

For whatever things were written before
were written for our learning,
that we through the patience and comfort
of the Scriptures might have hope.

– Romans 15:4



When the day of Pentecost had fully come... Acts 2:1

The Great Day Becomes Greater!

Pastors seek to get their people to think “outpouring of the Holy Spirit” when they hear the word “Pentecost.” “Pentecost” originally had a different flavor. Many years before Jesus rose from the grave (Easter), returned to heaven (Ascension Day--forty days after Easter), poured out the Holy Spirit upon the disciples (Pentecost--ten more days later), “Pentecost” was already being celebrated annually.

In the Old Testament this week-long festival was called the Feast of Weeks (Shavuoth). This name reflected the fact that this feast took place over seven weeks, a “week of weeks.” Fifty days after Passover, Pentecost marked the beginning of the harvest. Hence it was also called the Feast of Harvest or Feast of First Fruits. By the fiftieth day, the wheat harvest was completed and loaves baked from the new “first fruits” were offered at the Temple. People could begin using new grain. It was a day of great rejoicing for God’s blessings, like our Thanksgiving! Jewish men were expected to be present at the Temple.

Over the years, the name of the day was no longer Shavuoth (Hebrew), but Pentecost (Greek). “Pentecost” means “fiftieth.” Acts Chapter 2 tells us that when Pentecost came, Jerusalem was filled with Jewish people from many parts of the Roman Empire. It was that day on which Jesus poured out the promised Holy Spirit upon His disciples. The Spirit filled them with zeal, Bible wisdom, and the ability to speak other languages. These plain men of Galilee had God’s help that day preaching to the crowds the Good News of forgiveness of sins and eternal life in the crucified and risen Jesus.

Today pastors and people of The Christian Church still need those gifts. Each forgiven sinner has the privilege of sharing from God’s Word the Good News that Christ is the first fruit of the “harvest” to new life and resurrection accompanied by eternity in heaven. Rejoice, indeed! The new Pentecost far surpasses the old! It carries the greatest message for all. You are forgiven in Jesus!

Dear Lord, give to each of us the appropriate measure and outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to proclaim Your salvation to others. Amen!

There came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:2-4a

Signs of the Spirit's Presence!

I read about a man driving near an electrical substation during a thunderstorm. Lightning flashed, a ball of “light and fire” descended from one of the transformers, traveled atop the chain-link fence, danced for a few moments, and then dissipated!

The disciples also experienced some unusual things on Pentecost. Not just a quirk of physics, but the outward manifestation of the presence of God the Holy Spirit! He had come to be with them and within them. Imagine hearing the roar of a mighty wind, but not a twig moving outside, nor the slightest puff inside! Imagine seeing tongues-like-fire upon others' heads, which did not singe them. These were outward manifestations (epiphanies!) of the presence of God the Holy Spirit. He brought “breath and fire” to the life and heart.

Jesus had promised to send the “Comforter”; that is, the Helper, the Counselor, the Coach, the Paraclete—one “called to the side,” to assist the disciples' witnessing of Him, and of the Truth of forgiveness and salvation by faith in Him. He had told them to go out to all the world, but to wait for the Promised Spirit. Thus, whether you are an “active missionary” or not, the Holy Spirit directs and comforts you also as you live and speak for Christ.

Were the disciples afraid? When Jesus had ascended into heaven (ten days earlier) and told them to return to Jerusalem to wait “not many days” for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-5), they were not afraid. They were filled with joy! (Luke 24:52-53) Perhaps they thought that the Pentecost Festival would be the opportunity to “proclaim Christ.” Maybe they were expecting it! The same Lord sends you the Holy Spirit with the right words at the right time to share the news of forgiveness of sin in the crucified and risen Savior! Ask!

Lord, remove my fears and discomfort. Send the Spirit to help me bear witness to You. Amen!

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues. . . . [The crowds] were all amazed. . . . “We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God!” . . . Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.” Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them . . . “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel! . . . (Acts 2:4-16, selected verses)

Evidence of the Spirit’s Work!

A young girl had a very difficult time speaking clearly. Years later, when we saw her again, we marveled at how distinctly she spoke! It was evidence of the blessed work of her speech therapist.

The disciples on Pentecost gave amazing evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. They spoke the languages of the Pentecost visitors from fifteen different nations! The visitors were surprised and pleased to hear “the wonderful works of God”—the Good News of salvation in Jesus—spoken clearly in their own tongues!

Speaking in tongues is of no value, if it is considered only a badge of personal honor, “Oh! I can speak in tongues—even unknown tongues!” Speaking in tongues is valuable when it is used to share with those of other languages the Gospel of forgiveness in the crucified and risen Christ. “In the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.” (I Corinthians 14:19) The whole point is to bear witness to peace with God through Christ.

The enemies of Jesus who were present mocked this gift. “They’re drunk!” However, the timid disciples were not timid! Peter, who had denied three times that he knew Jesus, now stood up boldly. He spoke loudly, proclaiming that Jesus, the Son of God whom they had crucified, was alive and had poured out these gifts! Are you as bold as Peter? Pray the Lord makes you bold for the sake of someone who needs to hear the Gospel.

Lord, give me the boldness to share Christ in a simple way with others. Amen!

“God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ!” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do!” 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.” Acts 2:36-38

Harsh News and Sweet News!

Have you ever been “cut to the heart”? Once I demolished a new dehumidifier because I thought it was the old one. Cut to the heart! And it could have been worse.

Peter, at this “Fiftieth” Festival (“Pentecost”), straight-out told the Jewish opponents that they had crucified the promised Messiah, the Anointed One of God (the Christ). He told them that it was the risen Jesus who sent these unusual events that day. Many were cut to the heart! “What shall we do?!” Terror strikes the heart when one realizes he has violated God’s will. Peter spoke boldly. His boldness came from the Holy Spirit, working to bring the people to their knees. Likewise today, it takes firmness and boldness from the Holy Spirit to get proud sinners to see their dangerous perch. Reluctance in us to condemn sin is caused by reluctance to condemn self. Peter knew very well that he had denied Jesus. The Spirit helped him on Pentecost. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you call sin, sin.

The Holy Spirit also brought the Good News of forgiveness in Jesus. He gave Peter the words and the love to proclaim precious cleansing in the risen Jesus. “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” When sin is recognized and relief sought in Christ, God mercifully sends sin packing. Sin is “remitted” (forgiven) through Jesus’ victorious resurrection. Proclaiming the Gospel of forgiveness is a gift of the Holy Spirit. He leads you to do so without strings. Beware of: God forgives you “if you don’t do it again.” Rather, God forgives you; trust Him! Preach the Gospel boldly. Pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance!

Holy Spirit, help me to proclaim Law and Gospel in their simple Truth. Amen!

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. For the promise is to you and to your children. . . . Those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” Acts 2:38, 39, 41

Big Finish!

The best part about the 4th of July Fireworks, or any good concert is the big finish!

On this first “Christian Pentecost,” unusual things happened. The sound of a mighty wind, apparent tongues of fire, foreign languages spoken with ease by the disciples, the disciples proclaiming Jesus, the Savior from sin, boldly and with wisdom. All amazing things! Yet, if that is all that had happened, how significant would the day have been? The real significance is borne out as Peter’s Spirit-led words drew to a close. Peter urged the people to be separated from the comrades of Satan around them and to be baptized. They did.

Baptism is “not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God.” (1 Peter 3:21) Paul recalls the invitation he received, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins!” (Acts 22:16) “According to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5) Baptism is a special gift of God—we call it a sacrament—by which each is personally welcomed into the Holy Christian Church, personally assured of forgiveness in Christ, and adopted into God’s family. Its power lies in the command and promises of God, not in the doing of the deed. Baptism is for young and old alike, a special means of grace for faith to embrace—“You are washed clean in Jesus!” In love, God reaches out to sinners.

Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit was showered upon the hearts of many listeners. Three thousand were added to the Church family that day! Through the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they, by faith, will abide in heaven forever! Big finish!

Lord, thank you for the gift of the water and the Word, by which I, a sinner, am led to cling to Jesus for forgiveness.
Amen!

Weekend Rest Journal

MATCHING: Give all possible answers. Not all answers are used. Some are used more than once.

1. _____ The day on which Jesus died.
2. _____ The day on which Jesus rose from the grave.
3. _____ The day on which Jesus went up to heaven.
4. _____ The day on which Jesus gave the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
5. _____ The day on which Jesus will return to earth.

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| A. Thursday | H. Easter |
| B. Unknown | I. Last Day |
| C. Sunday | J. Wednesday |
| D. Ascension Day | K. Saturday |
| E. Friday | L. Good Friday |
| F. Pentecost Day | M. Resurrection Day |
| G. Black Friday | N. Judgment Day |

SHORT ANSWER:

6. _____ How many days from His death to His rising from the grave.
7. _____ How many days from His rising from the grave to His return to heaven.
8. _____ How many days from His rising from the grave to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
9. _____ How many days from His return to heaven to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit

ANSWERS: 1. E, I - 2. C, H, M - 3. A, D - 4. C, F - 5. B, J, N, (M) - 6. Three - 7. Forty - 8. Fifty - 9. Ten

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?

Malachi 2:10a

Godly Examples

There are many titles given to God in the Bible, to which we human beings can relate. He is at various times identified as a Sovereign, a King, a Lord, a Ruler, a Judge, a Creator, or a Husband. However, except for Husband, the title that is relatable to more people than any other is Father. There are relatively few kings, lords, or judges in this world, but every child has a father. That designation in Scripture of God as Father is both an honor and a responsibility for every father in this world!

It is an honor because God chose in His Word to identify His desired relationship with human beings in terms of the family relationship that exists between human fathers and their children. There is an emotional connection that exists between fathers and children which is unlike any other. It combines children's love and honor for their fathers, and a deep desire by fathers to both protect and provide for their children. It is a relationship that provides stability and security for families and strength within societies.

That honor, however, comes with tremendous responsibility. How children relate to and think of their fathers is a precursor to how they will think of and relate to their God. If children have a loving, stable, and strong relationship with their earthly fathers, they will be able to relate to and rely upon their heavenly Father much more easily. This is suggested by Martin Luther in his explanation to the Address of the Lord's Prayer. In explaining the meaning of the phrase: "Our Father, who art in heaven," Luther writes: "With these words God tenderly encourages us to believe that He is our true Father and we are His true children, so that we may ask Him boldly and with complete confidence as dear children ask their dear father."

Fathers, as we celebrate Father's Day, let us recognize both the honor and the responsibility that comes with that beloved title.

Dear heavenly Father, help all earthly fathers to recognize their responsibility to be good fathers, so that their children will relate to You with love, honor, and devotion. Amen.

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. 1 Peter 3:7

Godly Relationships

You may go to school to become an engineer, an architect, or a teacher, but you do not go to school to become a father. Sadly, you can become a father with less preparation than it takes to get a driver's license! The result is that many men are unprepared to become good fathers.

One of the best ways to become a good father is first to be a good husband! This is because children learn the meaning of godly family relationships by observing how their fathers treat their mothers. Sons learn how to be gentlemen by observing how their fathers treat their mothers. Daughters learn what to look for in a man by comparing him to her father.

Fathers, therefore, ought to listen carefully to God's instruction regarding their relationships with their wives. Peter urges husbands to live with their wives "with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life." To understand their wives, husbands must be prepared to listen to them with love and respect. A wife is God's greatest gift to a husband apart from his saving faith. She is both his companion and partner in life and is intended by God to assist her husband in achieving all that He has planned for them. Peter then speaks of giving honor to wives—treasuring them for their strengths while protecting them as individuals who are generally physically weaker. Peter emphasizes the importance of the spiritual element of a marital relationship—spouses encouraging and strengthening each other in their faith and relationship with God.

Children do not go to school to learn about godly family relationships, but they observe what God both desires and expects when their fathers nurture godly relationships within their homes!

Dear heavenly Father, help all earthly fathers to recognize the importance of fostering godly relationships with their wives—the mothers of their children. Grant them wisdom, love, and faithfulness and, thereby, bring blessings to their families. Amen.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Godly Leadership

There is only one true God...the LORD! The LORD identifies Himself as a Trinity, revealed most clearly through Jesus! After instructing believers to love the LORD with all their heart, soul, and strength, Moses turns to fathers and instructs them as the leaders of their children to guide them to do that very thing!

How can fathers succeed in their leadership role within the family? First, Moses instructs fathers to spend time with God's word! That word is to occupy an honored place in every father's heart. Fathers will want, therefore, to spend time reading and studying that word. As Jesus observes: “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and treasure it!” (Lk. 11:28 Literal).

Second, fathers are to take their teaching role within the family seriously. Sadly, all too often such teaching is left for mothers to undertake. Mothers are certainly to be involved in the spiritual instruction of children, but fathers, by virtue of their leadership role, are to play a primary role. This they are to do each day as they interact with their children wherever or whenever that may be!

Third, God's truths are to be a father's guiding principles in life. God's truths are not to be forgotten or left behind, but, as it were, worn for everyone to see. Fathers are to be examples of true godliness for their families.

Dear heavenly Father, please move all fathers to love You above all, to cherish Your Word, and to live Your truths as examples of genuine godliness for their families. Amen.

You, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:4

Godly Instruction

How might a father provoke his children to wrath? Let me count the ways: 1) By being too harsh, taking out his anger and frustration on them rather than disciplining them in love; 2) By being too lenient with them, allowing them to do whatever they wish to their harm; 3) By being absent from their home and their children's lives due to misplaced priorities; 4) By being abusive in his language or his actions, belittling or hurting them and thereby embittering their hearts; 5) By being a hypocrite, telling his children to live a godly life, while living an ungodly life himself.

How might a father foster a loving and God-pleasing relationship with his children and so fulfill his responsibilities before God? Paul instructs fathers: "Bring them (their children) up in the training and admonition of the Lord!" What does that mean? How is that done?

A child's training begins from little on, as fathers lead children down a godly path. It involves introducing them to God and assuring them that God loves them and watches over them. It means leading them to Jesus and an understanding that they need a Savior. It involves teaching them the difference between right and wrong, correcting them in love when they are wrong by leading them to repentance and assuring them of God's forgiveness. It involves teaching them to pray with thankful hearts. It means listening and explaining and rejoicing and discipling the minds and hearts of little ones entrusted to their father's care for just a short time in life!

And admonition—what is involved? Think of Jesus' commands to love God above all things and to love others as ourselves. Think of Jesus' reminder that there is only one thing truly needful in life—to know and treasure the word of God. Think of Jesus' invitation to worship and to praise Him. Think of Jesus' commission to share His message of love and forgiveness with everyone.

Dear heavenly Father, help all fathers to bring up their children to know You, to love You, and follow You with faithfulness.
Amen.

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

Godly Discipline

Godly discipline—the how’s, when’s, and how much are probably debated more often than any other aspect of parenting. The Bible certainly seems to endorse corporal punishment, but society often frowns on the same. What are parents and especially fathers to do when it comes to disciplining their children?

These are issues that ought to be discussed by husbands and wives before assuming the responsibility of raising children. Parents should, whenever possible, seek agreement on how to discipline, when to discipline, and the means of discipline. Since children within the same family can be very different, it is wise to be ready to adjust any agreed upon procedures.

Godly discipline, first, is carried out in love for children, not to vent parental anger. It recognizes that children have a sin-problem just like all people...parents included. It recognizes that sin will be a part of any child’s life and will have to be corrected. But the goal should always be the good of the child and the benefit that the discipline will bring for that child’s future life and relationships.

Godly discipline, second, is to be done promptly, as directed in Scripture, so that bad habits do not take root in a child’s life. When fathers are inconsistent and irregular in their discipline, children become confused and frustrated. Just as a fence around a yard serves to protect children from dangers outside, prompt and consistent discipline serves to help children feel safe and settled.

Godly discipline, third, will involve discipling a child’s mind and heart. Administering discipline or punishment for a child does not end with the disciplinary act. Fathers must sit down with their children afterwards and share with them why the disciplinary action was taken and what ends are desired. Children must be led to recognize the importance of their relationship with God and their obedience before God. Their future success and blessing depend upon God’s grace and good will, along with their faithfulness before Him.

Dear heavenly Father, grant all fathers wisdom as they seek to discipline their children in good and godly ways. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

Read and summarize the advice given by these fathers to their sons:

1. David's words to his son, Solomon (1 Kings 2:1-4; 1 Chronicles 28:9-10)
2. Solomon's words to his son, Rehoboam (Proverbs 2:1-9)
3. Paul's words to his spiritual son, Timothy (2 Timothy 2:1-15)

[illegible]

Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools. For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity. Ecclesiastes 7:2-6

The House of Mourning

Would you rather go to a birthday party or a funeral? The one marks the beginning of life; the other the end. The one is full of laughter; the other full of tears. Most people would rather be at a party. We like to have fun. Life is full of suffering, sorrow, and sacrifice, so, we like anything that will take our minds off the realities of living.

However, what are the lasting effects of fun and laughter? Does one go away from a party with a greater understanding of this world and the next? Partygoers may be happy for a brief time, but the realities of life become more burdensome after the echo dies out. So it is that the laughter of a fool is like crackling thorns in a fire. The thorns flare up quickly and die out just as quickly. Those who go to “the house of mirth” find a time of laughter, but it lasts only as long as the party. Trying to find joy in fun and games is a fool’s quest. The joy is shallow and fleeting.

However, in the house of mourning, the heart is made better. Lasting, beneficial lessons are to be learned at a Christian funeral. There we hear of the salvation that Jesus earned for all sinners. We learn that we are forgiven and declared righteous for His sake. There is joy at such an event: joy in knowing that the departed is with Jesus and that the same glory is waiting for us. Such joy lasts forever.

“Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.”
(Matthew 5:4)

O Lord, grant us your blessed assurance. In Jesus name. Amen.

Surely extortion makes the wise man foolish; and a bribe destroys the heart. The end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit. Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools. Do not say, 'Why is it that the former days were better than these?' For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this. Ecclesiastes 7:7-10 (Author Translation)

Better Days Ahead

“How’s it going?” – “Well, it could be better.” This is the answer of the haughty, who think that they know better than God how things should be going. So, when finances are not what they are expecting, they resort to sin. Some turn to extortion, forcing the weak to give them money. Some use bribery to get things their way. In both instances, they use sin to get what God hasn’t given them.

Deeper than dissatisfaction is the fact that these arrogant people are mad at God, the Giver of all good gifts. “Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools.” God is the Source of the greatest gift of all: His Son and, through Him, our redemption. To get angry at this Savior-God is utter foolishness.

Rather than smoldering over a perceived slight from the hand of God, rather than getting angry over what you don’t have, meditate on what you DO have. For “the end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.” Be patient, dear Christian. Better things are coming. MUCH BETTER things. The eternal riches of heaven will soon be yours. So, “do not say, ‘Why is it that the former days were better than these?’” Don’t long for “the good, old days.” Rather, long for “the good, new day.”

“It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.” (Lamentations 3:26)

O Lord, help us to look for the good, new day, the day of eternal joy and peace. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun. For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, but the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it. Ecclesiastes 7:11-12

Wisdom is Your Defense

Have you ever wanted to get rich? Are you lured by the lottery, gambling, or sweepstakes? Do you think that “stuff» will make you happy? The fact is that there are very sad rich people and there are very happy poor people.

It is not a sin to be rich. Abraham and Job were rich, although they didn’t lust for it. “The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up.” (1 Samuel 2:7) Wisdom does not make money a goal in itself, but leaves it to God whether to make one rich or poor. Truly, «wisdom is good with an inheritance and profitable to those who see the sun.» As for the riches of a fool, that becomes like the heavy bag of gold that dragged the swimmer to the bottom of the sea, because he refused to let go.

Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge in a God-pleasing way. Where does such wisdom come from? “In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Colossians 2:3) If you have faith in Jesus, you will understand that the things of this world are insignificant. Having the Savior for your soul and food and covering for your body, you will be content. (1 Timothy 6:8) Beyond this, your earthly riches will be used in a manner pleasing to your Savior: providing for the needs of your loved ones, of the poor, of your church, and of your nation.

“For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, but the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.” Money when combined with wisdom provides a shadow of security. However, wisdom by itself is the substance of security. The riches of a wise man are redemption, righteousness, life, peace, joy, love, etc. With these, there is true security, even when one is poor.

Dear Savior, grant us the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
Amen

Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him. Ecclesiastes 7:13-14

The Day of Prosperity and Adversity

Every day, thousands of people turn to the horoscope to find out what their day is going to be like. This is one of the many ways that people use in an attempt to predict their future. Fearfully, they think, “If only I knew something about my future, I could make plans to prevent bad things from happening.”

God does not want us to know about the future, except for that future He has promised. Sometimes it may appear as though we are victims of chance. The reality is that God has set a pattern of salvation for our lives. He has appointed the day of adversity and the day of prosperity. The bumpy road is as much God’s doing as the smooth highway. The highs and the lows all fit neatly into God’s plan. Moreover, when God has a plan, no one can change it. “For who can make straight what He has made crooked?” We are not the masters of our fate nor the captains of our souls. He is and it is not fate. It is His predetermined pathway to heaven.

For this reason, in the present, we can rejoice in the knowledge that our sins are forgiven. As for the future, all that we need to know is that God has a plan and He will be with us every step of the way. When the day of prosperity comes, we will rejoice and give thanks to God. When the day of adversity comes, we will know that God makes everything work together for our good. There is no uncertain future. There is only the certainty of knowing that the unalterable plan of God will bring us to eternal glory.

**Be still, my soul: your God will undertake
to guide the future as he has the past.**

**Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake;
all now mysterious shall be bright at last.**

The Lutheran Service Book 752:2

I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself? Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time? It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them. Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins. Ecclesiastes 7:15-20 NASB 1995

Sinners and Saints

Why would Solomon say, “Do not be excessively righteous . . . Do not be excessively wicked...” Are we not to reject wickedness and embrace righteousness. (Romans 6). Solomon explains: “Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.” Imagine that: righteous people who sin. Sinners who are righteous! How can it be? You know: God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). You are fully righteous in Christ. To attempt to increase righteousness in yourself is to regard what He has done as insufficient. Therefore, “Do not be excessively righteous.”

On the other hand, “do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?” The fool says, “Since I am a sinner anyway, I might as well go out and sin.” That brings death. The wise man puts down his sinful nature so that he does not become “excessively wicked.”

Always remember that you are a sinner and that you are a saint. “The one who fears God comes forth with both of them.” Recognize what you are and don’t try to be more: more sinful or more saintly. Let Jesus take care of both, removing the sin and bestowing the righteousness.

O Lord, I am a sinner. Forgive me and help me to avoid more sin. O Lord, I am righteous. Help me to avoid thinking that I can add to what Christ has done for me. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. What are some of the joys found at a wedding? What does a good wedding sermon focus on? What are the joys found at a funeral? What does a good funeral sermon focus on. Look up Revelation 21:1-4. Notice how God brings together both messages of a wedding and a funeral into one great final picture.
2. How would you answer this question: "How are things going in your life?" Pray for the Lord's wisdom and direction in your life.
3. What would you change if you knew, 1, tomorrow you will die; and 2, tomorrow you will not die?

[illegible]

Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.” John 8:34 ESV

Free, but Still in Slavery

Jesus told some of the Jews that if they would abide in His Word, they would know the truth and that truth would set them free. They were confused. They were the offspring of Abraham and had never been in slavery to anyone. Sure, their ancestors may have been in slavery in Egypt years ago, but not them. Jesus then spoke these words, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.” (John 8:34)

The slavery Christ speaks of is slavery to sin. Many think they are free because they make their own decisions. And so they are ruled by their own passions. The harsh taskmaster of ambition, the cruel tyrant of addiction, the evil despot of lust, and a host more, hold sway over many a life. Even we, as redeemed and forgiven children of God, daily struggle against these powers that would bring us back into submission. But, oh! To live without Christ in the heart is to be subject to them with no ability to escape.

How can these people not know they are slaves? It is because without the Holy Spirit, everyone is an earth-bound creature wanting to satisfy only one thing, itself. When the fruit was still on the tongue and juice upon the chin, Adam and Eve did not recall the warning of their loving God. Once their eyes were opened however, they realized they had exchanged their Creator King for service to Satan. The passions of this earth can satisfy for a moment, but then the bitter disappointment comes and the slave moves on to a new master seeking fulfillment.

The good news is that Jesus brings us the truth which will make us free. In this freedom, we are now able to serve a new Master. (more on this tomorrow)

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 pow’r to save.

The Lutheran Hymnal 498:1

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. Romans 6:22 ESV

Made Free, Yet Still Slaves

It may seem to run contrary to the American spirit, or even the spirit of man, to want to be a slave yet there it is. In Romans 6:16, Paul tells us that anyone or anything you serve becomes your master and you its slave. Natural man has the freedom to only serve Satan, self, and the passions of this world.

Paul explains that when we were baptized into Christ we were baptized into His death and buried with Him. Our old Adam was crucified with Christ and died there on the cross. Can a corpse be held guilty of any crime, can it be punished for anything? No! This is how we are to think of our old sinful flesh—dead, buried, totally impotent in our lives. We are freed from the law and therefore also from sin and death!

To what end has Jesus redeemed us in this way? So that we may present ourselves as willing and obedient slaves to Him. We know His yoke is easy and His burden is light and He is the way to life everlasting.

It may seem strange to think of Adam and Eve in paradise as slaves, yet they were. They willingly, obediently, and joyfully placed themselves under the obedience of their Creator God. They knew this was their proper place for peace, security, and joy eternal. It is only when they looked to another master that obedience to God became trying, burdensome, and altogether impossible.

O Holy Spirit, grant us grace That we our Lord and Savior
In faith and fervent love embrace And truly serve Him ever,
So that when death is drawing nigh,
We to His open wounds may fly And find in them salvation.

Help us that we Thy saving Word
In faithful hearts may treasure;
Let e'er that Bread of Life afford New grace in richest measure.
Yea, let us die to ev'ry sin, For heav'n create us new within
That fruits of faith may flourish.

The Lutheran Hymnal 293:1-2

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Ephesians 2:19 ESV

Citizens Abroad

Since the beginning, sovereign nations have reserved the right to protect their borders. This provides the citizenry with peace and protection and many other privileges granted to citizens.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul talks of citizenship in heaven. Since God is love and Christians are to love all others, including enemies, many expect heaven to be wall-less, with open borders welcoming all, simply because they have passed to the next life. We read in Ephesians this isn't so. Paul instructs the Gentiles, "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (Ephesians 2:12) This condition applies to all people of all time by birth—strangers, aliens, and enemies of God with no hope of ever gaining entrance to the heavenly realms.

Fortunately, our God was not satisfied with this status for us. He made and executed the plan to bring us into fellowship with Him and citizenship in our heavenly abode. This He accomplished through the redemptive work of Jesus. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:13) By His life, death, and resurrection Jesus has restored us to a relationship of peace with God the Father. He has also credited His righteousness to our account so that our path to citizenship in heaven is completely unobstructed.

We are now, "no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." (Ephesians 2:19) What a wonder! What a joy to look forward to in heaven! But, don't miss the fact that you are a citizen of heaven now. No matter your status or circumstance, no matter your condition, or the freedoms, or lack thereof, you endure now, your heavenly citizenship is yours today! Let this Gospel truth shape and guide your daily thoughts and actions.

O sweet and blessed country, the home of God's elect!
O sweet and blessed country That eager hearts expect!
Jesus, in mercy bring us To that dear land of rest,
Who art, with God the Father And Spirit, ever blest.

The Lutheran Hymnal 613:4

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 ESV

The Politics of Prayer

During the 2024 presidential campaigns, the scads of political signs in our town were clamoring for my attention. Then I saw a few that simply reminded us to pray. I can imagine some prayers running in this fashion, “Dear Lord, please let (insert name of favorite candidate) defeat (insert name of opposing candidate). In Jesus’ name. Amen.” Thankfully, our God instructs us how to appropriately pray for any and all including those in charge.

“First of all, then,” Paul tells us, “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions,” (1 Timothy 2:1-2a) It’s usually easy to pray for family, loved ones, and fellow believers. But, praying for someone across the political aisle or an individual we didn’t vote for can be quite a challenge. However, the Lord even gives us the purpose of these prayers in verse two of our passage, “that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” Shouldn’t this be the goal of everyone no matter who happens to be in authority? To live peacefully and quietly, pursuing the things of God is a freedom we have enjoyed under every administration of our nation due to the grace of God. Keep praying for it, for God has a purpose in mind.

God doesn’t simply want us to enjoy ourselves under a peaceful authority. There is a purpose to praying for peaceful governance in our land. When we live in peace and a godly, dignified manner, God tells us, “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:3-4) Let us continue to pray for these blessings on our nation and to take the opportunity to bring the truth of Jesus to all.

May He adorn with precious peace
Our own, our native, land
And crown with joys that never cease
The labors of our hand!

The Lutheran Hymnal 581:6

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives ...to set at liberty those who are oppressed. Luke 4:18 ESV

Liberty Loving Jesus

Jesus has been called a liberal, a radical, a champion of the downtrodden, and a reformer. Though some aspects of these labels may fit various points of Jesus' teachings, they all miss the real point of His work.

Americans are a liberty loving, freedom chasing bunch. On this Fourth of July we are celebrating our 249th anniversary of declaring our independence from Great Britain. That liberty was hard fought and won against the most powerful nation in the world at the time. What would Jesus have had to say if He were walking the streets of Boston during those turbulent times?

Jesus was born into a freedom loving nation as well, they just weren't able to enjoy much of it. The Romans had been dominating Israel for years. The Jewish people, their puppet leaders, and even their religious council were subject to Roman law. Jesus surely had something to say then! He told the people to pay their taxes, pray for those in charge, if a government official tells you to walk a mile, go two. He gave no command for protests, rights, equal pay, fair treatment, or obeying only those laws you agree with. The only exception is when an earthly government instructs to disobey a law of God's. Then Jesus commands us to obey God rather than men.

Despite what this sounds like, Jesus really does care about individuals and their rights and freedoms. But Jesus came to preach and provide liberty from sin, death, the power of the Devil, and our own sinful flesh. When we have been presented with this freedom through baptism or the Gospel, then we understand that this is the liberty which transcends any on this earth.

We have been blessed to live in a nation which enjoys more freedom than any on earth. Let us use this freedom to preach true heavenly liberty in Christ to all the nations!

**Unite us in the sacred love Of knowledge, truth, and Thee;
And let our hills and valleys shout The songs of liberty.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 578:3

Weekend Rest Journal

1. The Eighth Commandment is easily broken especially when it comes to politics. Take a moment to consider how this has played out in your life. Pray for the Lord's help in growing in a Christ like attitude.
2. As a non-Roman in a Roman province, an individual of Jesus' time would have virtually no say in how the laws and the government operated. Yet, Jesus obeyed the laws and successfully completed his Father's work. How might this influence our perspective on our position in American society?
3. Make a list of your political leaders: federal, state, or local. Pray for these individuals, by name, often. Pray God give them wisdom and courage to perform their duties appropriately. After all God has tasked these people with governing us so that peace may reign and the Gospel prevail!

[illegible]

This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens. Genesis 2:4

Genesis: The Book of Beginnings

The title “Genesis” is a fitting name for the first book of the Bible. Genesis is a Greek word meaning “beginning.” This book is the beginning of God’s marvelous rescue plan of salvation. Genesis lays the foundation for God’s work of salvation by describing the beginning of the perfect world (1:1), the beginning of mankind (1:27; 2:7, 21f), and the institution of marriage (2:24f). It continues by detailing the origin of sin (3:6f), and death (3:19; 4:8). Following the fall into sin, Moses records God’s first Gospel promise of a coming Savior (3:15).

The book of Genesis details the beginning of cities (4:17), music and poetry (4:19-24), the beginning of sacrifices (4:3f), and the beginning of different languages (11:5-9). However, the specific purpose of Genesis is to trace God’s saving activity throughout the history of the world. Genesis is the first chapter in God’s plan to deliver sinful mankind from sin and death, and describes God’s plan through His call of Abraham and God’s establishment of the nation of Israel from Abraham’s descendants.

Why is salvation necessary? Genesis teaches us that we are sinful and are doomed without it. It also shows us where the twofold division (believers and unbelievers) of the world came from. As you read the fifty fast-paced chapters of this history, pay special attention to how Genesis describes God’s work of redemption. It is not found in theological statements of doctrine, but through the biographies of real people. In the lives of these people we find God at work with the message of His law and the message of His grace to deliver sinners from death.

Lord, thank You for planning and carrying out salvation for sinners. Amen.

We have a sure prophetic Word
By inspiration of the LORD;
And though assailed on every hand,
Jehovah’s Word shall ever stand.

The Lutheran Hymnal 290:3

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Exodus 20:2

Exodus: The Exit from Egypt

The title of the second book of the Old Testament comes from the Greek name given to it. The word exodus means “going out,” which is fitting since it relates to the purpose of the book, and shows how God delivered His people from Egypt. This deliverance also marks the beginning of Israel as a separate nation, as the LORD fulfilled His promise to Abraham to make of him a great nation (Genesis 12:2). At the foot of Mt. Sinai, the people of Israel were formed as a nation and ruled by a theocracy (meaning a “rule by God”) through the giving of the covenant which contained moral, civil, and ceremonial laws which the people were commanded to obey.

These laws were given specifically to the nation of Israel and the civil and ceremonial laws are not binding upon us today. These laws were done away with by Christ, as Paul writes, “the Law was our tutor until Christ” (Galatians 3:24). Jesus delivered us from the Law of Moses. While the Moral Law is for all people of all time, sinners are not saved by the law. The law was not given to instruct man how to get to heaven. Salvation has always been by the Gospel (Galatians 3:16-18). God’s work of salvation is beautifully described in Exodus in the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12, 1 Corinthians 5:7), the manna from heaven (Exodus 16, John 6:48-51), and the water from the rock (Exodus 17:1-7, 1 Corinthians 10:4). Through the law God shows that we cannot be holy of ourselves. At the same time, through the sacrifices and worship ordinances of the Ceremonial Law God shows us how we are holy, namely, through the blood offering of God’s promised Savior.

Lord, point us to our salvation in the work of Jesus. Amen.

Yet as the law must be fulfilled or we must die despairing,
Christ came and has God’s anger stilled,
our human nature sharing.

He has for us the law obeyed and thus the Father’s vengeance
stayed, Which over us impended.

The Lutheran Hymnal 377:5

Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. Leviticus 16:21

Leviticus: Sacrifice for Sin

The title Leviticus comes from Levi, the family which was chosen to serve in the worship of God's people. The priests, and all those who assisted with worship and the Tabernacle, were descendants of Levi (Exodus 28:1). In Leviticus, the LORD presents the people with the proper manner to approach and commune with Him in public worship, and gives instructions to the priests concerning the worship practices He prescribed for them.

In this book, Moses detailed the various sacrifices God required of Israel. This also included what was expected of Aaron and his sons who served in the priesthood, and the great religious festivals which the LORD established for Israel. These descriptions point to the need for and the promise of a coming Savior.

Leviticus can be summed up as Israel's worship handbook, showing the people how to worship, serve, and obey the holy God. The God-established purpose behind all of these things can be found in 19:2: "You shall be holy for I the LORD your God am holy." The LORD also showed that His people were not able to become holy through their own actions, but only through the act of God. On the Day of Atonement, a lamb was slaughtered and its blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat, then the sins of the people were confessed over the head of the scapegoat which was led away from the camp of Israel and into the wilderness. These animals pointed Israel to the coming Savior. Only through the Lamb of God and His perfect life and death, offering and sacrifice, are sinners holy before the LORD!

Lord, thank you for making me holy through the blood of Jesus. Amen.

The holy, meek, unspotted Lamb,
Who from the Father's bosom came,
Who died for me, e'en me to atone,
Now for my Lord and God I own.

The Lutheran Hymnal 371:3

The LORD is long-suffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. Numbers 14:18

Numbers: Sin and Grace in the Wilderness

The reason for the title “Numbers” is because of the censuses that are taken of Israel’s fighting men both at the beginning and the end of the book. The LORD commanded these counts in order to strengthen the people for their conquering march through the Promised Land. Based on the census, Israel numbered approximately two and a half million people, which demonstrated the miraculous care of the LORD as He provided for them all in the wilderness.

The numbering of the people makes up only a small part of the book. The book was more fittingly referred to as “In the wilderness” by the Jews. This is a much more descriptive title for the book since these chapters cover the 40-year history of Israel in the wilderness. This wandering was the result of Israel’s lack of trust in the LORD to deliver the Promised Land into their hand. Because of this, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years (14:34). This wandering reveals the purpose for the book. It shows the longsuffering nature of the LORD, the need to rest on His love and to focus on His promise in the coming Christ. In addition, Israel’s faithlessness is contrasted with the LORD’s faithfulness and His continued grace and mercy in sustaining the entire nation.

The Apostle Paul tells us that this history is also for us (1 Corinthians 10:1-13). We too are to trust that the LORD will see us through as we journey in the wilderness of this sinful world on our way to the Promised Land of eternal life.

Lord, forgive our sin and protect and lead us in this life because of your faithfulness. Amen.

LORD, dismiss us with Your blessing;
fill our hearts with joy and peace.

Let us each, Your love possessing, triumph in redeeming grace.
O refresh us, O refresh us, trav’ling through this wilderness.

The Lutheran Hymnal 50:1 (adapted)

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children. Deuteronomy 6:4-7a

Deuteronomy: Remember and Teach

Although the title Deuteronomy comes from Greek and means “second law,” this book is essentially Moses’ farewell speech to Israel. The events of this book take place on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River. It covers a period of about one month following Israel’s forty-year journey in the wilderness. The opening verse says, “These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan in the wilderness” (1:1).

Moses gave this address to prepare the new generation for entrance into the land God promised to Abraham and His descendants and to encourage them to believe on and obey the LORD. Moses shows how God’s laws, which had been given at Mt. Sinai and would be put to use in the Promised Land. It repeats many of the events recorded in the previous four books but also serves as a battle plan for conquest, as Moses tells the people how God wanted them to deal with the people who lived in Canaan.

Moses gave this dying exhortation to his beloved people in spite of their rebellious and stubborn nature. He encouraged the people to remember the works and the promises of the LORD, and exhorted them to pass these truths and promises of the LORD on to their children and succeeding generations. While this encouragement was given to Israel, much still applies to us today. Equip the next generation by teaching them God’s Word!

Lord, teach us Your truth, and give us strength to pass Your truth on to our children! Amen.

Let children hear the mighty deeds which God performed of old,
Which in our younger years we saw, and which our fathers told.
Oh, teach them with all diligence the truths of God’s own Word,
To place in Him their confidence, to fear and trust their LORD.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read Genesis chapters five and ten. Genealogies are part of God's Word, given for our instruction. Consider and discuss why God inspired these family trees, and what He intends for us to learn from them. What patterns do you notice and what do you think this indicates?
2. In the final chapters of Exodus, the LORD gave very specific details about the construction of the tabernacle and items connected to it. Read Exodus 39 and reflect on why these details have been preserved for us. What does God want us to learn from the inclusion of these verses and other similar verses in these books?
3. In Romans 15:4, the Apostle Paul writes: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Contemplate and discuss what we can learn from each of the books of Moses. What hope do these books offer us today?

[illegible]

“Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth.” 1 Kings 17:24

A Prophet of Comfort

Elijah was a very bold prophet, capable of preaching the sweetest of the LORD's Gospel comforts. Elijah was sent to witness to a woman in the Phoenician village of Zarephath, in the distant north, the land of the Gentiles. Elijah preached the LORD's faithfulness, His power over crisis, even His power over death itself. In giving all glory to God and His holy name, Elijah, by the LORD's grace, had his prophetic words confirmed. He prophesied that the widow's near-empty supply of oil and flour (enough ingredients to make one more meal for her and her son before they died) would not run out until the drought was over.

The gracious LORD was not done with His Gospel witness to the widow. As her trials grew more intense, her son died from a terrible illness. Her son's passing grieved her and struck her with guilt to the point of saying to the prophet Elijah, “What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?” Faced with the grim reality of what sin has brought into the world—death—she has nothing but a stricken heart. Then the prophet does something miraculous. By God's power, Elijah raises her son from the dead! God has power over death! He has, in fact, destroyed death forever. Jesus, the God whom Elijah served, came from heaven to destroy death upon the cross and through His empty grave. He gave life to the boy, and He has given life, eternal life, to you and me.

Moreover, the woman says in response to this miracle that the word of the LORD, delivered by His prophets, written in His Holy Word, is true. It brings to us the sure promises of sins forgiven and life everlasting.

He lives and grants me daily breath;

He lives, and I shall conquer death;

He lives my mansion to prepare;

He lives to bring me safely there.

The Lutheran Hymnal 200:7

Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals. Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah." 1 Kings 18:17-19

A Prophet of Confrontation

Fear, love, and trust in God above all things—that is the first and greatest commandment. King Ahab throws it away, replacing the Almighty Creator and Savior with blobs of wood and stone named “Baal” and “Asherah.” This unholy practice could not stand, so Elijah confronts Ahab about this sin, to call forth repentance, to turn away from sin to God and His mercy. As Ahab and Elijah exchange words in their intense confrontation, the conversation builds up to an epic showdown—who’s real? The LORD vs. Baal, nine hundred and fifty false prophets vs. one true prophet, the lifeless lump of Baal vs. the living, gracious God.

It was time for Israel to relearn who the real God was. Nine hundred fifty prophets, screaming, shouting, waiting for their offering pyre to start on fire . . . nothing happened. Elijah laughs, “Maybe he’s sleeping?” All the intensity of the Baal worshippers continues, and still nothing happens. Now it was Elijah’s turn. As he prepares the altar, Elijah has it doused with gallons of water, making it extremely difficult to set it ablaze. Elijah then prays to the LORD that He may show to Israel that He, the LORD God, is the one true God. Then, BAM! Fire was sent from Heaven from above, consuming the altar with efficiency.

There’s no Baal, there’s no Asherah, there is nothing in this world that you should put your trust in above Jesus Christ, your Savior. He is God, His ways are flawless, He is real, and He has saved you from your damning unbelief, bringing you to faith in Him—Your crucified and risen Savior.

See earth in darkness lying, The heathen nations dying
In hopeless gloom and night.
To thee the Lord of heaven—Thy Life, thy Hope—hath given
Great glory, honor, and delight

The Lutheran Hymnal 126:2

Say to Ahab, "Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you." Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel. Then the hand of the LORD came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

1 Kings 18:44-46

A Prophet of Determination

With Israel now shouting, "The LORD, He is God! the LORD, He is God!" (1 Kings 18:39) and with nearly one thousand false prophets put to death, as commanded by the Law of the LORD in the days of the Old Testament, the stage was set for much work to be done in recovering the land's spiritual sight.

Though he would fail in His God-given assignment, King Ahab was responsible for upholding true worship, praise, preaching, and teaching of the one true God. I truly wonder what Ahab's thoughts must have been after all the intensity. One thousand false prophets proven wrong and put to death? The true God proven right, just as His holy word says. Fire was sent from Heaven! Ahab should've felt silly for promoting Baal worship. Perhaps all this flooded his thoughts, as his horses swiftly guided his chariot through the heavy downpour; until suddenly, through the raging downpour, a person, outrunning the kingdom's finest horses. It's Elijah, the LORD's prophet! The messenger of God, swift in foot by the LORD's power, runs before the king, determined to share the truth of sin and grace with the people that the LORD desires to save.

What a picture that gives to us! There goes the messenger, swiftly running to share the news. The joyful urgency, to show sin's seriousness and the grace of Jesus Christ that takes away sin, can only be given by God's grace through His Word.

On Galilee's high mountain Christ gave the great command

In words of strength and promise which all can understand:

"All power to me is given to do what I shall choose;

Therefore I send my children; Their witness I will use."

Worship Supplement 772:1

And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

1 Kings 19:11-12

A Prophet Needing Encouragement

Raising a child from the dead, witnessing fire from heaven and the proving of nine hundred fifty false prophets wrong, outrunning an army chariot: one might think that Elijah should be set for life when it comes to encouragement. But no, even he grew discouraged.

Just then, the LORD had His servant witness something incredible: wind strong enough to shatter large rocks, a tremendous earthquake, a raging fire! God sent all these things, a picture of His almighty, wrathful power. Certainly, all this should convince people, but, as the Bible puts it, God was “not in” the wind, fire, or earthquake. This wrathful might was not what would save Israel. That salvation would come in the still small voice of God’s good news, the very thing that could create faith in the hearts of Israel.

Elijah was assured of this once more, giving him new strength to carry on. And so it is with you and I. Often it may seem like nothing can convince your family, your friends, or the entire nation that Jesus and His word are true and that He is the only way to salvation. Arguments and reasoning, even so powerful as to break rock into pieces, is not what convinces the heart of salvation. That comes in the still small voice of the Gospel. That sweet Gospel, the message of sins forgiven by Jesus’ perfect life and innocent death, is what will create faith. It’s what strengthens all Christians during times of doubt, just as it did with Elijah.

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 291:4

Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. 2 Kings 2:11

A Prophet Taken Home

Oh the stories of the wonders of God's power and love that these two men, Elijah and Elisha, could share! Chasing king's chariots, proving hundreds of false prophets wrong, raising children from the dead, cleansing pots of stew, causing axe heads to float, watching one's mentor be taken to heaven by fiery chariot, what a ministry!

Yet, being realistic, I must confess that these two prophets went through trials that I would not dare wish upon myself. Elijah, persecuted by Queen Jezebel for nothing but preaching the cold hard truth, was near the point of suicide, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Kings 19:4)

Elijah, though, was never alone. The LORD God was always at His side, to always support him in life, and finally, to deliver him—only not "in death." This is the grace of Elijah's God! Yes, let's give all credit to the LORD, for that's what the LORD and His prophet would want. The LORD God, in His mercy, spared Elijah from temporal death, from his soul and body separating. The LORD God gifted His servant by taking him directly to heaven.

This is the type of God Elijah proclaimed, and He's your God, too! Though He may not use fiery chariots to take you to heaven, He has still saved you through Jesus' death and resurrection, just as He did with Elijah. One day, when our eyelids close in death, we will be in a place with no more sorrow or tears, delivered to our eternal rest, to stand with Elijah in worshipping our Savior God.

So, whene'er the signal's given
Us from earth to call away,
Borne on angels' wings to heaven,
Glad the summons to obey.
May we ever, may we ever,
Reign with Christ in endless day!

The Lutheran Hymnal 50:3

Weekend Rest Journal

The LORD used many prophets to preach His holy word, all of which certainly endured hardship. Yet, they all were blessed tremendously by their God.

1. Recall the Prophet Jonah. Read Jonah 1:1-6 What did the LORD call Jonah to do? What was Jonah's response? What hardship did Jonah face?
2. Recall the Prophet Elisha. Read 2 Kings 8:7-15 What did the LORD call Elisha to do? What hardships did he endure? How did he respond?
3. Recall the Prophet Moses. Read Exodus 17:1-7 What did the LORD call Moses to do? What hardships did he face? How did he response?

[illegible]

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. Isaiah 42:1 ESV

My Servant to Bring Justice to the Gentiles

The prophet Isaiah spoke many words of comfort to those with the threat of Judgment hanging over their heads. In chapters 40-55, 'Saint Paul of the Old Testament' speaks of God's Chosen Servant, who comes to answer his people's problems.

So, like John the Baptist standing on the bank of the Jordan River with a finger outstretched, the Prophet Isaiah gains our attention with the word 'behold' and points to the chosen servant of God, the Christ. The LORD God delights in Him. The LORD God has placed His Spirit upon Him. The LORD God has sent Him to bring justice to more than Israel. He brings it for all the nations.

The words that follow this initial description declare Him gentle and meek, faithful and focused. He will not quit until He has established justice on earth for sinners. We understand by faith who this Servant is—the Lord Jesus. In order that we may be completely certain, the Gospel writer, Matthew is directed to quote these words as fulfilled in Jesus (Matthew 12:16-21).

This Servant of God has completed the work He was sent to do. He declared as much triumphantly on Calvary: "It is finished!" He has accomplished justice for you by bearing your sins and guilt Himself. He has done this for all the nations...but so many don't know. God's Servant has enlisted you to make known His salvation to the world. We simply point to him and say, "Look, God's Servant!"

Tell me, ye who hear Him groaning,
Was there ever grief like His?
Friends thro' fear His cause disowning,
Foes insulting His distress;
Many hands were raised to wound Him,
None would interpose to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him
Was the stroke that Justice gave.

The Lutheran Hymnal 153:2

And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” Isaiah 49:5-6 ESV

My Servant to Bring Salvation to the End of the Earth

In the Forty-Ninth Chapter of Isaiah, the Servant tells us that His purpose was given him before being formed in His mother; that His purpose was to bring the people of Jacob/Israel back to the LORD. He is successful because the LORD is His Strength.

But He doesn't come only for the relatives of Jacob. No, that would be too small a thing. The plan devised by God's mercy and carried out by God's Servant has a much larger scope. He comes to be a light for the nations, one to chase the darkness of sin and death. He comes not only for the circumcised, but the uncircumcised, for those without any knowledge of the Living God or relationship with them. He comes to be their God as well.

I'm so glad that God doesn't think small. I think you should be happy too, especially if you are not sons of Jacob by blood. He comes with salvation. He comes to forever deliver us from sin and its consequences, from death and the hell we have deserved. He's not merely an example. He's the servant of God who comes to do this for you.

Ah, look on me with pity Though I am weak and poor;
Admit me to Thy kingdom To dwell there, blest and sure.
I pray Thee, guide and keep me Safe from my bitter foes,
From sin and death and Satan; Free me from all my woes

The Lutheran Hymnal 130:5

Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. Isaiah 52:13-15 ESV

My Servant Marred Beyond Human Semblance

I have a number of pictures on the walls of my office that depict Jesus. On one wall, He is on the cross. He does not look all that beat up and is a fairly attractive man. On another wall is the familiar work of the artist Hook which shows the compassionate Jesus gazing upon me. The thing is...it's His Word that draws us to Him, not His appearance.

Isaiah says that God's Servant would act wisely and be exalted. But he also tells us that His appearance was disfigured beyond recognition. On Calvary, after scourging and being crowned with thorns and crucified, He is swollen and bloody. Who among us would seek a hug from Him?

When we see Him by faith, like this, we know that He willingly endured this in love for us. He shows a love that we just do not find in this world. In this world we find self-centeredness and pride. In Christ we find incomprehensible love. We still marvel at that love. Even kings and princes will hear and marvel at what He has done. He has done all this freely, in order to win our love for him.

It wasn't pretty to look upon. It is beautiful and amazing.

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in,
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing
he bled and died to take away my sin.
Then sings my soul, my Savior-God, to Thee,
'How great thou art! How great Thou art!'
Then sings my soul, my Savior-God, to Thee,
'How great thou art! How great Thou art!'

Worship Supplement 744:3

*Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make
many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their
iniquities.* Isaiah 53:11 ESV

My Servant, the Righteous One

An Olympic athlete, wrapped in his country's flag, weeps openly as the gold medal is lifted over his head and awarded. A journalist stuffs a microphone in his face and asks, "Was all the hard work and dedication worth it?" It was all worth it when you see the results.

Now picture a journalist transported back in time to skull hill outside of Jerusalem. A man dies on a cross. He hangs there in anguish unable to breathe and then in shock. His back is in ribbons. His mother weeps below the cross and his friends cry together. He lifts his arm high enough to catch the answer and asks, "Jesus, was it all worth it?"

He summons His remaining strength and declares, "It is Finished!" "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." He bows His head and dies. The answer comes a few days later when an angel of God descends from heaven to roll back the stone of His borrowed resting place to show that He's gone. He is risen!

Was it worth it? The Prophet Isaiah answered the question hundreds of years beforehand. He declared: "by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities." The answer is a resounding YES! It was worth it to Jesus because His love placed a value on us that we can't fathom. How could He love the unlovable with such boundless love? Listen again. This isn't just a message of only the New Testament, it's the message and lesson of the whole of scripture. It was worth it!

Here we have a firm foundation, Here the refuge of the lost;
Christ's the Rock of our salvation, His the name of which we boast.
Lamb of God, for sinners wounded, Sacrifice to cancel guilt!
None shall ever be confounded Who on Him their hope have built

The Lutheran Hymnal 153:4

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. Isaiah 50:4-6 ESV

My Servant, Compassionate, Listening, Humble

This past Advent season, we meditated on the familiar words found in the ninth chapter of Isaiah. It's a birth announcement, but the child to be born is described in stupendous fashion. He is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. The first name reveals something about His compassionate nature. He comes to have the perfect word to speak to sinners in every situation.

The words that He speaks comes from God Himself (which He is). He gives Him His tongue and His words are able to sustain the weary. He from little on would listen intently to God's message and would so share and fulfill that message Himself. He was willing to go even further, to be treated with shame and contempt because He was enduring all of this for us.

The Servant of God brings salvation to sinners. He's also available with words of comfort, both then and now. When we struggle, we need only open the Scriptures and listen to Him speak the words that we need to hear.

Jesus' words always have power. He doesn't take time off. God helps us to seek Him out daily. In Him we will find His promised rest for our souls.

I praise Thee, Savior, whose compassion
Did bring Thee down to ransom me;
Thy pitying heart sought my salvation
Though keenest woes were heaped on Thee,
Bro't me from bondage full release,
Made me Thine own, and gave me peace.

The Lutheran Hymnal 243:3

Weekend Rest Journal

- 1. Think about the people and things this world idolizes. Attitude, Power, Pride. Now think of the things that this world looks down upon. Meekness, humility. Compare this to Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 42. Jot down some characteristics of the Servant that you want to also embrace.
- 2. Take some time to think about the little things in life. We overlook the blessings of God in providing necessary things like food, clothing, water, shelter. I guess they aren't so little, are they? Now think about how God revealed the greatest gift imaginable to a tiny people descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Write out a prayer of thanksgiving. List some of the daily provisions of this weekend or past week that you are grateful for.
- 3. Consider how people in this world define love. The ultimate love in this world is the love between two people or the willingness of some to die protecting others. Think about how people define beauty in our society. Now look again at Christ on the Cross. Look up Romans 5:6-10. Reflect on these verses.

“The devil was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.” John 8:44

Satan is the Original “Gaslighter”

“Gaslighting” is a term that is commonly misused, especially in politics, to accuse someone of an outrageous or repeated lie. Real gaslighting is more than that. It is a devious kind of lying, over an extended period of time, when the liar manipulates another person into questioning his or her own perception of reality. For example, an abusive spouse might manage to convince his partner, over time, that his vile actions are actually her fault.

Jesus called the devil “A liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44) He is the original gaslighter. He was successful in getting our first parents to question God’s goodness and authority, which led to the first sin and the curse of death. Satan’s tactics have been working for him ever since, and we are not immune to his schemes. When the devil and the world around us keep confronting us with an alternate reality, we can easily be tempted to think “What if they’re right after all? What makes me think that my view is the real truth? Perhaps I should be at least a little more flexible in my outlook on these matters.”

The key is to acknowledge both our own limitations and God’s steadfast faithfulness. Sinful pride says, “My opinion is the right one and everyone else is wrong.” Humble faith speaks differently. It says, “God, my dear Father, who gave His innocent Son to be my Savior, cannot lie or deceive me. What God says in His Word, the Bible, is certainly true, even if the whole world says otherwise!” The Book of James shows us the right way to deal with both our own pride and the great gaslighter: «‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:6-7)

I walk in danger all the way. The thought shall never leave me
That Satan, who has marked his prey, is plotting to deceive me.
This foe with hidden snares, may seize me unawares
If e’er I fail to watch and pray. I walk in danger all the way.

The Lutheran Hymnal 413:1

The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Psalm 19:1

Don't Let Satan Gaslight You About God and Creation

Satan, the master gaslighter, has led much of the world to an alternate "reality." He has managed to convince untold millions of people that either A) there is no God, or B) if there is, we can't know anything for certain about him, or C) if there is a God, he certainly did not create the world in six natural days.

These lies are irrational on their face. It is foolish to believe that life came from dead things, and that the unimaginably complex world around us happened by accident. "For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God." (Hebrews 3:4) It is foolish to believe that a God who is powerful enough to create this world would fail to reveal himself to us. "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." (John 1:18) It is foolish to believe that this all-powerful God was unable to do what he said he did at creation. "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them." (Exodus 20:11)

Foolish, yes, yet many people have abandoned the Bible because they are sure that so-called science has proved it to be wrong. Don't fall for Satan's gaslighting! Even if the whole wicked world considers God's Word to be "anti-science," don't listen. Instead, follow our loving Savior, Jesus, who did not say "In the beginning a giant explosion spawned the universe, life happened by accident, and people descended from lower life forms." Our Savior does not lie, and he said: "He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female.'" (Matthew 19:4)

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed,
Then sings my soul, my Savior-God to Thee,
"How great Thou art! How great Thou art!"
Then sings my soul, my Savior-God to Thee,
"How great Thou art! How great Thou art!"

Worship Supplement 744:1

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

Psalm 19:7-8

Don't Let Satan Gaslight You About the Bible

It has been described as one flawed book of holy writings among many. It has been called a collection of myths and fables, with perhaps some core of historical truth. It is considered to be a crutch on which gullible religious people lean. It is the Bible, and the devil wants to gaslight you into throwing it and your salvation in Christ away.

There are logical reasons to recognize the divine authorship of the Bible. What can you say about a book that was written down over a period of sixteen hundred years, by forty different writers who were in perfect agreement with each other? What can you say about a book with many examples of specific prophecies about people and places in the far future that actually came true? What can you say about a book that has radically changed countless lives for the better over many centuries? The obvious conclusion is that this is a miraculous book which came from God himself.

Yes, there are real, rational reasons to regard the Bible as God's Word. However, only the Holy Spirit can create true faith in a person's heart. He does this through the powerful message of the Bible. That message is that we are lost sinners, helpless to redeem ourselves, but God himself was willing to become a human being and to bear the guilt of sinners to the cross. Dying and rising again, our Lord Jesus set us free and promises us eternal life in glory. It is this conviction in the heart that leads a Christian to say, "A Savior like that, who kept every promise to me in spite of my sin, will never lie to me. He said 'Your Word is truth,' and so I am convinced that he has given me His own inspired Word, word for word, in my Bible."

Jesus loves me! This I know, for the Bible tells me so.

Little ones to him belong, they are weak but he is strong.

**Yes, Jesus loves me, Yes, Jesus loves me, Yes, Jesus loves me,
The Bible tells me so.**

Lutheran Service Book 588:1

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6

Don't Let Satan Gaslight You About the Real Jesus

The true Jesus warned his followers that «Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.» (Matthew 24:5) This happens to be one of Satan's favorite gaslighting techniques. Here are some examples of false Christs in our own day:

The generic "Jesus" is one of many paths to eternal life. If you try your best to live a good life, the theory goes, then trusting in Jesus, Allah, Vishnu, or any "higher power" are all the same thing in the end. But the real Jesus said «I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.» (John 14:6)

The rule-maker "Jesus" is someone who helps you to become a better person, little by little, until you become good enough to enter heaven. But the real Jesus said «The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.» (Matthew 20:28)

The life coach "Jesus" wants you to be rich, powerful, and always outwardly happy in this life. But the real Jesus said "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Mark 8:34)

The solution for this gaslighting is to know and trust in the true Jesus, the one who was crucified and raised to life again. His horrible death was your fault, for he took your sin and guilt to the cross. His death was the full payment for your sin, and the end of the devil's power over you. His resurrection guarantees your own eternal life, just as he himself promised. Though you can expect trials and troubles in this life, the real Jesus said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Jesus! Name of wondrous love, name all other names above,
Unto which must every knee bow in deep humility.
Jesus! Only name that's given, under all the mighty heaven
Whereby man, to sin enslaved, bursts his fetters and is saved.

The Lutheran Hymnal 114:1,5

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 1:6-7

Don't Let Satan Gaslight You About Sexual Purity

Some of the devil's most pervasive gaslighting in our day has to do with sexual immorality. To the world that buys into Satan's lies, whatever consenting adults do in private cannot be called a sin. Is it OK for unmarried people to share the same bed? Can a man marry another man? Can a woman become a man? The ungodly world not only says "yes," but accuses you of hatred and bigotry if you say otherwise.

The Christian who knows and follows God's Word on these matters is not standing on opinion. The same God who made us and redeemed us has not left any doubt about his plan for sexual purity. Jesus said, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:4-5)

The Bible warns about gaslighting on the topic of sexual purity: "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." (Ephesians 5:5-6) We do no one any favors by approving of actions that God calls sin. However, the Bible also warns against judgmental pride. Jesus had compassion on sinners of every kind, and sought out those who lived in open sins in order to gain them for heaven, through repentance and faith in His name. Our own purpose in staying true to God's Word in matters of sexual purity is to gain as many souls for the Lord as we can, through the Gospel of Christ crucified for sinners.

**Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me;
Died that I might live on high, lived that I might never die,
As the branch is to the vine, I am His, and He is mine.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 342:1

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read Romans 1:16-23. Why do people have no excuse for failing to believe that God exists? Why do people give in to Satan's "gaslighting"?
2. Read John 5:19-25. What is it about Jesus' words that show that he is the only one who can be the Savior? From verse 24, why do the words "HAS everlasting life" and "has PASSED from death to life" provide so much comfort?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-14. What is it about this section that disagrees with popular opinions about moral questions in our day? Which verses should keep us mindful that we need a Savior from sin as much as anyone else?

[illegible]

“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.” Isaiah 54:10 ESV

God’s Steadfast Love is Immovable

I have been blessed to live among the mountains of British Columbia. They are magnificent! And they are very solid! They have been here for approximately four thousand five hundred years, standing firm against torrential storms and resisting the ravages of time. As solid as they appear, however, God says they may depart. In fact, like everything in this world, the mountains will depart and be removed.

When mountains do move, it is disastrous. On April 29, 1903, Canada’s deadliest rockslide buried the town of Frank along Highway 3 in southern Alberta. During the night, the summit of Turtle Mountain broke loose and ninety seconds later half the town along with one hundred ten of its residents were buried under millions of tons of limestone.

The “Frank Slide” is a powerful reminder that everything in this world that seems solid and dependable can come crashing down in seconds. But there is one thing that we can always depend upon, something that will never depart, never disappoint us or let us down; that is the steadfast love of the LORD our God. In the previous verses God promised, “Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.” (Verses 4-5)

This is a sure promise from our God. His “steadfast love shall not depart from you,” nor shall His “covenant of peace be removed.” Hold that promise dear and rejoice.

Dear Father, with all the things crumbling around me, may I cling to you, for your steadfast love will never fail me. Amen.

“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you. Isaiah 54:10 ESV

What Do You Depend On?

We depend on so many things in life. We count on the freedom and prosperity of our nation. We rely on our jobs to provide a steady income. We depend on our homes to keep us warm, dry, and comfortable. We trust in our families to provide a safe and secure environment in which to live and grow. We assume our health and ability to work will hold up as long as we need.

These are some of the “solid” mountains in our lives that we depend on. But every one of these can depart and be removed from us in a moment. Our nation can crumble or be defeated. Those people we count on can disappoint us and let us down. Our homes can be destroyed, you name it. As unthinkable as it is, a mother could even forget her nursing child, “Yet I will not forget you,” says the LORD. (Isaiah 49:15)

The mountains may be removed! But God’s “Covenant of Peace shall not be removed.” That is the only thing that we can truly depend on and know will never fail us. God’s covenant of peace is His promise of forgiveness in the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. It’s His promise of reconciliation with the Father, the promise of God’s unending presence with us, His providence and protection. It is the promise of eternal life. This covenant of peace will never be removed.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) Guaranteed! “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.” (Mark 16:16) Without question. “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28) You can count on it!

Father, may I trust Your sure promises above all else. Amen

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. Psalm 46:1-3

A Very Present Help in Trouble

Last summer our family gathered in North Central Wyoming for a reunion. We stayed within view of Heart Mountain, which has been described as the greatest geological mystery of the twentieth century. It sits on top of layers of sediment over three miles deep. How did it get there?

Today we know that it was part of the largest known landslide in the world. An entire four hundred thirty square-mile mountain broke off from the Beartooth mountain range and slid about thirty miles southeast to where it is today. As it slid it broke up into about fifty large blocks, Heart Mountain being the largest of them. One of the biggest mysteries is that the slide plane only has a three-degree incline.

Heart Mountain is a powerful testimony to the aftermath of the world wide flood. It also makes Psalm 46 all the more vivid: “Even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” We will not fear because God is our refuge and strength. How terrifying it would be to see a huge mountain sliding across the countryside destroying everything in its path, not to mention the intense earthquake it would cause. Even if this happens again, we have no need to fear because God is “a very present help in trouble.”

Sadly we do fear far lesser catastrophes, but only because we do not fully trust God to be our refuge and strength. Trust Him! Call upon Him! Depend on Him! He will never leave you or forsake you.

Dear Father, You have been with me through all the trials of my life. Teach me to trust you completely and not fear whatever may come next. Amen

There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.

Psalm 46:4

Drink from the River

What is this river that makes glad the city of God? To answer that we need to know what is the city of God. The next phrase makes that clear. It is “the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.” It is the place where God dwells with His people. This Place is His Church.

So what is the river that makes God’s church glad, and His people rejoice? It is His Word. His Word is the water of life. It gives us His grace and forgiveness. It showers us with His steadfast love which will never fail us. It shows us Christ our Savior who loves us and gave Himself for us. You are drinking from that river right now. God’s Word is our greatest treasure.

Paul urges us to “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4) Some wonder how we can possibly rejoice all the time when life is full of many troubles. The answer is simple: do not focus your attention on the troubles, focus on God and His greatness and love. Do you want to be glad and rejoice even when things are crumbling and falling apart around you? Then drink freely and constantly from that river whose streams make glad the people of God.

We certainly don’t want to let that river of the water of life be polluted by anything false or man made. Many people seek preachers who will say what they want to hear. They think that will give joy and fulfillment, but that only satisfies the flesh. The pure Gospel is the only thing that can truly refresh our souls and bring us joy.

May we fill up with the pure water of life in Christ and rejoice always.

Dear Father, we thank you that you have given us your pure Word to refresh and strengthen our soul, that we may trust you and find our joy and peace in you always. Amen.

There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn. Psalm 46:4-5

Immovable

Isn't that incredible? God says the mountains, as solid and permanent as they appear, can be moved and cast into the sea, but God's people "shall not be moved." God is in the midst of His Church, living among His people. God is their solid rock.

In Psalm 18, David calls God "my Rock." He is not only a solid rock that cannot be moved, He is MY Rock. Therefore I cannot be moved either as long as my faith is anchored in Him.

Psalm 46 continues in verses 6-7: "The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge." Yes, the nations are raging against God, we see it all around. They will not last, but God and His Word last forever. And those who hear God's Word and put it into practice build their house on that solid rock which will not be moved. Even when this world is destroyed, God will still be with us and we will be with Him.

Let's close this week's devotions with Psalm 30:4-7. "Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favour is for life; Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Now in my prosperity I said, "I shall never be moved." Lord, by Your favor You have made my mountains stand strong."

Dear Father, you have promised to grant whatever we ask according to your will. Jesus tells us it is your will to give us the Holy Spirit. Therefore, fill me with your Spirit, I pray that my mountain may stand strong and immovable. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. "Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, So the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever." Psalm 125:1-2 Can you think of any solid mountains in your life that have been removed? What things have you depended on that let you down?
2. What does Psalm 46 teach you about God's faithfulness to bring you through such times?
3. Write out a verse from Psalm 46 on an index card that you find encouraging. Use this as a helpful reminder in your life to strengthen you through difficulties.

[illegible]

He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.'" Acts 13:22

A Man After God's Own Heart

David is an important figure. He expanded the territory of the nation of Israel, defeating many of their enemies. He brought the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle to Jerusalem. He loved the LORD and wanted to build a temple for Him, but that would be left to his son, Solomon. From David's family line, the Savior of the world would eventually be born.

God describes him as a man after His own heart. If we are familiar with the life of David, that might seem like an odd description for a man who committed adultery, and tried to cover up his sins by committing murder. Certainly, that's not the heart of the LORD!

When God spoke these words about David, He had just rejected Saul as king of Israel. Saul did not follow the LORD's command. When Samuel approached Saul about his sins, Saul would make excuses and point the finger elsewhere. Yes, David sinned against the LORD too, but when Nathan approached David about his sins, David confessed, "I have sinned against the LORD." (2 Samuel 12:13) Nathan assured the repentant David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die." In repentance, David also accepted the consequences of his sins, including the death of his illegitimate son.

The Bible says that the LORD does not despise "a broken and contrite heart," like that of David's (Psalm 51:17). May the Lord work in us such a repentant heart, that is broken and sorry over our sins. Acknowledging our guilt, let us look to the sinless Son of David, Jesus Christ, and rejoice that through the death of "great David's greater Son," the LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die eternally but live!

Lord God, with David I pray that You would "create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me." Lead me always to repent of my sins with David and rejoice in the peace of forgiveness that Your Son Jesus gives me. Amen.

For further devotional reading, read Psalm 51 and make the repentant words of King David your own prayer.

The LORD said to you, ‘You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.’ 2 Samuel 5:2

The Shepherd King

The Bible is full of shepherds: Abel, Jacob, Moses, and Amos to name a few. Shepherding is dirty work. Shepherds worked among their sheep, walking with them, tending to them personally, and leading them by his voice. A good shepherd cares about his sheep.

In his youth, David cared for the sheep of his father Jesse. When a bear or a lion threatened those sheep, David fought them off. As king, David cared for his heavenly Father’s sheep—the people of Israel. He didn’t rule them with an iron fist, but with a shepherd’s heart.

When King David’s sinful choices brought a plague on Israel, David pleaded with the LORD, “Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father’s house.” (2 Samuel 24:17) David, showed his shepherd’s heart, that he would rather he be the one to suffer so that the flock, the people of Israel, would be spared.

Here we see another way in which David was a “man after God’s own heart.” God’s heart is revealed as He Himself became Man, born of the house and lineage of David, to be our Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd saw us being struck down by the plague of our own sin and Jesus said to His Father, “Let Your hand be against Me.” The Shepherd laid down His life on the cross to save you, His lambs and sheep. Rejoice that King Jesus loved you with a shepherd’s heart and rose from the dead to continue to shepherd you with His Word and in His love!

Dear Jesus, thank you for being my Good Shepherd. Continue to lead me by the voice of Your Word, that I may dwell in Your house forever. Amen.

For further devotional reading, read Psalm 23 and make the words of the Shepherd-King your own.

Then David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. 2 Samuel 6:14-15

The Worshiping King

Michal, daughter of Saul and wife of David, couldn't believe what she was seeing. The King was whirling and dancing like a fool in the capital city among his citizens. But David did not care what his wife thought. The Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's visible presence, promises, and mercy, was arriving in Jerusalem. David could not contain his joy for the Lord. "I will play music before the LORD. And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight." (2 Samuel 6:21-22)

David worshiped the LORD for His mercy, His kindness, His deliverance, His grace, and His salvation. The book of Psalms contains roughly seventy-five hymns ("psalms") attributed to David. The worshiping king wrote, "I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, And I will glorify Your name forevermore. For great is Your mercy toward me, And You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol." (Psalms 86:12-13)

Great David's greater son, King Jesus, also loved to worship God. At age twelve, His parents found Him at the temple talking to church leaders about the Bible. Luke reports how, as an adult, it was Jesus' custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). Although Jesus is the One to be worshiped, He came as our substitute and took our place under the Law. He kept the Sabbath holy for all the times we didn't gladly hear and learn God's Word. Through faith in Jesus, God credits you with His perfection. All the more reason for us to worship and praise Him with all our might!

Dear Father, forgive me for the times I did not want to worship you or that I honored you with lips, but my heart was far from you. Thank you for sending your Son Jesus to be my righteousness. With David I pray that you would "restore to me the joy of Your salvation." Amen.

For further devotional reading, read Psalm 9 and make the words of the Worshiping King your own.

Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand.” 1 Samuel 17:45-46

The Trusting King

When we think of David, certainly the story of David and Goliath comes to mind. The young shepherd boy, David, probably only a teenager, armed with a sling and a stone, goes against a nine foot, well-armed, well trained, mighty warrior. The story is so well known that even unbelievers reference it.

But at the heart of the story of David and Goliath is faith that trusts in God. While Goliath had superior size, superior weapons, and superior experience, David had a superior God. God had delivered David from the “paw of the lion and the paw of the bear” (1 Samuel 17:37). David trusted that God would give him the victory over this giant enemy of His people. His trust in the LORD was not disappointed.

Great David’s greater Son, Jesus Christ, came to battle enemies greater than Goliath. He saw how your sin was weighing you down, like armor too heavy to carry. Christ came to take this heavy burden on Himself and free you from it. Christ battled Satan, that great dragon, in the wilderness and on the cross. Jesus tasted death, that great enemy, for all of us. And as He went into battle on Good Friday, King Jesus had perfect trust in His Father, saying, “Not My will, but Yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42)

And what was the outcome of these battles? “The Lord is risen, indeed!” (Luke 24:34) By the cross and empty tomb, Jesus cut off the heads of these great enemies, and through faith, Jesus gives His victory to you. “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57) Forgiveness, life, and salvation are yours through King Jesus!

Dear Father, thank you for sending Your Son to save me from my enemies. Through Your Word, continue to strengthen me. By Your Holy Spirit, lead me to trust in you

For further devotional reading, read Psalm 5 and make the words of the Trusting King your own.

“O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!”

2 Samuel 18:33

The Loving King

The life of David was by no means an easy one. After defeating Goliath, David had to flee from King Saul. He became jealous of David and wanted to kill him. Later, when David was king, his son Absalom convinced the people that he would be a better king than his father. David had to flee Jerusalem with his family to escape Absalom's invasion.

How did David react when these two adversaries were killed? When Saul died, we read that David and his men “mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul.” (2 Samuel 1:12) When David received word that Absalom was killed, he wept and mourned, wishing he had died in place of his rebellious son. What love this king had, even for his enemies.

The love we see in David's life is eternally amplified in the life of Jesus, the king of love. Not only did He teach us to love our enemies and pray for them, but Jesus Himself practiced what He preached. Jesus wept over the people of Jerusalem that had rejected Him as their Savior King and would soon call for Him to be crucified. Violently abused and unjustly condemned, nailed hand and foot to the cross, Jesus prayed for His torturers, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

Let there be no doubt that Jesus loved His enemies, including you! While David wished that he had died instead of his rebellious son, Jesus actually did die in your place. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) Jesus truly is the King of Love. Rejoice in His love for you and let it shine forth in your love for those around you.

Dear Jesus, thank You for loving me, even though I am an unlovable sinner who disobeys the will of Your Father. Work Your forgiving love in My heart by Your Spirit, that I may rejoice in Your forgiveness and love others as You have loved me. Amen.

For further devotional reading, read Psalm 3 and make the words of the King your own.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read Psalm 59. What was David's mindset when on the run from Saul? What can I learn from David when I am treated unfairly or unjustly?
2. Read Psalm 124. How did David react to the LORD's deliverance? How can I make this psalm my own prayer?
3. Read Psalm 32. How did guilt plague David? How does guilt impact you? What is your state because of Christ's forgiveness? How does that help when dealing with guilt?

[illegible]

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

Mark 13:1-2 ESV

F.O.C.U.S. – Faith

F is for faith. Contrary to what many unbelievers claim, faith isn't about ignoring "the real world" but about seeing it more accurately. Jesus' words in Mark 13 remind us that our earthly surroundings, even those that seem so secure, are temporary. When the disciples marveled at the grandeur of the Temple, Jesus turned their attention beyond it, predicting its eventual destruction. He was teaching them—and us—to see beyond what's in front of us, to recognize that our true foundation is not in the visible but in the invisible—in God's promises toward us in Christ.

Consider Noah. When God told him a flood was coming, from that point on he surely saw the world differently. A gopher tree wasn't just a tree, but a part of his and his family's salvation. A saw was no mere tool, but a gift of God to build the ark. A meandering cloud was no longer just an object in which to see animals but was the way God would carry out both His judgment against the world and still preserve His promise of a Savior to come. God's promise became his focus.

Like Noah, we're called to trust in what God says rather than in the temporary structures and objects around us. God's Word is truly reliable. Your daily devotions focus your heart upon Christ with this promise always in the background: Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

O Lord God, grant us steadfast faith to rely on You and Your Word alone. Amen.

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” And Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray.” Mark 13:3-5 ESV

F.O.C.U.S. – Obedience

O is for obedience. While the first thing that pops into our heads when we hear that word is doing what we’re told, this obedience isn’t about ticking off a list of rules. It’s rather about a life aligned with God’s good and gracious will toward us in Christ.

Paul calls it the obedience of faith because this obedience goes hand in hand with faith (see yesterday’s devotion). This obedience is about submitting to God’s promises even when the devil, the world, and your own conscience would lead you astray and tell you that you have no Savior, no forgiveness, no eternal life.

Like Job, the inevitable troubles and hardships of life are intended by God to draw us closer to Him and to our Savior. Even when life throws challenges and trials our way, we are forgiven. We have eternal life in Jesus, even when the fear of death creeps in. Obedience here is about trusting in God’s finished work of saving us through Jesus.

Heavenly Father, forgive me for times of pride or rebellion.
Grant me a ready heart to listen and follow You. Amen.

Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. Mark 13:6-7 ESV

F.O.C.U.S. – Courage

“C” is for courage. Courage isn’t just bravely facing your enemy on your own. That would be foolish. Courage comes in knowing that our Savior is with us in every situation of life. After all, that is His promise.

When Martin Luther stood before the emperor, he declared, “Here I stand, I can do no other.” He wasn’t drawing strength from himself. He was relying on the assurance of God’s Word—a Word that, he knew, would outlast empires, thrones, and all wicked schemes of men. In another sense of his words, God’s Word was the only place he could stand.

One of the hardest times to have courage is when our conscience rises up as though it is our enemy. Our sin appears to give the conscience a level of ferocity that is sure to do us in. Yet, as John writes, “Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and He knows everything.” (1 John 3:20) God’s grace silences our conscience giving us a reason to stand up in the courage of faith to exclaim, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” (1 Timothy 1:15 NKJV)

Holy Spirit, fill me with boldness and courage to face wherever would oppose You and Your reign in my heart. Amen.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. Mark 13:8 ESV

F.O.C.U.S. – Understanding

“U” is for understanding. Jesus’ prophecy about the Temple’s destruction was a powerful reminder that sin has had horrible effects on God’s creation. These effects often seem to threaten our lives as well. Christians of every generation have witnessed and even experienced those effects. When the nations rise in war and natural disasters likewise rise, we shouldn’t wonder what is going on. We should understand that sin has both temporal and eternal consequences.

Yet, for the one who has faith in Christ, understanding also means recognizing that we’re part of God’s redemption story, a story that’s bigger than any single moment. That’s because God’s grace is more abundant than our sin, and that grace is made available to us through His Son who took our sins away on a cross.

Our lives in this realm—our successes, our struggles, our trials, our weaknesses—are only temporary. Our true citizenship is in God’s eternal kingdom, where Christ is. Understanding this gives us a broader perspective. We’re not here just to get by; we’re here to live as citizens of heaven, journeying toward a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Lord Jesus, give me a mind that is set on things above. Teach me to take up Your light yoke, so that I would not be distracted or weighed down by this world. Amen.

“But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. Mark 13:9-10 ESV

F.O.C.U.S. – Service

“S” is for service. Jesus calls us to a life of service, not to earn God’s favor but simply because we have been renewed, restored, and reoriented by His service of love toward us. Our service is a way to reflect His love to others, even in small, everyday actions.

Our roles in God’s kingdom might not seem grand or noticeable, but in each act of service, we mirror God’s love. Whether it’s being generous to someone in need, standing by a friend who is struggling, or helping a stranger who has “lost everything,” we’re called to bear witness by our works to a God and Father who loved us first.

In a world that often values ambition and self-promotion, service calls us to live in Christ’s love and to bring that love to others so that we might bring them to Christ for eternal life. This means speaking the Gospel to them, that they might know the name of Jesus and rest in His love and forgiveness.

Lord Jesus, thank you for Your loving sacrifice. Let me follow in Your example, to give up myself and grow in Your likeness and love for others. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read through the Olivet Discourse in Mark 13:1-37. Pay special attention to the closing verses, 32-37. Reflect on the meaning of “Stay Awake” as it relates to your daily life. What does this look like for your walk with Christ in the week ahead?
2. If you are able to search online, or if you have The Lutheran Hymnal available, look up TLH 351, “Love Divine, All Love Excelling.” Worship the Lord by praying or singing this hymn.
3. Write out a prayer of gladness by setting your mind on the kingdom of Jesus and the victory of His resurrection.

[illegible]

So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified. Mark 15:15

Barabbas

“What are the odds?” Perhaps Barabbas was thinking this as the guards brought him from his holding cell to stand in front of the riotous crowd. It was true and very likely that Pilate would release a prisoner. That was his custom each year during the feast (Mark 15:6). But who knows what was going through Barabbas’ head when they came to grab him, a murderer and known insurrectionist, to be the one offered his freedom?

We are not told. The crowd did not care. Pilate, in desperation, could not find a reason why they would want the brute released in place of the innocent Man he had just interrogated. But God certainly knew. Jesus knew as He stood there, condemned by the people and condemned by God. Even for a wicked man such as Barabbas, the Son of God, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, bore the punishment. He knew which direction the crowd would sway. He knew that it was necessary to be the sin-bearing Servant that God had promised to sinful mankind (Isaiah 53).

In His suffering and death, forgiveness was poured out and won for all people. Even those who sought to overthrow their rulers had the Ruler of all go forth to win the victory over their sins. Try as Pilate might, he was not going to change anyone’s mind that day. The people chanted “Barabbas!” so that he might gain his liberty and that Jesus would be condemned. But in Jesus’ condemnation, all sinners find liberty through His forgiveness.

A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth
The guilt of all men bearing;
And laden with the sins of earth,
None else the burden sharing!
Goes patient on, grows weak and faint,
To slaughter led without complaint,
The spotless life to offer;
Bears shame, and stripes, and wounds and death,
Anguish and mockery and saith,
“Willing all this I suffer.”

The Lutheran Hymnal 142:1

Judas said, "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. Matthew 27:4-5

Judas

Thirty pieces of silver. This was the amount that Judas received to betray Jesus over to His persecutors. Commentators have different ideas about how much that might be worth today. There is an irony in considering the immeasurable cost of Jesus' sacrifice, as compared to the meager sum that was the price of his betrayal.

Jesus was betrayed and handed over to be killed. Yet He went to the cross to endure the sins of all people. No one is beyond forgiveness in this time of grace. The accounts of Judas in the Bible say that he was overcome with guilt and that he returned the money. But Judas cut his time of grace short. In his grief, he took matters into his own hands and ended his life.

In our own hands, forgiveness is cheap: it means nothing. Apart from Jesus, there is no forgiveness. But because of Jesus and through His work and sacrifice, it is priceless. It is full of meaning. "He 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).

Many people have fallen away from the faith, not just Judas. God has no desire to see the wicked perish (1 Timothy 2:4, see also Ezekiel 18). But in Christ, you are rescued from the task of making atonement. In Him there is redemption. By God's guidance, you are led by His word instead of the grief of your sins. In Him there is forgiveness.

Oh, watch and fight and pray. The battle ne'er give o'er;
Renew it boldly ev'ryday And help divine implore.
Ne'er think the vict'ry won Nor lay thy armor down;
Thine arduous work will not be done Till thou obtain thy crown.

The Lutheran Hymnal 449:2-3

And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.” Luke 22:31-32

Peter

Sometimes when I let the dog outside, she will see something and decide to chase it without a second thought. The problem for this little dog is that occasionally, the object she is chasing will stop or even chase her. That is when the panicked cries start.

The account of Peter denying his association with Jesus is familiar. Like an excitable dog, the best friend of his Savior, he sometimes rushed into situations without considering the cost. Jesus had told him that before the rooster crowed, Peter would deny Him three times. Peter refused to believe it, questioning his all-knowing Savior’s judgment.

But Peter did deny Jesus three times. In realization, we are told that he wept bitterly. The words Jesus spoke to him must have been racing through his mind. Satan asked to sift him like wheat, yet Jesus, knowing what would happen, still prayed for His beloved friend.

Peter sinned. He did not have a moment of weakness—he had multiple moments of weakness. It is an all too common problem for us sinners. Yet Jesus assured him, “I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen the brethren.” Peter was not beyond forgiveness. In fact, even knowing what he would do, Jesus still went to the cross for him.

He has done the same for you. He has prayed for you. He went to the cross for you. He forgives you your sins because He loves you.

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 every weakness—take it to the Lord in prayer.

The Lutheran Hymnal 457:2

But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Luke 23:40-42

The Thief on the Cross

The due reward for our deeds would be to hang on one of the crosses that Good Friday, smitten, stricken, afflicted, and forsaken by almighty God. In his final moments in this vale of tears, a man hung agonizingly on a cross, paying his debt to society. Scripture tells us that this man was a thief but we know little else about his life up to that moment. However, we are told of the most important day in his life—the very first day of it!

There on the cross, he was at the side of his Savior. Nearly everyone there scorned the innocent Man who suffered next to him. But there was something different about Him: He was innocent. Hearing the other guilty man on the cross take part in mocking Jesus, the thief rebuked him. He told him that they were getting what they deserved. Jesus, on the other hand, was innocent.

In his final moments of this life, the thief made his request to the King: "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Jesus heard him and did not condemn him. We know him as the "thief on the cross." Jesus knew him as a repentant believer. He told him with the utmost certainty, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." The man was forgiven. He was forgiven, not because he chose the right words at the right time. It was not because he made the shot right before the buzzer. He was saved because his faith was solely in Jesus, who alone could forgive him. That day, by grace through faith, he enjoyed Paradise.

When on my poor and burdened heart My sins lie heavily,
Thy pardon speak, new peace impart; Dear Lord, remember me.

When in the solemn hour of death I wait Thy just decree,
Be this the prayer of my last breath: Dear Lord, remember me.

The Lutheran Hymnal 515

So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!" Matthew 27:54

The Roman Soldiers

When it comes to Jesus, there is no sitting on the fence. There are no sidelines. He affects your life. The Romans put many people to death. Though it was an extremely cruel way to kill someone, it was no doubt just a part of life for many. So when the Jewish Man of Nazareth was condemned to death, they may have thought that it would be an ordinary day.

It was not. And if they had heard even some of the accounts about the innocent Man, then the events going on around them must have aroused a bit of curiosity. Jesus-the One called King, God, Son of God-was dying. Yet the world went dark. The earth quaked. The temple veil tore in two. Having pierced His side instead of breaking His bones, water and blood poured out.

The soldiers saw all of these amazing events. We are told that "they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" They recognized that this was no mere Man. What was testified was true. They would hear more in three days. God not only died to atone for mankind's sin, He would also rise again in victory over it!

Is forgiveness too much to comprehend? It may seem like it at times. We may not think we are worthy of it, and rightly so. But God has shown His forgiveness to sinners by the innocent death of Jesus. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). What they saw is what you know by faith: truly Jesus is the Son of God. You are forgiven!

Behold the Lamb of God! O Thou for sinners slain,

Let it not be in vain that Thou hast died!

Thee for my Savior let me take, my only refuge let me make

Thy pierced side.

The Lutheran Hymnal 165:1

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read Psalm 34. What is David speaking of in the psalm? How does he describe the state of sin? How does he describe the joy of forgiveness?
2. The devotions this week were all taken from Good Friday accounts. The grace of God and the forgiveness of sins are closely connected. Consider how Jesus' actions that day affected those in the accounts. Consider how His actions affect you.
3. Read Revelation 1:4-8. What is said of the crucifixion? What is said of the forgiveness of sins? What is said about future events?

[illegible]

Now may the God of patience and comfort
grant you to be like-minded toward one another,
according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one
mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ.

– Romans 15:5-6



