirit, dwelling within us, will provide guidance, strength, and power to live a life that honors God. The Lord is with us through our struggles of the flesh!

As citizens of the Kingdom of God and having seen the freedoms we now have, we no longer want to be conformed to the ways of the world, but joyfully show by our actions and words the glories of God. We furthermore look forward to our heavenly home, where our bodies will be fully transformed.

O Lord, we bless Thy gracious heart,
For Thou Thyself dost heal our smart
Thro' Christ, our Savior's precious blood,
Which for the sake of sinners flowed.

Give us Thy Spirit, peace afford
Now and forever, gracious Lord.
Preserve to us till life is spent
Thy holy Word and Sacrament.

The Lutheran Hymnal 321:3-4

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. I Corinthians 15:58 ESV

Responsibilities of Freedom

Along with our freedoms, the United States constitution confers certain responsibilities upon us. It is important for all of us to have a firm understanding of this document. The right to vote is the important responsibility to ensure the proper leaders govern our cities, states, and nation. The right for a free press is the responsibility that we fully research and publicize the issues that concern us. The right for free speech is the responsibility to point out abuses in our communities and nation. The right for peaceful assembly is the responsibility to make known our concerns to elected officials. If we do not responsibly carry out our responsibilities, we could very well lose the freedoms so many people have sacrificed to secure for us.

The apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Christians in Corinth, reminds them (and us) of our responsibilities as citizens of the Kingdom of God: He begins our text: “Be steadfast, immovable” – we are to be spiritually grounded in the Word of God, have a firm understanding of it. We are not to give in to the ways and standards of the world or temptations of Satan, which would cause us to lose the freedom of salvation for which Christ sacrificed himself.

Paul then reminds us to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord”. Our responsibility as citizens of the Kingdom of God, is to work uncompromisingly as the Lord has gifted us and leads us in this life. Until the Lord returns there are souls to reach and ministries of every sort to be performed. We are responsible for our money, time, energy, talents, gifts, bodies, and minds, and we should use them to contribute to the work of the Lord. We do this joyfully, “knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain”.

**Let me be Thine forever, Thou faithful God and Lord;
Let me forsake Thee never Nor wander from Thy Word.
Lord, do not let me waver, But give me steadfastness,
And for such grace forever Thy holy name I'll bless.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 334:1

Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Proverbs 30:5 ESV

Preserving Freedom

Every beach trip, my wife insists on going through the routine of putting on sunscreen. Me, being the “manly person” that I am, I resist steadfastly: “A little sun won’t hurt me!” Later, as I carefully pull the shirt off my sunburnt shoulders, I realize my error. As I’ve aged and had skin lesions removed several times, I’ve realized that I should not have taken my health for granted. Fortunately, the surgeons have been able to remove these cancerous growths before their tentacles of death spread to infect my entire body.

In the midst of our nation’s current election season, we likewise realize the danger of taking our freedoms for granted. We know that maintaining our freedoms requires vigilance, responsibility, and active participation in the democratic process.

It is even more imperative that we do not take the freedoms won for us through Christ for granted. The powerful forces of evil (Ephesians 6:10-12) want us to think that evil isn’t bad and that we are strong enough to resist. They plant small lesions of unbelief into our heart, hoping they will spread their deadly tentacles throughout our entire spiritual body.

This is why it is important to regularly hear and read God’s Word. His Word creates a protective shield of faith from Satan’s attacks. This same Word of God also acts as a surgeon’s blade to cut out any cancerous unbelief before its deadly tentacles spread. “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit.” (Hebrews 4:12 NIV) In Matthew 18:15-18, Jesus describes this process.

How blessed we are that God, who not only gives us the shield of His Word to protect our souls from the attacks of evil, also through that same Word works in our hearts to remove evil before it destroys our souls.

Arm these Thy soldiers, mighty Lord,
With shield of faith and Spirit’s sword.
Forth to the battle may they go
And boldly fight against the foe.

Come, ever-blessed Spirit, come
And make Thy servants’ hearts Thy home.
May each a living temple be
Hallowed forever, Lord, to Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 332:1,3

Weekend Rest Journal

1. How do you traditionally celebrate our nation's independence? Can you think of any corresponding ways we can publicly celebrate our freedom from sin's power?
2. There is a tradition in many churches to spend a few moments after receiving Holy Communion to consider the cost Jesus paid for our salvation. During Sunday's service, find places in the liturgy which also remind us of that cost.
3. The Lord promises that the work we do in His name will not be in vain. Can you think of some people in your life who can use a comforting or encouraging word about the freedom won for them by Christ? Speak to them, knowing that the Holy Spirit is working through you.
4. Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the freedoms we enjoy in our earthly citizenship and, more importantly, in our relationship with Christ. Help us to appreciate the responsibilities that come with these freedoms and to live in a manner that reflects the love and grace we have received. May we cherish the temporal freedoms while always remembering the eternal freedom secured for us through the sacrifice of your Son, Jesus Christ. In His name, we pray. Amen.

Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." Luke 11:1

Jesus Teaches How to Pray

During Jesus' ministry, one of His disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray. In response, Jesus gave what has become known as the Lord's Prayer. The evangelists Matthew and Luke recorded this prayer for us. In Matthew, it reads, «In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil (or the evil one). For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.» (Mt. 6:9-13; Lk. 11:2-4)

Martin Luther said concerning this prayer, "The Lord's Prayer is a prayer above all prayers, the greatest of all prayers, which has been taught by the greatest Master of all, in which all spiritual and bodily trouble is comprehended and which is the strongest consolation in all temptations, tribulations, and in the last hour."

When we use this prayer, we observe that a majority of the petitions are devoted to spiritual things and a lesser number to earthly things. With this arrangement, Jesus gives us a lesson on priorities. It reminds us what Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:33)

The Lord's Prayer is so full of meaning and covers all the many things we may want or need. It will be good for us to review what Jesus is teaching us in the coming week.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech that infants' lips can try;

Prayer the sublimest strains that reach The Majesty on high.

The Lutheran Hymnal 454:3

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Romans 8:14-16

The Address of the Lord's Prayer

In Jesus' instruction concerning His prayer, He teaches us to direct it to our heavenly Father.

It is a miracle of God's grace that we have the privilege to pray to Him and call Him our Father. While God is the Creator of everyone, not all people are able to address Him as their Father, because humankind in their natural state is outside God's family. Jesus paid the adoption price through His sacrificial blood on the cross and the Holy Spirit created faith in our hearts. Because of this, we have been made sons and daughters of God's family and can address Him as our Father.

How is it that Jesus would have us direct this prayer to the heavenly Father? In the letter of James, we learn that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." (1:17) As King of kings and Lord of lords who oversees everything and governs in heaven and on earth, our Father is the source of every good and perfect gift that we need for our body and soul.

As this prayer starts out with the words "Our Father", we understand that the Lord's Prayer is not an individual prayer, but rather one offered by all believers throughout the world at numerous times and on different occasions. We are not only praying for ourselves but also for fellow believers, as well as for all others whom God the Father would bless with His grace and mercy.

Our Father, Thou in heav'n above,
 Who biddest us to dwell in love,
 As brethren of one family, to cry in ev'ry need to Thee,
 Teach us no thoughtless words to say,
 but from our inmost heart to pray.

Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 458:1

Hallowed be Your name. Matthew 6:9b

The First Petition: Hallowed Be Your Name

In this petition, we are asking our heavenly Father that His name be hallowed. The word “Hallowed” (Greek word *hagiazō*) has the meanings: setting apart as sacred to God or set apart for a divine, saving purpose, to regard as sacred, make holy, consecrate. With this understanding, we are praying to God in the First Petition of the Lord’s Prayer to aid us in keeping His name holy among us. So then, what does the name of God include? It is not only the names by which God is known, but also everything that He has revealed about Himself and His precious truths recorded in the Bible.

In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther gives us this helpful explanation concerning this petition: “‘Heavenly Father, help us in every way so that Your name may be holy.’ ‘But what does it mean to pray that His name may be holy? Is it not holy already?’ Answer, ‘Yes, it is always holy in its nature, but in our use it is not holy. Now, here is a great need that we ought to be most concerned about. This name should have its proper honor; it should be valued holy and grand as the greatest treasure and sanctuary that we have. As godly children we should pray that God’s name, which is already holy in heaven, may also be and remain holy with us upon earth and in all the world.’”

“‘But how does it become holy among?’ Answer, as plainly as it can be said: ‘When both our doctrine (teaching) and life are godly and Christian.’ Since we call God our Father in this prayer, it is our duty always to act and behave ourselves as godly children, that He may not receive shame, but honor and praise from us.’”

**Thy name be hallowed.
 Help us, Lord, in purity to keep Thy Word,
 That to the glory of Thy name
 we walk before Thee free from blame.
 Let no false doctrine us pervert; all poor; deluded souls convert.
 Amen.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 458:2

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." John 18:36-37

The Second Petition: Your Kingdom Come

In the second petition, Jesus instructs us to pray for the coming of God's kingdom.

The question is, what is the kingdom of God? In Jesus' day, there were many who mistakenly believed that the kingdom of God was an earthly one. Jesus dispelled this falsehood by declaring that His kingdom is not of this world. Rather, it is a spiritual one made up of believers in whose hearts the Lord reigns through His Word.

How does the kingdom of God come? Luther writes in his Large Catechism: "For the coming of God's kingdom to us happens in two ways: (a) here in time through the Word and faith (Matthew 13), and (b) in eternity forever through revelation (Luke 19:11; 1 Peter 1:4-5)."

The second petition is a plea we make for all believers, as well as for unbelievers. We petition God to make it possible for the kingdom of God to continue to come to us by enabling us to turn to the Lord each day with a penitent and believing heart so that we remain in the faith to the very end. This petition is also a mission prayer, beseeching the Lord to extend His kingdom by bringing more and more to faith through His powerful Word. Finally, we are praying that God's eternal kingdom comes on the last day of this world so that by His grace we may enjoy the everlasting bliss of heaven.

Thy kingdom come. Thine let it be in time and in eternity.
 Let Thy good Spirit e'er be nigh
 our hearts with graces to supply.
 Break Satan's pow'r, defeat his rage;
 preserve Thy Church from age to age. Amen

The Lutheran Hymnal 458:3

God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:3b,4.

The Third Petition: Your Will Be Done On Earth as It is In Heaven

Since none of us fully know the mind of God and since His ways are past finding out (cf. Romans 11:33,34), are we able to know what God's will for us is? The short answer is, Yes! Holy Scripture is full of revelations that make known God's will for us. The Bible passage above bears this out. God's will for us and all people is that we believe in Jesus as our Savior and thus become partakers of salvation. In God's governance of our lives in good times and in bad, His uppermost purpose is our eternal welfare. The apostle Paul testifies in Romans, "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." (8:28)

It is important for us to keep in mind these truths concerning God's providential care in our lives so that we do not lose heart or start to question God's love for us when He allows or sends us trials or tribulations. Then we will be able to say to God, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The devil, the unbelieving world, and our own sinful flesh do not want God's will to be done in our lives. And so, they will make every effort to dissuade us from accepting His will. Instead, they would have us reject God's will and God Himself so that we are separated from Him and lose our part in the eternal kingdom of God.

Because of this opposition to God's will, we need to keep in mind how Jesus was willing to accept God's will, even His eternal will for Jesus to die on the cross for our eternal redemption. By accepting God's will and carrying it out, Jesus defeated the spiritual enemies of our souls. Through the redeeming love of God in Christ we are empowered to pray "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven".

"The will of God is always best and shall be done forever..."

The Lutheran Hymnal 517:1a

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Philippians 2:1-2

Single-minded

If someone is described as “single-minded”, it means that they are determined. That person’s mind has one thought, one drive, one goal that it must complete. Being single-minded can be a positive or a negative trait. It depends on the goal.

Jesus was single-minded when it came to winning your salvation. After the transfiguration He turned His full attention toward that goal. “He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:51) This is not to say that He was eager to face the cross. But He was certainly determined to fulfill the Father’s will for you and for me.

A person can become single-minded easily enough. But getting multiple people on the same page is hard. Every person has his or her own goals. To get a group of people to have the same united goal can be challenging.

Here, Paul implores the Philippian congregation to have the same goal. What is that goal? That all have the same mindset of love. That was the same mindset Jesus had when He went to the cross. He was focused by love. Focused by love for His Father and love for you. Christians are to share in that same love. This does not come naturally from our sinful natures. But it does come naturally to us by faith. We can all have the same goal. That goal is love. Love that comes from our Savior, which we show to others. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us this same mind. What a loving God we have! He loves us, unites us in love, and allows us to love others. May God empower us all to be single-minded in love!

So may we join Thy name to bless,
 Thy grace adore, Thy power confess,
 From sin and strife to flee.
 One is our calling, one our name,
 The end of all our hopes the same,
 A crown of life with Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 412:2

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4

Lowliness of Mind

Is it a good thing or a bad thing to be “different”? Most people don’t want to be different. We like to fit in. We don’t like standing out. But aren’t we all different? We all have strengths and weaknesses. We all have different personalities. Some may be more similar than others, but every single person is different and unique.

Paul’s whole point in these verses of Philippians 2 is that we, as Christians, need to be similarly different. We need to be of the same mind, as was pointed out in yesterday’s devotion. But that same mind is different than the mindset of the world. Christians naturally stick out. We are different in how we live, how we talk, and how we carry ourselves. But here, Paul also says that we stand out differently even by the way that we think.

How are we to think differently? Paul says here that we are not to think in ways of selfish ambition, in getting ahead in life. We are also not supposed to think out of conceit, that is in pride or vanity. Christians are not to put themselves first. Rather, we are to have “lowliness of mind.”

This can be challenging. This lowliness of mind does come naturally to us through faith. God gives you the gift and ability to put others ahead of yourself. This ability that you have been given is based on His love for you! He allows you to love your neighbor as yourself. That is a mindset that can only flow out of us from the love of Christ. To the world, Christians look different and think differently. But it is truly a blessing to be similarly different through Christ!

Thou sacred Love, grace on us bestow,
Set our hearts with heavenly fire aglow
That with hearts united we love each other,
Of one mind, in peace with every brother.
Lord, have mercy!

The Lutheran Hymnal 231:3

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. Philippians 2:5-7 ESV

Christ Minded

When I was growing up, there was a popular acronym commonly seen on bracelets and other articles of clothing. The acronym was “WWJD”, which stood for “What Would Jesus Do?”. I think the goal of WWJD was to get Christians to try to think about what Jesus would do in the various situations in which they would find themselves. It was meant to adjust the Christian’s mindset, which is admirable.

But one of the problems with WWJD is that we don’t always know what Jesus would do. In addition, when we examine Jesus’ life, we see that He often did things that we don’t do. But isn’t that the beauty of the gospel? We failed to do what God’s holy law required, but Jesus fulfilled the whole law on our behalf. He did it willingly for us all!

WWJD can be a good thought. But it’s often the wrong question to ask. It’s presumptuous to think that we would know what Jesus would do. Don’t be guided by what you think He might’ve done. Don’t wonder, “what would Jesus do”? Instead, ask, “WDJD”, that is, “what did Jesus do?” Look to what He did! Did Jesus feel slighted as He served sinful men? No, He delighted in serving His Father and others. Let this be our mindset—one that puts God and others first. Take comfort and motivation from the fact that Jesus always did what was right. Serving wasn’t beneath Jesus. It’s not beneath you either. We aim to have His mindset. He Himself will empower you to serve out of the love that He has shown to you!

**My heart abounds in lowliness,
My soul with love is glowing,
And gracious words my lips express,
With meekness overflowing.
My heart, My mind, My strength, My all,
To God I yield, on Him I call.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 421:3

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Philippians 2:8

Obedient Minded

Have you ever heard of “Obedience School”? It’s where you take your dog for training in order that it becomes more compliant and receptive to commands. Not every dog has to go there. All dogs will learn a certain level of obedience on their own. But if you want a dog to serve a special purpose, training is required. If the dog is intended to become a K-9, a seeing eye dog, or even a hunting dog, then they need special training.

Perhaps it’s a little degrading to compare ourselves to dogs, but isn’t the comparison warranted? When Jesus tested the Canaanite’s woman’s faith, He told her, «It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.» She responded, «Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.» Jesus remarked, «O woman, great is your faith!» (Matthew 15:26-28)

When it comes to us having the servant’s mind, no doubt we also require training. To obtain this mindset, we must look to THE Servant. Look at Jesus. Look at how He humbled Himself to serve us! He became obedient to the point of death. And not only death, but crucifixion! He was completely obedient to the will of His Father. It was the Father’s will that His Son would die to save us.

How do we learn obedience? From the Word of God. The Law shows us the rules and the consequences. It tells us all of the ways in which we have failed to obey. But then we see the Gospel. It shows us our obedient Savior, who actively did all that the Law required and who passively suffered and died for us. He was always obedient, and we are able to learn obedience through Him.

**For us, by wickedness betrayed,
For us, in crown of thorns arrayed,
He bore the shameful cross and death;
For us He gave His dying breath.**

Worship Supplement 760:4

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. Philippians 2:9-11

Mindful of Confession

Here we see what the servant's mind means for THE Servant. Here we see what Christ's obedience and humility earned Him. The glory belongs to Him alone. The name that is above every name is Jesus Christ. He gives us a part of that name. We are Christians. We are a part of the name that saves. «Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.» (Acts 4:12)

Peter's confession in Acts 4 is our confession as well. That Jesus is who He confessed that He was. «I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.» (John 14:6) He is the One and only Savior. He is the only way to heaven.

What you say about Jesus says a lot about you. If you say that He is just some pious teacher, or that He was just someone who only talked about love, that is not enough. The world has seen other "pious" and "loving" teachers before. Jesus is more than that. He is true God and true Man. He is my Savior, the sufficient payment for my sins.

What we say about Jesus says a lot about our God. Flesh and blood have not revealed who He is to us, but only His heavenly Father. It is only by the Holy Spirit that we are able to confess that He is Lord. When He returns, all will confess what we confess, to the glory of God. May He ever keep us mindful of this glorious confession.

At the name of Jesus, Every knee shall bow,
 Every tongue confess Him King of glory now,
 'Tis the Father's pleasure, We should call Him Lord,
 Who from the beginning, Was the mighty Word.

Worship Supplement 763:1

In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet. Zechariah 1:1

Zechariah: Prophet of the Passion

Zechariah is one of the twelve minor prophets of the Old Testament. They were called “minor” prophets because of the short length of their books. Zechariah and Haggai were sent to encourage the Jews who returned from the Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

For hundreds of years God’s people had worshiped in a tent church called the Tabernacle. When King David was not permitted to build a permanent structure, his son, King Solomon, built a magnificent temple on the temple mount. After Solomon died, God’s people departed from the ways of the Lord.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah refused to listen to the Lord’s prophets. So the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and took the people to Babylon. God had promised that the Messiah-King would come from the tribe of Judah. So after 70 years of captivity, God brought his people back to the land promised to Abraham. In 537 BC, Cyrus King of Persia decreed that the Jews could go back to their land and even gave them the gold and silver and things from Solomon’s Temple to rebuild the Temple.

Only 43,360 people returned. They were to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. We cannot imagine the sight of the desolation of Jerusalem and the ruins of the Temple that they saw when they came back. However, they got busy building their own houses while facing opposition from the surrounding nations. For twenty years no work was done on rebuilding the temple. So the Lord sent Zechariah and Haggai to call his people to repentance and to rebuild his House. Remarkably, the temple was rebuilt in five years (516 BC).

Zechariah goes on in his book to assure God’s people that the Lord of Armies would protect and bless them. We shall see in the following devotions how Zechariah pointed the people of his day and our day to the coming of the promised Messiah and Redeemer.

**Surely in temples made with hands,
God, the Most High, is not dwelling;
High above earth His temple stands,
All earthly temples excelling.**

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9:9

The Prophet of Palm Sunday

Let's go back 500 years before the time of Zechariah. King David had expanded Israel's military might. He had conquered the neighboring countries and made God's people a world power. But what was the reality of the situation in Zechariah's day? Israel was ruled by the Babylonians and then the Medes and Persians. There was no king from David's descendants. Their leader was a puppet governor.

How did the people of Zechariah's day understand his promise of a coming king? I think that they were looking for God's salvation in the form of an earthly king like David or Solomon. They looked for their salvation in the reestablishment of David's earthly kingdom. During the next 500 years, these longings grew more intense. Fast forward to the days when Herod, an Edomite, was the puppet king of the Romans and Pontius Pilate was governor. As the Passover grew near, a ragged Rabbi named Jesus led a procession of followers riding on a donkey. Matthew tells us that, "This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: Tell the daughter of Zion: Look, your King comes to you, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The people shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Five days later, the mob shouted, "Crucify him."

What kind of a king are you looking for? Zechariah, the Prophet of the Passion, tells you today, "Rejoice greatly! Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and brings salvation!" Jesus came and established an everlasting kingdom as prophesied by Zechariah. He is your Savior-King.

**Ride on, ride on, in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die.
Bow Thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O Christ, Thy power and reign.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 162:5

Then I said to them, “If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.” So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD for the potter. Zechariah 11:12-13

The Prophet of the Betrayal

In chapter 11 the Lord spoke through his prophet Zechariah. The history of God’s Old Testament people Israel was not a pretty picture. However, there also is a remarkable nugget of prophecy buried in chapter 11. The Holy Spirit reveals the fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus’ betrayal by his disciple Judas as recorded in Matthew 27:3:

Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” And they said, “What is that to us? You see to it!” Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood.” And they consulted together and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, “AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE VALUE OF HIM WHO WAS PRICED, whom they of the children of Israel priced, AND GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER’S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME.”

It is remarkable how the Lord revealed Jesus as the promised Messiah through Old Testament prophecies. This small detail of the Passion History is another confirmation that Jesus is the promised Messiah and King of the Old Testament.

**We have a sure prophetic Word
By inspiration of the Lord;
And tho’ assailed on ev’ry hand,
Jehovah’s Word shall ever stand.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 290:1

“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.” Zechariah 12:10

The Prophet of the Crucifixion

Five hundred years before Jesus, great David’s greater Son, came to establish an everlasting kingdom of forgiveness, Zechariah prophesied events from Jesus’ suffering. According to Zechariah’s words, the Lord would pour out on the house of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace, who pleads for mercy.

Zachariah goes on, “Then they will look at me, whom they pierced.” These words are seen in their fulfillment in connection with Jesus’ death on the cross:

But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, “NOT ONE OF HIS BONES SHALL BE BROKEN.” And again another Scripture says, “THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED.” (John 19:34-37)

When the soldiers came to Jesus, they found that he was already dead. So they pierced his side with a spear. He was dead. The women, the soldiers and the mob looked upon the One “they have pierced.” How often do we look at Jesus, the One we have pierced? “But it was because of our rebellion that he was pierced.” (Isaiah 53:5 EHV) In the words of Zechariah we mourn for him as one mourns for an only child. We grieve bitterly for him. We do not mourn because of the unfairness and torment of Jesus’ death. Instead we mourn because it was our sins which pierced Jesus. Yet, we do so with hope, knowing His resurrection has secured our forgiveness and salvation.

By Thine hour of dire despair, By Thine agony of prayer,
By the cross, the nail, the thorn, Piercing spear, and torturing scorn,
By the gloom that veiled the skies O’er the dreadful sacrifice,
Listen to our humble cry. Hear our solemn litany!

The Lutheran Hymnal 166:3

“Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, Against the Man who is My Companion,” Says the LORD of hosts. “Strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered; Then I will turn My hand against the little ones.” Zechariah 13:7

The Prophet of the Passion

Zechariah’s final prophecy begins with the familiar “on that day”—the day of God’s revealing of his promised salvation in connection with the coming of the Messiah-King Jesus and his work of redemption and everlasting life.

500 years later, the Holy Spirit reveals the fulfillment in Matthew 26. Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane when the temple guards came with swords and clubs to arrest him and take him to Annas and Caiaphas to be killed. The Holy Spirit tells us, “Then Jesus said to them, “This night you all will fall away on account of me, for it is written, “I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” In the face of this mob, the disciples turned tail and ran. As the events of Good Friday unfolded, they hid out of fear for their own lives. Jesus would go to the cross alone.

Sometimes as the enemies of Jesus and the society we live in overwhelm us, we scatter and hide. We are assured as we look to the cross that no one will pluck us out of Jesus’ hand and that he will gather his flock and give us everlasting life. Zechariah closes chapter 13, “I will bring the one-third through the fire, Will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them. I will say, ‘This is My people’; And each one will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”

So with Zechariah we look beyond the manger, the cross and the empty tomb to the day when Jesus will come again as King of kings and Lord of lords and take us home with him.

Jesus, shepherd of the sheep,
Who Your Father’s flock does keep,
Safe we wake and safe we sleep, Guarded still by You.

By Your blood our souls were bought,
By Your life salvation wrought;
By Your light our feet are taught, Lord, to follow You.

Worship Supplement 783:1.3

For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Romans 10:10

I Believe

Every Sunday morning we stand up to say together, “I believe.” Most often we do it in the form of the Apostles’ Creed. Many of us are well acquainted with the Apostles’ Creed not only because we say it in church dozens of times a year, but also study it in Luther’s Small Catechism before we are confirmed.

Confirmation students are surprised when they are told that the creeds are not prayers. Adults can forget that, too. Even though we stand when we say it and say “amen” at the end, and even though most people bow their heads and fold their hands—it’s not really a prayer. It is a confession. It is a statement of faith. When we say the creed we are declaring what we believe based solely on what God’s Word tells us. We also remind ourselves of the truths of God’s Word which we believe unto righteousness.

The word “creed” comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means “I believe.” In the early Christian church, there was a practice of having an adult make a statement of his faith before being baptized. And it’s easy to see the connection between baptism and our creeds. We baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We confess that we believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit that we believe and confess the truths of God’s Word. But the Holy Spirit doesn’t stop there. He sanctifies us and causes us to put that faith into action. This week we will consider ways in which the Apostles’ Creed applies to our Christian lives. May the Holy Spirit instruct us to live our lives in confession of the God of our salvation.

**We All Believe in One True God,
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Ever-present Help in need,
Praised by all the heavenly host,
By whose mighty power alone
All is made and wrought and done.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 252:1

*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us,
that we should be called children of God! 1 John 3:1*

I Believe in God the Father Almighty

Everyone has a father, but not everyone has a loving father. Sadly, in this sinful world, some people never find out who their father is. Some know who he is, but he's been absent. Some grow up with their father but are neglected or abused and never know what it's like to have a father who cares, nurtures, and loves his child.

In our confession, we recognize that God the Father is our true Father. He is the Creator of heaven and earth and every person. Consider how bold that confession is in a world that believes we are here because of a Big Bang and evolution. Your confession and belief in the truth of God's six-day creation already sets your life apart. You are not unsure of how you got here or why you are alive. You know your Creator. He is God your Father, and He is an involved Father.

We confess that He still preserves us along with all of His creation. We confess that we have the privilege to call ourselves children of God! That's amazing because we were all born sinners and outside of the Father's household. In order to make us His sons and daughters, He sent His only-begotten Son to be our Brother. He did this out of His fatherly love, goodness, and mercy, without any worthiness on our part.

What is our response? How do we live as children of God? Luther sums it up: we ought to thank and praise our Father. We ought to serve and obey Him. Confessing that God our Father is our Creator and reflecting the love He has shown us is a surefire way to show others that they too have an almighty Father.

Dear Father, endless praise I render
For soul and body, strangely joined;
I praise Thee Guardian kind and tender,
For all the noble joys I find
So richly spread on every side,
And freely for my use supplied.

The Lutheran Hymnal 243:2

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. Hebrews 2:9

I Believe in Jesus Christ

The Second Article of the Apostles' Creed divides the work of Christ into two parts, just like the verse above. The first part is about Jesus' humiliation. We confess that the eternal Son of God became Man for us, kept the law for us, and died for our sins. Our response to this is to live lives of repentance. We realize it was our sin that caused Jesus to go to the cross and receive the Father's wrath in our place. We are humbled when we consider the cost of our salvation.

The second part of the work of Christ is His exaltation. We confess that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to rule over all things forever. We see in all of this our sins forgiven and our hope of eternal salvation. Luther tells us that the purpose of all of Jesus' work is that we should be His own. We live under Him and His kingdom. We are saints who were once sinners.

So we serve Jesus with righteousness, knowing that He has forgiven the sins we have committed. We live in innocence, knowing that Jesus kept the law for us so we can stand holy before God. We live in blessedness, happily anticipating our own exaltation when Jesus comes to judge His people righteous and worthy of His everlasting kingdom.

**We all believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Mary's Son,
Who descended from His throne And for us salvation won;
By whose cross and death are we Rescued from all misery.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 252:2

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38

I Believe in the Holy Spirit

Through the words Peter spoke on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit caused the people to hear and believe the simple and saving message about Jesus. He led them to repent and saved them through the waters of baptism. It's the same thing He has done for you.

That Pentecost day is said to be the birthday of the Christian Church, when people began to gather together to hear the good news of the Grace of the Father shown through Jesus Christ. As we confess the Holy Spirit we also confess the Holy Christian Church, also known as the communion of saints. In this Church the Holy Spirit continues to call people to faith by the gospel in Word and Sacrament. In this Church the Holy Spirit enlightens us with gifts and sanctifies us so that our words and actions become little sermons and confessions to our neighbors.

The third article of faith gives us a very practical way to apply our confession in our lives. Stay in the church fellowship. Continue to gather with fellow saints to grow in the one true faith. In a church where the Law and Gospel are taught in truth and purity and the sacraments are regularly administered, the Holy Spirit richly forgives all sins, creates new hearts, and renews right spirits. In His Church alone the Holy Spirit preserves saints who live in confident hope of the resurrection from the dead and life everlasting.

Holy Spirit, strong and mighty.
Thou who makest all things new,
Make Thy work within us perfect
And the evil Foe subdue.

Grant us weapons for the strife
And with victory crown our life.

The Lutheran Hymnal 226:7

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

I Believe

Even though the Apostles' Creed isn't a prayer, Martin Luther exhorts us to include it with our daily prayers. He advises all Christians to begin the day with his Morning Prayer, followed by the Lord's Prayer, and then a recitation of the Apostles' Creed. What a wonderful way to start your day! With these truths fresh on your mind you will be compelled to "rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks." Try it! You'll be amazed. Consider how this will change your outlook on the day ahead and beyond.

Confess that you believe in God the Father. Then you can rejoice and be glad for another day He has made for you in His creation. You can look forward to receiving your daily bread and all other blessings with thanks.

Confess that you believe in Jesus Christ. Begin your day knowing your sins are forgiven and your salvation is won because Jesus has already done all things and that the One sitting at the right hand of the Father is always with you. Go about your day not as a condemned prisoner, but as a totally free person—free from sin and free to live for Christ.

Confess that you believe in the Holy Spirit. This is your constant reminder you need God's help in all things. You cannot go it alone. You will not be perfect today or any other day. You will sin and you will fail to do God's will. So we need to daily turn to our constant Helper, the Holy Spirit, who daily forgives repentant sinners and renews and strengthens us in the confession of the Triune God.

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

Weekend Rest Journal

1. The Psalms were inspired to be used by God's people in their worship. Many hymns are praise and thanksgiving, others are confessions of sin, and still others are petitions for spiritual and physical needs. There are also some Psalms which are very much like our New Testament creeds, in which the people confess the truths of the Triune God. Read Psalm 118 and note where you see references to the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit. How does the psalm confess the preservation of God the Father? How does the psalm show the redemptive work of God the Son? How does the psalm express the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit that causes the believer to respond?

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
Matthew 6:19-21

Treasures that Last

It’s a simple concept: treasures that wear out and decay or can be stolen or lost aren’t as valuable as treasures that last forever. At the very best the treasures on earth will only last for the few short years on this earth. As you know, “You can’t take it with you.” We know that to be true, but the things we see have a much greater attraction than the things we can’t see. So we tend to gather treasures that wear out rather than the intangible treasures of heaven.

Jesus speaks about this distinction often to drive home the point. He tells us not to worry about what we eat or drink or what we will wear. Rather seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:25-34) God does truly give all these earthly things in abundance. Jesus spoke of a man to whom God gave abundant crops that he stored up, but instead of trusting in God who gave them, he trusted in the riches themselves. Jesus called him a fool for he was not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16-21) Similarly, He told of a rich man who enjoyed all the pleasures this world can give, but had no compassion on the poor man named Lazarus. He soon found himself in agony in hell forever. The treasures on earth are like a mirage, they appear beautiful, but in the end they leave you empty handed.

This week we will consider some of the real, lasting treasures that will never fail us. They are all treasures that God gives freely.

Gracious Father, may we truly desire and pursue the eternal gifts you give and treasure them in our heart. For where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. Amen.

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Ephesians 3:8

The Riches of Christ

The Apostle Paul once despised Christ. He was trying to eradicate Christians so he wouldn't have to hear the name Jesus Christ any more. After his conversion, Paul speaks of having found unsearchable riches in Christ. He considers Jesus Christ his greatest treasure. He gladly counted everything else as rubbish compared to "the excellence of the knowledge of Christ." (Philippians 3:8)

It's amazing how we can begin to lose sight of the "unsearchable riches in Christ." Has going to church to worship and hear His word lost its excitement for you? Is your mind occupied by a dozen things throughout the day, but you hardly give a thought to Jesus Christ? It's time to rediscover the "unsearchable riches of Christ." The riches of His love and mercy are infinite. You can dig in Scripture all your life and never reach the bottom of the gold mine of treasures in Christ.

Paul was so overwhelmed at God's grace that chose him, "the least of all the saints," to preach those unsearchable riches to the gentiles. He wants us to see and be filled with the unsearchable riches of Christ. Let us join in his prayer for us (Ephesians 3:14-19) "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

Gracious Lord, grant that I may know the love that surpasses knowledge. Give me a heart that delights to search out those unsearchable riches. Amen.

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. Colossians 2:2-3

The Riches of Knowledge (God's Word)

Imagine a miner who is digging away in his mine. Suddenly he strikes a vein of pure gold. When he goes home, his wife asks him how his day went. Would he say, "Oh, it was ok. Not much happened"? Not a chance. He would be so excited to tell her he struck it rich. He couldn't wait to get back to his mine and dig more gold until the vein ran out.

That was David's attitude about God's word. He said, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold.» (Psalm 19:9-10) Do you find it difficult to make the time to read God's word? Or do you read your devotion without giving it much thought? Then remember that the Bible is the richest gold mine. In it is "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The gold in the mine is just another example of the deceitful treasures of this world that have no lasting value. God invites you to dig into His word and find the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. There you can "attain to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God."

The "mysteries of God" hold the key to the most happy, productive life now and the fullness of joy forever. They can only be discovered in God's word. For "In the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God." (1 Corinthians 1:21) Treasure God's word in your heart! "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

"Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." (Jeremiah 15:16)

Lord grant me this treasure always. Amen

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. Ephesians 1:7

The Riches of His Grace

“The unsearchable riches of Christ” include many blessings. Paul says in the opening verses of Ephesians that the Father “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

There is no greater blessing than the “riches of His grace!” Paul first mentions that God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,” and “predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ.” All this was “to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.” (1:4-6) Like the Apostle Paul himself, we were all once enemies of God fighting against Him on our way to hell. But now we have been accepted by God, for in Christ “We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” What a treasure of His Grace!

The “riches of His grace” become all the more precious when we know the depth of our depravity and the price of our redemption. Paul never stopped marveling at the grace of God because he never forgot how wretched he had been and still was. Even as a believer, he kept doing the evil that he didn’t want to do and failed to do the good he wanted. (Romans 7) We too, can’t go a day without sinning against our Holy God. We treasure God’s grace when we hunger and thirst for righteousness and come to Him in repentance. We are cleansed through His blood.

Isaiah says, “Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God. “Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” (Isaiah 40:1-2) God’s grace is always more than enough to remove all our sins.

O Lord, we thank you that you have shown us the exceeding riches of Your grace in Your forgiveness and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Amen

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. Ephesians 1:18

The Riches of His Glory

The unsearchable riches of Christ, the riches of His grace, the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God revealed in His Word, all reach their climax in the riches of the glory of His inheritance. That is the inheritance of heaven. Those are all treasures that last forever in eternal glory with God.

The Apostle Peter describes this glory this way: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” 1 Peter 1:3-5

This glory is a treasure that Jesus says cannot be corrupted by moth or rust. No one can break in and steal it from us. It won't even “fade away.” Living in God's presence will never get old. We will never take it for granted. That inheritance in heaven will always be overwhelming with the glory of God and fill our hearts with the fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:11)

Keep your mind and heart focused on this treasure, and fill your life with all the things that will get you there: His Word which reveals to you all the riches of wisdom and knowledge, His grace which grants you His redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Whatever you set your heart on will direct your actions.

Gracious Lord, may I truly treasure your Word, your grace and forgiveness in Christ, and your gift of eternal life. Make these treasures the focus of my life. In Jesus' name. Amen

But Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me. Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. Isaiah 49:14-15

We Are All Like an Unclean Thing

People do not live trouble-free lives. They have marriage problems, job problems, health problems, financial problems, and so forth. Because people have problems, they sometimes would like to have some help and support.

When we turn to God for help, we might wonder, "Does God know my problems and hear my prayers?" In answer, God assures us in the Bible that He loves us more than our own mother. God never forgets or forsakes His children. There is in the heart of most mothers an almost slavish, sleepless affection for their children. Most mothers will love their children when no one else will have anything to do with their children, when all others have given up on them. But God's love is much greater than even a mother's love.

Perhaps the reason we are lacking God's promised help is not because God has forsaken and forgotten us, but that we have forgotten and forsaken God. Maybe we are not reading His Word, not praying to Him daily, not worshiping Him regularly, or not trusting in Jesus as our only Savior from our sins. The Bible says human beings "are all like an unclean thing" whose "righteous acts are like filthy rags." (Isaiah 64:6 NKJV, NIV) We deserve, therefore, to be forgotten and forsaken by God. But God forsook Jesus Christ in our place when Jesus paid for our sins upon a cross. Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me." Because of Jesus, God does not forsake us. If we go to God humbly, not trusting in our supposed goodness, but trusting only in His mercy in Christ Jesus, God will remember us.

Holy Ghost, help me never to forget nor forsake my God, but rather to be always assured that He will never forget nor forsake me for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. Revelation 3:20

Humbly Open the Door of Your Life to Christ

The everlasting God stands outside the door, waiting for us to let Him in. He is almighty and could just force His way in if He wanted to. But God never forces His love upon anyone. If we could just convince people that Christ is seeking their temporal and eternal welfare, every door would be open at the first call of His voice! Many are so engrossed with material things, their minds are so occupied with dollars and partying, with pleasures and profits, with having the praise and friendship of the world, that they have no place for Christ in their lives. Others think they just do not need Christ, even if they have room for Him. Even some who like to think of themselves as Christians have not opened the door of their heart and life to Christ. They say that it is all right to be religious, but that one can also be just a little too religious. The devil delights in such Christianity.

Why does Christ want to come into our lives? The reason He came from heaven was as He Himself explained, “To seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10) He brought forgiveness of sins and salvation by dying for our sins in our place, thus fulfilling the perfect justice of God. The Bible says of Jesus, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Where Christ comes into the heart He does not bring sadness and gloom, but there real pleasure and gladness begin. “I will come in to him, and dine with him, and he with Me,” Jesus says.

Lord Jesus, I humbly confess I need You, and open the door of my life and my heart to Thee. Be with me eternally. Amen.

She will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. Matthew 1:21

Humbly Confess Your Sins

The name “Jesus” was not given to Mary’s Child by his earthly parents, but by God Himself. “Jesus” is Hebrew for “Savior.” So that must be how God wants us to think of Jesus, primarily as our Savior. That is why God the Son came to earth as a human being. He did not come to heal all physical ills and wipe out poverty. Jesus Himself said, “I have come that they may have life.” (John 10:10)

What is our enemy from which Jesus saves us? Sin! “He will save His people from their sins.” That is exactly how we should all think of sin, as our enemy, not as something trivial or even enjoyable. Sin destroys us, body and soul, now and forever. “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) Some people doubt that, but hell is no joke.

We hear it often during Christmas time: “Joy to the world; the Savior is born!” But a Savior to save us from what? To save us from the worst mortal danger in the whole creation: sin, death, and hell. You cannot save yourself from these powerful enemies by being “good.” Every sin will cling closer than a shadow to us unless Jesus saves us.

How did Jesus save us from our sins? He earned His name by alone paying the price of sin Himself in our place. He paid death and hell for us on the cross, thus defeating our great enemy. “He will save His people from their sins.” Who are “His people?” They are those who believe in Him as Savior. The Bible also says, “To Him (Jesus) all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.» (Acts 10:43)

Dear Son of God, I thank You for being born as a Child and son of Man, living a sinless life, and dying for the sins of all the people of the world to save us who believe in You. Amen.

“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe... lying in a manger.” Luke 2:10-12

Our Conscience Should Humble Us

Man’s conscience and the Ten Commandments show man his sin and he is thus afraid to face God. But the angel’s announcement ended with this: “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.” The Gospel of Jesus Christ is above all intended to create the greatest possible joy in the human heart. Sin had separated God and man, but God bridged that separation by becoming a man Himself. When God beholds a sinner and His wrath begins to burn, God will remember that God the Son, as a man, bore the sinner’s doom.

God had come to earth before, but not as a man and not as a Savior. The Lord and two angels went to Sodom to witness human sin and to punish it by burning up Sodom and Gomorrah. This coming of God brings horror to the world. But, as we see in Luke 2, when God was born as a human being, He came not in vengeance, but in mercy. He might have come with thunderbolts in His hands, but instead, He brings gifts of forgiveness.

The Savior from sin that the angel announces “is Christ the Lord.” The word “Lord” here is equivalent to “God” (1:9). Our Savior is God Himself. Rejoice in this! For suppose an angel had been sent to be our savior. An angel would not have been able to bear the sin of the whole human race. But God’s one life is worth infinitely more than all the lives of all His creatures.

To this day, knowing that Christ the Lord alone makes us righteous and at peace with God our Maker is the only hope for men, and should give us great joy!

Holy Ghost, lead me always to find fullness of joy in Jesus alone: trusting in Him, humbly repenting of my sins, and serving Him. Amen.

He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and He has set the world upon them. He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness. For by strength no man shall prevail. 1 Samuel 2:8-9

Humble Dust and Ashes Beggars

What is the most common, lowly worthless thing you can think of? Dust! Yet that is what God calls man: “Dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19) Sin makes us as worthless and powerless as dust in God’s eyes. However, God tells us today that He is willing and able to raise up “the poor from the dust,” and lift up “the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory.”

How does God do this? God will do this first of all to those who humbly admit their lowly, helpless, sinful state. Then the Bible states that God will “guard the feet of His saints.” Who is a saint? A saint is a person, who, by the power of God the Holy Ghost within him, does not trust in his own goodness but solely in the atoning death of Jesus Christ to pay for all his sins before God. A saint trusts that Jesus alone has earned for him a place in heaven and made him good in God’s sight.

God does the hardest thing to do: forgive our sins. If one could go to the hospital today and tell a cancer patient to be healed immediately, rise, and go home, many would say he was the most powerful man on earth. But Jesus said it is easier to say «arise and walk» than it is to say, “Your sins are forgiven.” (Matthew 9:5) No longer will men be dead as dust in God’s sight, for “in Christ all shall be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:22)

**Heavenly Father, I who am but dust and ashes, beg of you,
make me forever alive by faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. Ephesians 4:1

Walk Worthy of Your Calling

Medical doctors tell us that walking is one of the best things anyone can do to maintain good physical health. Regular walking burns calories, strengthens hearts, lowers blood sugar, eases joint pain, boosts immune functions and energy, and strengthens the muscles and bones in our legs. Walking can and does enhance our physical lives in multiple ways!

It should not surprise us, then, to find that the Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of walking to encourage us to maintain good spiritual health. He writes: “Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called!” But what exactly does Paul have in mind?

The Bible tells us that God calls us to faith. His Holy Spirit leads us to repentance over sin and instills within us a trust in Jesus as our Savior from sin. In this way we are called into God’s kingdom and become His representatives in this world (2 Corinthians 5:20). By our faith, we also become members of His family—sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. But our calling goes far beyond just knowing of and trusting in Jesus. That is merely the beginning of what God has in mind for us. After all, Paul informs us that “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)

The Bible urges us, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves,” (James 1:22) and then goes on to warn us that “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead!” (James 2:17) God calls us to a life of active and ongoing love and service—a life filled with good works that will both honor God and serve our neighbor. So let us get walking every day, for then our spiritual lives will be enhanced in multiple ways by God’s grace and with God’s blessing!

O LORD God, help us to walk in a worthy manner, so that in faith we actively honor Your saving name and serve all among whom we live. Amen.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10

Walk in God's Prepared Works

A 2023 report by the Harvard Graduate School of Education found that a significant number of young adults (ages 18-25) reported having anxiety (36%) and depression (29%). One of the key reasons was the lack of “meaning or purpose” in their lives. (insidehighered.com)

No one can dispute that we are facing an increasing problem with depression within our society—a problem driven, in large part, by a sense of purposelessness and loss of meaning. This should not surprise us, for our society is becoming increasingly secular and materialistic. When the existence of God is denied and human beings are told they are the result of random chance with no future beyond this mortal life, people will have trouble finding any meaning and purpose beyond satisfying their personal wants and needs.

As Christians who embrace a biblical worldview, our lives are filled with meaning and purpose. We are, after all, individuals created by a personal God, who designed us as unique individuals with our own gifts and abilities. We are individuals redeemed by Jesus Christ and called into a renewed relationship with our Savior God. “We are,” as Paul states in our devotional text, “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” Indeed, we are not saved by good works (Ephesians 2:8-9), but we have been saved for good works! Beyond that, Paul informs us that those good works have been “prepared beforehand” by God, so “that we might walk in them.”

That means that every morning we awaken, we can thank God not only for the new day but for everything He has prepared for us to do in that day. For the child of God, each day is brimming with meaning and purpose!

Dear Father in heaven, reveal to us each day the things You have prepared for us to do, so that our days will be filled with meaning and purpose and our lives then filled with joy! Amen.

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Ephesians 5:1-2

Walk in Love

Love is the greatest virtue, for it is the heart of God's character. The Apostle John writes: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." (1 John 4:16b) He further explains the nature of love and expresses God's command to love: "God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:8b-11)

Paul echoes John's thoughts and further explains both God's desire for us and Jesus' example given to us. God's desire is that we imitate Him. This is impossible without the Spirit's help. Love, unfortunately, is not the heart of our character by nature. As sinful human beings, we are selfish and often loveless. God demonstrated His love for us by sending Jesus to rescue us from our lovelessness. He gave up that which was most precious to Him for our good. He wants us to give up that which is most precious to us for the good of others. Jesus gave Himself up on the cross and died as "an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." Even so, Paul encourages us to give ourselves up by walking in love.

Our God is not interested in an on-again, off-again type of love for others, but rather a consistent, day-to-day love patterned after our Savior's love for us. Such love is our "sacrifice to God," and such love is our "sweet-smelling aroma" arising in the presence of our heavenly Father!

Dear heavenly Father, send Your Spirit to create within us clean hearts and right spirits, so that we, enabled by His power, might walk in love each day. Amen.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. Ephesians 5:8

Walk as Children of Light

The contrast between light and darkness is used in Scripture to describe the difference between good and evil, faith and unbelief, and our Savior and Satan. John, for instance, writes: “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:5b-7)

Paul reminds us about the side of that divide on which we once stood: “You were once darkness.” Scripture reminds us how we all arrived in this world when it records David’s confession which is common for us all: “I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5 NIV) In view of God’s grace, however, all has changed! Paul says, “Now you are light in the Lord.” Peter likewise proclaims: “You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

That being the case, Paul urges us to “walk as children of light!” Light exposes darkness and at the same time disposes of darkness! The light of God’s love exposes for us Christ’s presence, power, and promises, all of which enrich and enable our lives. At the same time God’s love disposes of our sin, guilt, and shame. The light of God’s love within us disposes of our uncertainties, worries, and fears, so that we might serve our Savior with joy and gladness. We can walk as children of light with confidence because Jesus walks beside us!

Dear Father in heaven, continue to enlighten our souls with the truths of Your Word, so that we might walk as children of light, so that those still walking in darkness might be drawn to Your light and given true hope in this sin-darkened world. Amen.

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:15-16

Walk Wisely

At a recent Family Forum on the topic of “Internet Safety” sponsored by our church school, a police officer urged our children to be cautious in their use of the internet. This was especially true, she stated, when it came to what they post on the internet, for what is posted on the internet is permanent, even if you delete it. While the internet is a marvelous tool, she urged everyone to monitor their time on the internet, for it can be a tremendous timewaster. She pointed out that the average amount of time spent by junior high school students on the internet in a single year is the same amount of time needed to earn three master’s degrees! Wisdom is needed as we walk through life!

Paul urges us to “walk circumspectly,” that is “not as fools but as wise.” Throughout all of history, God’s people have found it difficult to use or “redeem” time wisely. We live in a world that is often very distracting! Given the evil nature of our world, those distractions can indeed be dangerous. The officer at the Family Forum explained there are many good people and many bad people using the internet, so you must be careful! The Bible states emphatically: “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’” (1 Corinthians 15:33) Let us, therefore, strive to walk in wisdom!

The reason, ultimately, to do so is because God has gifted us our lives, which are limited to the days planned for us. We do not know when the Lord will call us home. As His stewards, we want to be busy using our time wisely to accomplish all He has planned for us. If, by God’s grace, that is what we do, then with joy we will hear our Savior say: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord!” (Matthew 25:21)

Dearest Jesus, please enable us to redeem our time by walking in wisdom each day. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. The idea of the “Christian Walk” is found also in the Old Testament. What is the nature of such a walk? We find that explained in the Book of Psalms. The psalms are Hebrew poetry, which rely on a literary technique called parallelism. Parallelism involves making a statement, and then making a second statement which further defines it. While there are several types of parallelism, we will consider synonymous parallelism, which means that the psalmist first writes a statement and then adds a second very similar statement to further define it. Look up the passages cited below. In each passage the psalmist speaks of a believer’s “walk” in one of the two statements. Jot down the similar ideas the psalmists use to further define the “Christian Walk.”

Psalm 26:1 _____

Psalm 26:3 _____

Psalm 26:11-12 _____

Psalm 81:13 _____

Psalm 89:15 _____

Psalm 101:6 _____

Psalm 119:1 _____

Psalm 119:45 _____

Psalm 128:1 _____

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. 1 John 2:18

The Last Hour

The Apostle John is speaking to all believers as he writes: “Little children.” A term of endearment, and actually a badge of honor to God’s glory bestowed on each one of us. A little later John writes: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1)

As a father and now a grandfather, I am very familiar with the needs of little children. Little children need more care and attention, more nurturing, and more protection and supervision than their older siblings. The LORD knows our sinful natures, and knows that each of us needs more spiritual care and attention, more nurturing in the Word, more protection and supervision by His angels whom He has given charge over us. So He warns His little children that it is now the last hour.

The last hour refers to the final time here on earth before our Savior’s second coming. It is a time of great spiritual challenges because of the many evil forces that are against our great God and Savior Jesus Christ and us His children. Forewarned is forearmed – especially for us little children. Jesus warns about them, but He also tells us not to be afraid of them, for He has overcome the world. His full payment for our sins on the cross has done this for us. We rejoice to know where to go to put on the full armor of God: the Word. We are also mindful of teaching these great truths to our little children.

In this, the last hour, let’s give priority to daily home devotions. As we prepare for the upcoming school year, let’s make use of Christian schools, where Jesus Christ is the center of every subject, and the Savior of every little child.

Dear Jesus, in this last hour, let Your steadfast love guard and protect us. Amen.

A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children.

Proverbs 13:22a

Grandparents

My father-in-law and his dear wife always looked out for my kids, their grandchildren. They made it a point to spend time with them, talk with them, and treat them as the gifts of God they are, even to the point of giving generous monetary gifts for their futures, including helping to pay their bills for Immanuel Lutheran High School in Eau Claire, WI. They were a fine example of Christian grandparents who knew that children were “an inheritance from the LORD.” (Psalm 127)

Looking back at all the interaction between my grandparents and their grandchildren, I am in awe at the importance they placed upon the well-being of their loved ones. Even more important was the fact that they lovingly showed them the wonders of the Gospel of Jesus. They read them Bible stories, sang hymns to them, quoted Bible passages, and shared the love that God shared with them. They understood that the best inheritance they could share with their children's children was the good news of Christ crucified for sinners. By faith they could leave this world knowing that they passed on the best inheritance to their family – a Spirit-worked faith in the saving work of Jesus, the Son of God.

Of course, my wife and I also paid special care and attention to the spiritual well being of our little ones. However, in the hustle and bustle of the hectic life of young parents, it was always reassuring to know that our parents had our backs—and kept our family in their active thoughts, and prayers to the LORD. Now that I have my own grandchildren (Thank You LORD!), I praise Him for His steadfast love and kindness toward them and their parents. My wife and I, in our old age can truly say with the Apostle John: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” (3 John 1:4 NKJ)

**O LORD, help us to give the best gifts to our children's children
– Your saving Word. Amen.**

Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

Proverbs 8:10-11(ESV)

Priceless Education

Good parents always want to provide the best for their children. A balanced loving family, a good home in a nice neighborhood, fine clothes and shoes, healthy and nourishing food, opportunities for developing good friendships, and so forth.

We learn early on that good parenting also involves selflessness (denial of self), for the benefit of our children. It begins with sleep deprivation – sacrificing normal sleep in caring for the newborn. Later, it advances into other sacrifices. For example, you'd like to go golfing, but instead you go to your four-year-old's t-ball game. It's not what's best for you, it's what's best for your child. It ends up being the best for you, even if it doesn't seem like it in the moment. There are times, however, when parents are first in line over their children. At the beginning of an airplane trip, the flight attendant instructs that in case of a sudden drop in pressure, the oxygen masks will drop down. You are to put your mask on first and then your child's. You're no good to your child if you're not thinking straight or passing out.

In today's verse, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Solomon tells us the priceless value of Jesus and His Word (instruction, knowledge, wisdom) over anything else this world considers valuable (silver, gold, jewels). The forgiveness of sins and complete salvation found in the cross of our Savior Jesus is our true treasure. His Word is the oxygen mask our faith needs to help make the right decisions for our children.

Want the best for your kids? Study the Word, and from infancy, pass it on to your children in daily lessons in God's Word at home. If available, make use of Christian schools. Give our children the opportunity to breathe the fresh air of a Christ-centered education.

Lord Jesus, give us faith to believe that nothing we may desire compares to Your Holy Word. Amen.

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 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.

1 Corinthians 1:20

God's Worldview

Any given day you may be asked what your “worldview” is on a particular subject. A worldview is a compilation of personal opinions and principals, narratives and expectations about the world around us, which then direct our thoughts and actions. Worldview is expressed in religion, morality, philosophy, science and so forth. Many worldviews are seeded at school in the early years of a young person’s life. What is your worldview on the current state of public education being offered to children today?

More and more the educators of the world insist on using curriculums that are not only godless, but also politically motivated and manipulated to indoctrinate children and young people to think and act in wicked, godless, and immoral ways. In their worldly wisdom, they do not, nor are they able, to know God. He makes their wisdom foolish.

Thankfully, as believers, our worldview is based not on man’s wisdom, but God’s. His Gospel message of Christ crucified for our total salvation works in our hearts to direct our thoughts and actions to His glory. God’s worldview, His plan of grace through His Son, Jesus, has saved us. It is the foolishness of the message preached – the Means of Grace. By faith we take great interest in passing this good news, God’s worldview, on to the next generations.

I’m thankful that in my church fellowship, the means of grace (the Gospel preached) is found daily in our Christian schools. This gives our youth a chance to flourish in the true wisdom of God with Christ at the center of every subject. Spirit worked faith in their hearts believes in God’s worldview that makes the wisdom of the world foolishness.

Dear Jesus, through faith in Your Word please give us and our children the only worldview that matters – Christ, and Him crucified. Amen.

Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Psalm 34:11

Come and Listen

The old country schoolhouse often began its day with the ringing of a bell. It was an invitation to the children nearby that school was about to start. As our families consider educational choices for their children for the coming school year, the psalmist has a message of urgency in what is really the most important thing to learn in any school. The Psalmist starts by ringing the bell of invitation with the admonition, “Come!” This verse is found in the middle of Psalm 34, which is loaded both before and after with the good gospel promises of our gracious God.

Listening is an important part of education. Children have to be taught to listen early on, so that they don’t miss out on the lessons being taught. When it comes to our spiritual life, we know “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” (Rom 10:17) Faith listens to Jesus, hears His invitation, and grasps His promises. This is especially true when it comes to the lesson God wants to teach us has to do with the fear of the LORD. To fear the LORD means to give all glory to Him. Jesus wants to teach us and our children about His steadfast love and kindness, and that good news will, by faith, enable us to give all glory to Him.

In my affiliation, the Church of the Lutheran Confession, our Christian Schools teach Jesus Christ and Him crucified as the center of every subject. With Jesus as the Teacher, our children learn from Him and we all find rest for our souls. The bell is ringing, and our Savior’s invitation stands, promising the best education for us and for our children here in time, and hereafter in eternity.

How shall the young secure their hearts
 And guard their lives from sin?
 Thy Word the choicest rules imparts
 To keep the conscience clean.
 Thy Word is everlasting truth;
 How pure is every page!
 That Holy Book shall guide our youth
 And well support our age. Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 286:1.5

Even if my daylight never dawns
Even if my breakthrough never comes
Even if I'll fight to bring You praise
Even if my dreams fall to the ground
Even if I'm lost, I know I'm found
Even if my heart will somehow say
Hallelujah anyway!



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