

With might of ours can naught be done,

Soon were our loss effected;

But for us fights the Valiant One,

Whom God Himself elected.

Ask ye, Who is this?

Jesus Christ it is.

Of Sabaoth Lord,

And there's none other God;

He holds the field forever.



- The Lutheran Hymnal 262

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men. Colossians 3:23

Work as Worship

Labor Day gives us a pause from our work to reflect—but do we ever stop to ask why we work? For many, work is just a paycheck. For others, it’s a source of stress or even identity. Some people live for the weekend; others tie their sense of worth to job titles and promotions. But Scripture lifts our eyes above all that. The Apostle Paul reminds us that our work—whether paid or unpaid, at home or in the workplace—is ultimately done “as to the Lord.” That changes everything.

This verse was written to slaves in the Colossian church. Their work was neither glamorous nor appreciated, yet Paul encouraged them to do their tasks “heartily”—from the soul—because they were ultimately serving the Lord Christ. If that was true for them, how much more for us? When we understand our work as service to the Lord, even the most menial job is filled with purpose.

And here is the comfort we need: Our worth is not found in our work, but in Christ’s work for us. Jesus labored under the weight of our sin. He lived the perfect life we couldn’t live and gave His life on the cross to redeem us from the curse of sin and death. His resurrection declares our forgiveness, and His finished work gives lasting value to our daily work. Because of Jesus, we don’t need to prove ourselves—we are already loved, accepted, and secure in Him.

This Gospel truth frees us from comparison and striving. Whether your work is big or small in the world’s eyes, the Lord sees and values it. He is not an unjust God who will forget your labor of love (Hebrews 6:10). In Christ, even a cup of cold water given in His name does not go unnoticed.

So whatever your work this week, do it heartily—not for applause, not for identity, but in gratitude to the One who worked your salvation from start to finish.

Lord, grant me joy in my labor and remind me that I serve You in all things. Amen.

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. Genesis 2:15

Work Is Not a Curse

It's easy to grumble about work. Alarms buzz too early. Emails pile up. Our muscles ache. Some days, it feels like we're stuck in a never-ending loop of tasks that wear us down. We might even joke that work is a necessary evil. But is it?

Genesis 2 tells a different story. Before sin entered the world, before the curse came down, God gave Adam a job. He was placed in the garden "to tend and keep it." That tells us something important: work is not a result of the Fall—it's a gift of creation. Work, in its purest form, is good. It gives purpose, rhythm, and opportunity to serve.

Of course, Genesis 3 reminds us that sin didn't leave work untouched. After the Fall, thorns and sweat became part of the equation. Labor turned into toil. Deadlines, disappointments, and exhaustion entered in. But the good news is that Christ has come to redeem not only us—but all aspects of our lives, including our labor.

Jesus came into this fallen world and took up a carpenter's tools. He knew the weight of a day's work. More than that, He knew the weight of our sin, which He bore on the cross. His resurrection secures our forgiveness and gives lasting hope—not only for our souls but for the work of our hands. In Him, our daily tasks are no longer cursed toil, but redeemed opportunities to love and serve.

When you work in faith—whether you're raising children, building homes, organizing files, or caring for others—you are reflecting the image of your Creator. It doesn't have to be glamorous to be godly. It just needs to be done in love, relying on Christ.

So the next time your work feels pointless or exhausting, remember: it was God who gave work to man in paradise. And it's God who now blesses your labor in Christ.

Lord Jesus, thank You for redeeming not only my soul but also the work of my hands. Help me to see my daily tasks as a gift from You. Amen.

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

Resting in Christ

Labor Day offers a welcome break from our work. For many, it's a chance to sleep in, take a walk, or enjoy time with loved ones. We're often told to "unplug," "decompress," or "practice self-care." And while these are helpful, they only scratch the surface. True rest—the kind that reaches into the soul—can't be found in a hammock or a weekend off. It can only be found in Jesus.

When Jesus says, "Come to Me," He isn't just inviting the physically tired. He speaks to those weary under burdens deeper than sore muscles. He addresses those weighed down by guilt, anxiety, expectation, shame, and sin. And His promise is stunning: "I will give you rest."

Not "I'll show you how to earn it," or "I'll help you work for it," but "I will give it." This is the rest that only the Savior can offer. Because He has borne the burden of our sin, we are free. Because He has finished the work of salvation on the cross, we are invited into peace that doesn't depend on our performance.

Jesus did the heavy lifting of redemption. He toiled in the garden of Gethsemane. He labored under the weight of the cross. He suffered for our failures and rose for our justification. That means we no longer need to strive to earn God's favor—it is already ours in Christ.

This rest is for the anxious heart, the perfectionist spirit, the guilt-ridden conscience. It's for you. Jesus doesn't demand that you pull yourself together—He calls you to Himself. He invites you to lay it all down at His feet and find refreshment in His grace.

So as you rest today—whether briefly or deeply—remember where true rest is found. Not in a nap or a day off, but in the Savior who says, "Come."

Lord Jesus, I am weary. Not just from the work of my hands, but from the weight in my heart. Thank You for inviting me to lay my burdens on You. Teach me to rest in Your grace and find peace in Your promises. Amen.

Aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands...that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

1 Thessalonians 4:11–12

The Witness of Good Work

In a world addicted to noise, attention, and platform, Paul's words feel almost countercultural. Aspire to lead a quiet life? Mind your own business? Work with your hands? These don't exactly make for flashy headlines or viral posts—but they do reflect a life that pleases God and blesses neighbor.

Paul wrote this to a young church in Thessalonica where some members were becoming idle and disruptive, perhaps thinking that the Lord's return made everyday labor unnecessary. But Paul reminds them—and us—that daily faithfulness is not second-rate spirituality. It's a meaningful way to glorify God.

This quiet life isn't about isolation or irrelevance. It's about steady, dependable, Christ-reflecting faithfulness. Our vocations—however ordinary—are sacred ground when lived in service to God and others. Whether we're raising children, answering phones, hauling lumber, or tending gardens, we serve the Lord by working with honesty and love.

Even more, Paul connects this way of life to our witness. "That you may walk properly toward those who are outside," he says. Our neighbors may never step inside a church, but they notice how we live. A Christian who works diligently, keeps their word, minds their work, and doesn't meddle in gossip or grumbling stands out.

But let's be honest: we don't always do this well. We grow impatient. We slack off. We seek attention. We compare our calling to others'. That's why this passage, like all of Scripture, points us back to Christ. He lived the quiet, faithful life perfectly—never lazy, never boastful, always obedient to the Father's will. He worked with His hands and bore our failures on the cross. In Him, we're not only forgiven, but renewed to live differently.

So don't underestimate the power of quiet faithfulness. The world may not applaud it—but your Savior sees it, blesses it, and works through it.

Lord, teach me to value the calling You've given me. Help me to work faithfully and reflect You in all I do. Amen.

Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established. Proverbs 16:3

God Is in the Details

Some days we hit the ground running. We jot down goals, make lists, and dive headfirst into our tasks. But how often do we pause to begin our day with the Lord? Proverbs invites us into a better rhythm: “Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established.”

We like to think we’re in control of our schedules. But plans shift. Deadlines move. We misplace things. Frustrations mount. Even when things go “according to plan,” we may feel anxious, wondering if it’s all going to hold together. The truth is, we weren’t made to carry the weight of life alone. That’s why this simple verse is such a gift.

To commit our works to the Lord means to entrust them into His hands. It’s more than a quick prayer before a meeting—it’s an act of humble surrender. “Lord, this is Yours. Guide my steps. Use my work. Redirect me if needed.” When we do that, God gives stability—not always in circumstances, but in heart and mind. He gives peace to the planner, strength to the weary, and clarity to the overwhelmed.

We don’t commit our work to the Lord to guarantee success. We do it because He is faithful, and our labor is not in vain when it’s done in Him (1 Corinthians 15:58). In Christ, even our small, forgotten tasks are seen and used for eternal good. And when our plans fall apart, we remember the most important work was already accomplished—Jesus completed the work of salvation at the cross. Because of His finished work, we can approach our daily work with confidence, even joy.

So bring your work to the Lord—your spreadsheets, your errands, your school assignments, your caregiving, your cleaning, your calling. He is not distant from your day; He is present in it. Entrust it all to Him.

Lord, I commit this day and all its work into Your hands. Direct my efforts, calm my anxious thoughts, and help me to trust that You are working all things together for good. Thank You that in Christ, my work has purpose and my heart has peace. Amen.

Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others.

Ecclesiastes 7:21-22

Whose Approval Do We Seek?

Has this ever happened to you? A person acts like a friend to your face, but bad-mouths you behind your back. Imagine if God did this: in the Bible He says, “I love you. Your sins are forgiven,” but then, to the angels He says, “Did you see what he did? I’m going to send him to hell for that.”

God is not two-faced. Duplicity is a human characteristic. Driven by sin, man does and says whatever he thinks will serve his purpose. However, what God says to your face He also says behind your back. When He tells you that you are forgiven, in heaven He says the same, and the angels rejoice.

We hunger for recognition. We want to hear others praising us. However, Solomon tells us, “Do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you.” If you depend on the praises of men, you may end up compromising your principles and beliefs. Even though they may praise you to your face, they will probably curse you behind your back.

Instead of seeking the approval of men, we should be concerned about the approval of God. If God says, “Well done,” then it doesn’t matter what men say. In the Bible, God gives His approval or disapproval, for there He reveals right and wrong...truth and error.

In Scripture, God gives His approval of your words and actions. As for His approval of you as a person, this has nothing to do with your words and actions. It is because of Christ that God approves of you. In Christ you are cleansed and righteous in the eyes of God. Cling to this approval. After all, “if God is for us, who can be against us?”

We come, O Lord, with heavy hearts,

For we have practiced all sin’s arts.

Oh, hear us now and set us free

In Christ, that we may worship Thee. Amen.

I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness...Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes. Ecclesiastes 7:25-29

Our Situation in the World

Why is the world in such a mess? Why are nations at war? Why is there violence on our city streets? Why are mothers killing their babies? Why are so-called “good citizens” taking advantage of the poor and weak? Why are adultery, fornication, and divorce running rampant? Why isn’t God doing anything to stop this?

In Solomon’s continuing attempt to evaluate things like this, he found that it was too deep for him and for us. He searched for wisdom and purpose. He examined the wickedness and madness of foolishness. He wanted to discover why things happen in the world.

In the end, he found this: “God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.” It was a sad conclusion to know that man has gotten himself into a mess through his evil scheming. In the beginning, man was made upright, but since the fall into sin, he continually ruins things with wickedness. Sin has turned human beings into fools. Fools refuse to examine the deadly nature of their sins.

It isn’t God’s fault that the world is so evil and chaotic. He made man upright. It is man’s fault. It is because man has been scheming, plotting, and planning wickedness throughout the centuries.

Are we innocent? How often we come to the mercy seat and confess that we have been guilty of looking for clever ways to circumvent the ways of the Lord. And, what is His response? “Be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven.” Praise God that, while we were planning evil, He was planning good. That plan finds its completion in Jesus Christ, who never schemed to do evil and whose perfect righteousness has been credited to us.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen. (Psalm 139:23)

Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, And the sternness of his face is changed. Ecclesiastes 8:1

Noble Character

The wise man is a noble man. He knows his God ... the God of love. He sees the cleansing blood of Christ and the beauty of His righteousness.

The wise man is a noble man. He knows himself for what he was: weak without his God, sin-laden and lost, desperate and in need.

The wise man is a noble man. He knows himself for what he is: strong in Christ, forgiven, saved, full of hope and blessed.

The wise man is a noble man. He knows and glorifies His Lord. He beholds the divine hand in the day and sees God's presence in the night.

The wise man is a noble man. Though poor he is rich. Though weak he is strong. Though unlearned he interprets the truth.

The wise man is a noble man. His wisdom makes his face shine, for joy is his companion and peace accompanies him through pain and pleasure.

The wise man is a noble man. He is a blessing to his neighbor. He serves both friend and foe. He is like his God.

The wise man is a noble man. His death is the door to life. From earth, he ascends to his God, for his God is his Redeemer.

Wisdom's highest, noblest treasure,
Jesus, lies concealed in Thee;
Grant that this may still the measure
Of my will and actions be,
Humility there and simplicity reigning,
In paths of true wisdom my steps ever training.
Oh, if I of Christ have this knowledge divine,
The fulness of heavenly wisdom is mine.

The Lutheran Hymnal 366:5

I say, keep the command of the king because of the oath before God. Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter... a wise heart knows the time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, when man's trouble is heavy upon him... evil will not deliver those who practice it. All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt.
Ecclesiastes 8:2-3, 5-6, 8-9 (NASB)

Who is in Charge Here?

This is simple wisdom: don't try to rebel against those who are in authority. The only one who will be hurt is you. In a time of oppression, you may be tempted to join in something evil. You may not like our leaders, but wait. If you do not like what the government is doing, wait. The time may come when you will be able to find a God-pleasing way to enact change. A wise man knows the proper time and ways that are God-pleasing.

Only one kingdom has been standing fast throughout the ages: the kingdom of God. From the first promise of salvation until the end of time, the kingdom of God stands fast and its Ruler remains on His throne. Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, presides over this kingdom and we are its citizens. Who knows what will happen with earthly kingdoms? He does. This is enough for us. With Jesus as our King, we can quietly submit to the earthly authorities; they are under His authority. Jesus will use them as long as it serves His purpose and then He will replace them. As for those who wait submissively, we will continue on, sons of the King, redeemed and destined for eternal glory.

Lord, help us to see our limitations and to accept them. Help us to see, also, that there are no limitations with You and to trust You. Hear us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also is vanity. Ecclesiastes 8:10

How will I be Remembered?

Who remembers the dead once they are out of sight and in the ground? Solomon speaks of the wicked, but even among believers it is true that after a generation or two, "... the memory of them is forgotten" (9:5). Have you walked through your hometown cemetery? How many of the deceased do you remember? "Out of sight, out of mind."

In the hope that they will be remembered, people may try to create a legacy in their name. They may want to be remembered as someone who wielded great power. Or, a person of great wealth. Or, a person of superior intellect. Or perhaps they want to leave some contribution: an invention, a cure for cancer, a large acreage for a national park bearing their name, a scholarship in their name, a magnificent building, an endowed chair at a university, etc. At the funeral of a famous person, the obituary tends to be filled with words of praise. That's why it is called a "eulogy."

How do you want to be remembered after you are gone? The greatest legacy you can leave behind is this: when your name comes up, people will think of Jesus. A Christian's obituary ought to be a celebration not of what he has done, but of what Christ has done for him. Without Christ, all of us would be like the wicked. In fact, we would be the wicked, lost and condemned. However, with Christ in our lives, God has declared, "You are not guilty." More than that, He has declared, "You are righteous before Me." Therefore, even though we will be forgotten on earth, thanks be to Jesus, we will never be forgotten in heaven, for our names are recorded forever in the Book of Life.

My God forgets me not! Lord, I am Yours forever.

Oh, keep me strong in faith That I may leave You never.

Grant me a blessed end When my good fight is fought;

He helps in life and death—My God forgets me not!

The Lutheran Hymnal 402:5 (edited)

- [illegible]

So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. John 9:15-16 (ESV)

The Blindness of the Pharisees

Blind Separatists. The Pharisees were a group among the Jews who tried to live according to the Law of Moses. Unfortunately, the Law wasn't enough, and they added to it by 'interpreting' and 'defining' the Law of God for themselves. They made every effort to 'separate' themselves, which is why they were called 'Pharisees.'

The Gospel of John relates how Jesus corrected the vision of a man born blind in the most unorthodox of ways. He spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread it in his eyes...an act that would temporarily render a seeing person blind. He sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam and when he returned, he could see for the first time. Incredible!

The Blind Pharisees were not impressed because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath Day. They confronted the formerly blind man. The man could see that the miracle proved Jesus was from God. The Blind man's point gained traction with some, but not others, and there was a division among them.

There are still people who see and hear but are blind to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. So that is where you come in. Jesus would have you tell others what Jesus has done for you, so that the eyes of others may be opened.

Faith He grants us to believe it,
Grateful hearts His love to prize;
Want we wisdom? He must give it,
Hearing ears and seeing eyes.

The Lutheran Hymnal 358:4

Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders), And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

Mark 7:1-3, 5 (ESV)

Dirty Hands vs. Corrupt Hearts

Did you use hand sanitizer? It wasn't all that long ago that many of us dutifully used hand sanitizer. We didn't want to accidentally pass on COVID to someone else. Now that the pandemic is over, we might be less concerned. Yet we still know germs are out there!

On one occasion the eagle-eyed Pharisees noticed that some of the disciples ate with unwashed hands. It wasn't that they were concerned about Jesus' disciples contracting some disease or ending up sick. It wasn't that they were germaphobes. They were very diligent in washing their hands – like the elders did. It was one of their necessary 'additional traditions.' It was an opportunity to look down on Jesus and His 'dirty' disciples.

Jesus pointed out their habit of making their traditions requirements to lay on others...while also leaving the commandments of God undone. No doubt the Pharisees had clean hands and healthy cuticles; but their hearts were filthy.

Now this does not mean you should look at your hands or imagine that you are more acceptable to God than someone else because of what you have done. We are all like an unclean thing. We have been cleansed of sin by the blood of Christ...not hand sanitizer.

Not what these hands have done Can save this guilty soul;
Not what this toiling flesh has borne Can make my spirit whole.
Thy love to me, O God, Not mine, O Lord, to Thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest And set my spirit free.

The Lutheran Hymnal 389:1,4

"No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." Luke 16:13-15 (ESV)

Just Getting Ahead

We've all heard it said that 'God helps those who help themselves.' Well, as it turns out, some of the Pharisees like to help themselves...to the houses of widows (Matthew 23:14). Instead of helping said widows to retain their homes they sought to add them to their own portfolios.

Jesus was warning the people about the power that money has over people. In fact, for many, money trumps even God, becoming a god that cannot save those who trust in it. Being the hypocritical know-it-all's that they were, they turned up their noses at Him. They ridiculed Him.

My grandfather used to warn about gambling. Some people would minimize the danger and say: "It's just entertainment." He would reply: "What's entertaining about playing with a spiritual disease (greed)?" Some say, "Well, it's only a little bit of money." If it's not about the money...leave it out. Just play cards.

This is a serious matter. It can lead to greed, covetousness and other sins. Praise God that He sent His Son to suffer and die to atone for all sins.

Take my silver and my gold, Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect and use Every power as Thou shalt choose.

The Lutheran Hymnal 400:4

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

Luke 15:1-2 (ESV)

Dining with the Scum of the Earth?

Where would you like to eat lunch? It seems clear that the Pharisees believed some sinners to be hopelessly lost. It seems they didn't think they were worth the effort to win back for God. I suppose that was because they were first concerned about themselves and what the politicians today call optics.

They criticized Jesus' disciples for eating on the Sabbath, not because eating was a sin, but because they had determined that rubbing heads of grain in one's hands was equivalent to threshing. They criticized Jesus and His disciples for eating with the outcasts of society...tax collectors and those caught in public sin.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost...which includes every human being. We are, by birth and nature, lost. In fact, those who do not know Jesus by faith are today 'without hope and without God in the world (cf. Ephesians 2:12).' Some don't believe they are lost or in danger. Some can only see the sins and mistakes of others and minimize and dodge the label of sinner themselves.

Jesus ate with sinners. Jesus called them to repent. Jesus comforted and forgave sinners. But Jesus didn't minimize or approve of their sins. He paid for them with His own blood. Instead of cringing when we come upon someone in need, perhaps we should remember that Jesus died for them too. Maybe...just maybe...we could offer lunch and take the opportunity to introduce them to Jesus. He would give them so much more.

All are redeemed, both far and wide,
Since Thou, O Lord, for all hast died.
Oh, teach us, whatsoe'er betide,
to love them all in Thee!

The Lutheran Hymnal 439:4

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." John 11:45–48 (ESV)

He has to be Stopped!

They can't see the forest because of all the trees. The religious leaders sent out spies to watch Jesus closely. When they returned and reported Jesus' miracles, they disregarded what they had seen. A formerly blind man came to them and told them how Jesus had put mud in his eyes and healed him. They could not see it. It was like they had mud in their own eyes.

Naturally, we assume that, were we in their position...we would never do the same. Have you noticed the division in our country over politics much? One side says, "The other guy always lies... don't believe or listen to what he says." The other side says the same. Neither would know the truth if it walked up and bit them.

The Jewish Leaders wanted Jesus dead because He was taking away their power and influence and pointing out their hypocrisy. Some wanted Lazarus dead because He was living proof of Jesus' power. Would we be so quick to speak up? We may remain silent at times, telling ourselves, "They won't listen anyway." We justify it by saying, "We can't argue them into the Kingdom!" No, but Jesus' Word can do what you can't. You aren't called to convince or convert...only to point to the Savior. Trust Him to handle the rest.

Lord of Harvest, let there be
Joy and strength to work for Thee
Till the nations far and near
See Thy light and learn Thy fear.

The Lutheran Hymnal 507:6

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read John 9:1-41. Notice the different kinds of blindness; physical and spiritual. Can you think of other ways that people are blind today? Evaluate your life...are you blind to certain sins and their power over you? Pray for clarity, to see yourself and to receive Jesus' healing power.
2. Read Matthew 15:1-20. We'd all agree that personal hygiene is important. Germs and microscopic bacteria are prevalent in our world, even if we can't see them. A person can become sick by ingesting unwashed fruits or vegetables. Notice what Jesus said about being 'defiled.' Reflect on the cleansing power of Jesus' blood. Eat and drink of Him.
3. Read Luke 16:13. We live in one of the most wealthy and prosperous nations on the face of the earth. Most anything we want is at our fingertips. This is a blessing...and a curse. When sick...to whom do we turn first, the Savior or the Doctor? When there is a shortage in income, do we turn to the Savior first or fret a bit first? What does it mean to serve money first before God? List the blessings you have been given. Ask God how these gifts can be used to serve others.
4. As you go about your life today, shopping for groceries or making a trip to the post office or the library, do a little "people watching." What do you see? Whom do you see? Pray for an opportunity. Who could you share a conversation with or even invite to lunch?

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Genesis 2:18

Your Spouse: God's Greatest Earthly Gift

Think of it, Adam had all of God's perfect, beautiful creation—All the animals, unafraid and friendly to him; all the plants and trees for their food and beauty. He even had God to talk to, yet it was "not good" because he did not have anyone like himself. So God made woman. He formed her out of his rib. Made of the same substance, she was truly comparable to him; like him in so many important ways, and yet wonderfully different. They would make each other complete. Adam was overjoyed! "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." (Genesis 2:23) Then God instituted the holy estate of marriage. Eve was God's greatest earthly blessing to Adam and vice versa. He had everything else, but his life was not complete until God gave him a wife.

That is not to say that a person can't have a fulfilled life without a spouse. The Apostle Paul indicates that God gives some a special ability to serve God more faithfully without a spouse. Nevertheless, if you are married or desire to be married, don't forget what a special treasure your spouse is. Marriage is ordained by God to be the closest, most intimate relationship known to man and to be a source of great joy, love, comfort, strength, and support. If you truly treasure your spouse as a gift from God, that will go a long way to making a truly happy, blessed marriage the way God intended it to be.

If you are not married but desire to be, pray that God will direct you to a godly spouse who can be a true companion in Christ. If you are happily single, thank God for that gift and serve Him with all your might.

Lord, thank you for establishing this union of husband and wife. Teach me to truly treasure this gift and honor you. Amen

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24

Leave, Cleave, and Become One

It is very evident for anyone who wants to know God's design for marriage, that it is a union between one man and one woman for life. They are to "leave" their father and mother. You, of course, ought to still love and honor your parents according to the Fourth commandment and care for them, but you are now beginning a new family unit. Your first commitment is to your spouse.

You are to be "joined" to your spouse, or as the old King James Version translated it, "cleave" to your spouse. That seems like a stronger term. To cleave to your spouse means to be inseparable. You are not to let other family or friends come between the two of you. Marriage is a beautiful, close-knit relationship. Some couples seem to live parallel lives. They are not hostile to each other, but they each live their own lives. Others do everything they can together. This is the kind of companionship God intends for a close-knit marriage.

This closeness is emphasized even more by the last phrase, "and they shall become ONE FLESH." What could be closer than that? To be "one flesh" means that you no longer think and act for yourself. Now you live for your spouse because they are literally a part of you. As Paul says, "So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself." (Ephesians 5:28) Our selfish human nature that thinks about our own feelings, hurts, and desires is the greatest enemy to the oneness of marriage. For any marriage to succeed, we must learn to love and forgive the way Christ loves and forgives us. Therefore, being one flesh spiritually is of the greatest importance.

O Lord, thank you for the close bond of marriage. Forgive me for all the times my own selfishness has broken down the unity and teach me to love and forgive as you have done to me. Amen

For you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.

1 Thessalonians 4:9

Marriage Envelops All Types of Love

Love is such a broad word that we use in many ways. “I love chocolate cake,” and “I love my spouse,” are clearly talking about different types of love. You might have heard that the Greek language has four different words describing love.

PHILEO is the love and affection between friends, when you enjoy someone’s company and trust them enough to confide in them and seek their advice. Paul urges the older women to admonish the younger women, among other things, “to love their husbands, to love their children.” (Titus 2:4) Those are both compound words with Phileo. Any marriage and family will be more vibrant when you consider your spouse to be your best friend.

STORGE is an even stronger affection among family members, especially between parents and children. It describes a closeness, an emotional connection. What a blessing to a marriage to always have that wonderful feeling of being in love.

EROS is the sensual, passionate love of physical touch and sexual intimacy. This word is not found in the Bible, but can be properly understood in the context of marriage. The world has certainly made a multitude of sins connected to it, but God has created sex specifically for enjoyment and intimacy in marriage.

All three of these enhance marriage in many ways and make it a truly beautiful and intimate relationship. However, because of our ever-present selfish motives, they are not a reliable foundation for marriage. When selfish desires are no longer met, people think they “fall out of love.”

Our verse above is not talking about marriage, but even married couples need to be taught by God how to love each other. Paul is speaking about the fourth and highest form of love: AGAPE. That love does not come naturally. It only comes from God. This Love makes a solid foundation for our marriage. (More on that tomorrow.)

Lord, teach us your love and fill us with Your blessings. Amen

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7

AGAPE: the Foundation for Marriage

“Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” This is not just any love that is from God, it is Agape, the highest form of selfless, unconditional love. Agape is a love that humans do not have by nature, nor can they get it on their own. Agape only comes from God, and everyone who has this type of love is truly born of God and knows God.

Agape is not based on emotions or feelings of love. It does not depend upon the loveliness or worthiness of the person loved. It is a committed decision to do whatever is necessary for the good of the person loved, no matter what. It is the Love that God has when He “so loved the world,”—the world that despised Him and rejected His commands; the world that would abuse and crucify His own Son. Yet He loved that world so much “that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) That is Agape!

Agape is the building block of every godly relationship, but especially of marriage. Agape is the love that does not let the cruel words and careless actions of the other ruin your love for them. It forgives and forgets and is determined to do good.

When Agape is the foundation of your marriage, every other type of love, with all the feelings, intimacy, and joy, will be enhanced greatly. Just as God’s Agape produces love in our hearts, so when we show this love, we pray that it will produce love and build the most wonderful marriage.

Lord, you are the God of true Agape love. We thank you for your great love and forgiveness in Christ, and pray that you will teach us to love as you have loved us. Amen

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body . . . Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish . . . Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” Ephesians 5:22-23, 25-27, 33

Love and Respect

Paul beautifully describes God’s design for marriage and the perfect roles that God gives to husbands and wives in their “one flesh” relationship. Marriage mirrors our relationship with Christ.

The role of wives submitting to their husbands is viewed by many as a negative, discriminating, and horribly outdated command. But remember, God designed marriage to be the greatest blessing that brings couples joy and happiness when they follow God’s order. Wives, remember these words, “As to the Lord.” There is nothing negative about submitting to Christ. It is our great privilege. Submitting to your husband in marriage is submitting to Christ.

Husbands, what a standard to live up to, to love your wife “just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” It is impossible to fully live up to that, but that is our goal every day. Christ gave Himself for the church in order to present it glorious without spot or wrinkle. Likewise, your role is to sacrifice yourself for her in every way necessary to make her truly shine in splendor, physically, emotionally, and especially spiritually. When husband and wife both focus on their own role of building the other up, you will have a truly blessed, joyful, and God pleasing marriage.

Lord, forgive my selfishness and help me to give only love and respect to build up my spouse as you have taught us. Amen

Weekend Rest Journal

Meditate more on Ephesians 5:22-33.

1. Wives: consider your role in verses 22-24, and 33. What does it mean to submit to a husband "As to the Lord"? What does it mean that a husband is head as Christ is head? How can a wife show that she respects her husband? And what effect do you suppose that will have on him?
2. Husbands: consider your role in verses 25-33. How does the phrase "just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her," change the way you look at your time, wants, and desires etc.? What does a completely self-sacrificing love and service look like today? Jesus gave Himself for the church to make it beautiful and glorious without any blemish. What can you do for your wife to make her shine and flourish in every way?
3. For those who are single: What does the marriage picture of Christ and the Church teach you about your own fulfillment, joy, and purpose in life?

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. John 15:18 KJV

Adversity

Sometimes it feels as though we live in a unique time of extreme adversity towards Christians and Christian living. We look at the news and think that it can't get much worse. However, have we ever stopped to do some self-reflection on the great blessings the Lord has procured for us through past generations?

For instance, do we stop to thank God for the beautiful old church buildings that we are blessed to worship in? We should realize that through great adversity, these buildings were erected by faithful Lutherans who loved our Lord. For many of these faithful families, life would be hard after erecting their chapels in America. Many times, after only having built their church buildings a decade prior, these faithful Lutherans would face persecution from false narratives that were being spread during World War I and then again during World War II. Catechumens would learn from the Catechisms in German only to be forced to relearn their lessons in English. Churches would have to cross state borders to have German services because of ill-considered state laws. Yet, throughout all this adversity, these faithful patriarchs persevered and passed down to us the beautiful buildings, the liturgy, and most importantly, the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is a wonderful realization that, as Christ has preserved His flock throughout great adversity in the past, He will continue to do so with us. We can take comfort in His words to us, "and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." Matthew 28:20b KJV

Lord, keep us safe and guard our faith now and always. Amen.

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature...And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

Mark 16:15,20 KJV

Henry Muhlenberg

The year was 1742 when a man by the name of Henry Muhlenberg landed on the shores of America. He was a Lutheran pastor tasked with a monumental endeavor. The Lutheran churches in America were scattered across the New World with no organization and were in danger of factionalism. That is, they were in danger of disagreement because they were too independent. Henry's goal was to standardize the liturgy and set the footing of the Lutheran churches back on solid ground. Thus, he founded the very first Lutheran synod in America. Then he continued to help new congregations get started in the colonies.

Henry is a great example of one who overcame challenges with the Lord's guidance. His story reminds us of the Great Commission that Christ gave to His disciples. Just as the disciples and Henry overcame adversity to spread the gospel and unify the church around God's truth, so too should we. At times, we can feel discouraged because of various disagreements we may have in our annual church meetings. Sometimes weighty subjects are discussed at the family dinner table or at our synodical conventions. There may not always be total agreement on every issue discussed. This can result in a certain level of adversity. However, isn't it comforting to realize that our struggles are not as overwhelming as those Henry and the disciples sought to overcome?

We can go forward in confidence if we take the words of this great hymn to heart:

The cause is God's; obey his call
And to his hand commit your all
And fear no ill impending!
Though not yet seen by human eyes,
His Gideon shall for you arise,
God's Word and you defending.

Lutheran Worship 361:2

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. Ecclesiastes 3:1

John Peter Muhlenberg

In our last devotion, we learned about Henry Muhlenberg, the man who was responsible for organizing the various Lutheran churches in America. His task seems enormous as we look back on it from our modern perspective. However, his sons would face even harder times as they sought to advance the Kingdom of God on the shores of America.

John Peter Muhlenberg was one of Henry's sons. He was ordained as a Lutheran pastor after serving with a regiment of German dragoons in the Old Country. In America, he served a congregation in Virginia, which was made up of German immigrants. In 1776, it was evident to John that America was about to fight a war against the British for Independence. He read, while standing at the pulpit, from the book of Ecclesiastes chapter three, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven . . . A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace."

After preaching this, he declared that this was a time for war. He took off his clerical robe and revealed that he was dressed in his Continental Army uniform. He then proceeded to recruit hundreds of his church men to join his Eighth Virginia Regiment. John was indeed a bold pastor who was needed for a crucial time in history. Just as John realized a liberty that he believed was worth defending, so must we realize an ever greater responsibility. We have been called to promote the kingdom of Christ: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." (Galatians 5:1)

Christ has indeed set us free from the great Adversary, the devil. Let us rest in this comfort and share this truth with others.

Do not despair, O little flock,
Although the foes' fierce battle shock
Loud on all sides assail you!
Though at your fall they laugh, secure,
Their Triumph cannot long endure;
Let not your courage fail you!

Lutheran Worship 361:1

Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” Colossians 3:13 KJV

Frederick Muhlenberg

John Peter Muhlenberg had a brother named Frederick. Frederick was less than impressed with John’s stirring sermon from Ecclesiastes. In fact, he told his brother, as a fellow pastor, that he shouldn’t get involved in politics and war. However, John instructed his brother that he loved his liberties just as much as any man. He would fight to defend them if necessary. Frederick disagreed with his brother until one day the British torched his church building.

After the church was reduced to ashes, Frederick changed his mind and sided with the patriotic Americans in their struggle for independence. Later on, after the war, Frederick became America’s very first speaker of the House of Representatives. God worked mightily through the Muhlenberg family, indeed!

Do you feel as if you have friends and family who aren’t standing up for what is right? Maybe life’s struggles have driven you to despair because you feel helpless to fix broken family situations. Don’t give up hope for your loved ones and don’t despair as you try to patch up friendships that have gone sideways. Hardships and disagreements can bring you closer together with those you care about, if the situation is approached in love. “Forbearing one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” (Colossians 3:13 KJV)

Frederick eventually came around to understanding his brother’s perspective after circumstances changed. So too, our friends and family may also be reunited in Christian agreement if we ask Christ to help us to be forbearing with one another.

My God desires each soul’s salvation,

My soul he too desires to save;

Therefore with Christian resignation

All earthly troubles I will brave.

His will be done eternally:

What pleases God, that pleases me.

The Lutheran Hymnal 529:5

Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.

Psalm 37:1-2 KJV

Overcome Evil With Good

This past week, we've explored the stories of Henry, John, and Frederick Muhlenberg. These were Lutheran pastors in early America who overcame tremendous obstacles to advance the kingdom of Christ. In our day in age, we may find ourselves facing similar situations such as wars and rumors of wars. We can see the worldly men and women seemingly prospering while the church struggles against countless forces that seek her destruction.

However, God will preserve His flock in the same way He preserved the Muhlenbergs. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." (Psalm 37:3)

Through God's working in our lives and the constant rejection of our old, sinful nature, we endeavor to do good on this earth. "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:20-21)

By doing good, through the Holy Spirit's working in our lives, we will overcome our earthly and spiritual adversaries.

Bless us, Father, and protect us
From all harm in all our ways;
Patiently, O Lord, direct us
Safely through these fleeting days.
Let your face upon us shine,
Fill us with your peace divine.
Praise the Father, Son, and Spirit!
Praise him, all who life inherit!

Lutheran Worship 440:2

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Reflect on your own heritage. Are there examples of heroes in your past? Can you think of a grandparent or remember a story of a relative that showed courage in adversity? Is there a person from your church family who has helped you to learn about following the Lord by their example of faithfulness? Journal about that memory. What was it about that person that you admired?
2. Look to the stories of Scripture for an example of faithfulness in adversity. What person comes to mind? What events did they live through? What does this teach you about how to face challenges in your own life? (for some specific examples read: 1 Kings 19:1-18; Daniel 3:8-25)

[illegible]

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:6-8

Gifts of God's Varied Grace: Preaching

Imagine yourself in the pulpit of the church about to preach a sermon. Pretty nerve wracking, right? Such a role couples the fear of public speaking with the importance of teaching God's Word in its truth and purity, carefully presenting both the Law and the Gospel. Preaching God's Word entails such great responsibility that nobody would honestly look at himself in the mirror and feel qualified for such an honor.

Though none of us is qualified or even deserves the privilege of speaking about and for God, we have been granted this gift. Indeed, some have been particularly blessed in "prophecy,"—that is, publicly speaking God's Word, seen most frequently in the role of our pastors. Though preaching is daunting, those who have the gifts to study and proclaim God's Word should prayerfully consider the public ministry, for it is also a great blessing. We should also recognize that serving God in this capacity is not anything we do through our own strength and intellect; instead, we are simply serving God by using the very gifts He has given us.

We need also to remember that preaching is not limited to the pulpit. Consider Paul's letter to Timothy: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." (2 Timothy 4:10) While we need young men to prepare to serve in the public ministry and preach from pulpits, we also need them and the rest of us to always be ready to share God's Word with others.

How beauteous are their feet
Who stand on Zion's hill;
Who bring salvation on their tongues
And words of peace reveal!

The Lutheran Hymnal 487:1

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:6-8

Gifts of God's Varied Grace: Teaching

Those who enter the public ministry, pastors and teachers, are typically the most visible servants of God's Christian Church here on earth. Because of the public nature of their ministry, they are expected to live a God-fearing life that does not bring shame or doubt upon the Word of God. Paul's advice to Titus about being "a pattern of good works" (Titus 2:7), applies especially to those in the preaching and teaching ministry. Likewise, we read: "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment." (James 3:1).

Just as daunting as facing a congregation from the pulpit is being entrusted with God's little lambs in a school setting. Spending all day with them as "a pattern of good words" is challenging indeed. Those considering using their gifts to teach, however, also need to realize that these gifts are from God and should be used for His glory. While none of us will ever live up to the strict judgment of God's Law, which demands perfection, we are blessed to take up a role like teaching, in which we recognize that people learn not only from what we say but what we do. Such a position leads us to remember daily that we are sinful and that it is only through the Holy Spirit's work in us that we produce fruits of faith. Moreover, those who use their gift of teaching in the public ministry are blessed to witness the Word growing in the hearts of young people. What could be more rewarding or provide greater satisfaction?

Heavenly Father, we thank you for teachers, those who help our young people learn about God through words and example. Amen.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:6-8

Gifts of God's Varied Grace: Encouraging

One misconception that Christians can fall prey to is thinking that the only (or best way) to serve God is by becoming a pastor or a teacher. All believers, however, have the privilege of sharing the good news of Christ with others, though in different ways. In fact, in the verses prior to our text, Paul lays out the reason God provides us different gifts: "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." (Romans 12: 4-6). Believers have different functions within the Christian church here on earth, just like different parts of the body work together in a well-functioning, unified organism.

So, what can we do if we don't have the God-given gifts or personality for the public ministry? In our text, Paul lists several options. One gift that is often overlooked but is of great importance to our work in God's Kingdom is exhortation, or encouragement. While all of us can support our fellow believers, some people are particularly blessed with the ability to encourage others. They seem to know the right gesture or words or gift that will help someone feel appreciated and valued. It is hard to overstate the importance of a kind word or thank-you note to called workers and fellow church members.

As we think about how we can use our gifts in service to our LORD, "let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works." (Hebrews 10:24)

Lord, please give to us encouraging hearts and minds that help support your Kingdom Work. Amen.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:6-8

Gifts of God's Varied Grace: Leading

When we think of leaders, we may immediately conjure up images of the fiery coach, the stern general, or the tough CEO. Maybe such an idea of leadership also led Moses to be reluctant to accept his role as leader of the children of Israel. When we consider whether we have the gift of leadership, we should look to the Bible rather than models from our culture.

While servant leadership has become more popular lately in the secular world, we recognize that this concept of leadership is not new at all but is embodied in Christ and described throughout the Bible. What greater example of serving others can there be than Jesus? The Son of God became a lowly human; He “humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:8) As leader of the disciples, He also acted with humility (even washing their feet) and always for their best interest.

In his letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul also outlines qualities for leaders in the church. (1 Timothy 3:2-12; Titus 1:6-9) In looking at these characteristics, we might be intimidated because we are not at all “blameless” (1 Titus 6:9), nor do we daily fulfill all the requirements for these positions. The most important qualification, though, is “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught” (Titus 1:9) God doesn't ask for perfect leaders, but for those who lead “with diligence” and faith.

Lord, teach all those who serve in church leadership to cling to the Word of God, which provides direction for their leadership and the promise of forgiveness for when they fail. Amen.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:6-8

Gifts of God's Varied Grace: Giving

In considering being stewards of God's gifts—using them wisely to His glory rather than neglecting or misusing them for ungodly purposes—we have been looking at how we use our time and talents. Indeed, dedicating our abilities to God is a form of giving—really, giving back to God Himself. Paul describes this a few verses before our text when he urges the Romans to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” (Romans 21:1) Realizing God's gifts to us—life, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life – it becomes our joy and privilege to use our time and talents in serving Him.

In our text, though, we are urged to give with liberality, with generosity. Specifically, we can look at our monetary support of our churches and synod and examine whether we give stingily, putting whatever is left at the end of the week in the collection plate, or whether we prioritize our offerings. Note that the Bible does not tell us specifically how much to give; rather, it focuses on our attitude when we give: “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor. 9:6).

Whether we give pennies, like the widow giving her mites, or millions of dollars, let us pray that God gives us the heart of a cheerful giver, so that we give generously and with joy to support the work of His Kingdom.

**We give Thee but Thine own, Whate'er the gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone, A trust, O Lord, from thee.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 441:1

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Look carefully and honestly at the gifts listed in Romans 12:4-9 or in I Corinthians 12:4-11 and write down other gifts. Think about gifts that you or others have noticed in you. Write down two to three gifts God has given you and how they can be used in spreading the gospel.
2. Again, look carefully and honestly at the gifts listed in Romans 12:4-9 or in I Corinthians 12:4-11 and write down other gifts. Think about gifts you have noticed in other people that you know. Write down two to three people and their gifts and plan specific ways you can encourage or thank them for using their gifts for spreading the gospel.
3. Paul uses the analogy of the human body to describe the unity and diversity within the church. How is thinking about different types of service to God as different functions of the body helpful? What does this comparison reveal about which types of service are perceived as more or less important?
4. At times, we can be jealous of other people's gifts and can see only our shortcomings. How can seeing our abilities as gifts from God alter such a perspective?

“Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” Esther 4:14b

What is Your Purpose on Earth?

If you have not read the short Old Testament book of Esther recently, I urge you to do so. It is as intriguing as any drama novel. There is betrayal, romance, and plenty of political intrigue. The queen refuses to submit to the drunken leers of the Persian king’s advisors, and is banished by the king. The king then forces all of the young women of his kingdom into his harem to choose the next queen, including captured Jews who had been brought into the kingdom years earlier. One of the Jewish women (Esther) catches the king’s eye, and he makes her his queen. Meanwhile, one of the king’s advisors, who hates Esther’s uncle, has come up with a plan to kill him and all of the Jews in the kingdom. Esther’s uncle hears of the plan and asks Esther to intervene with the king.

However, Esther is concerned about the king’s strict rule, punishable by death, that no one (including her) can appear before him without an invitation. Her uncle then speaks the words of our text, reminding her that God had possibly placed her in her position for the specific purpose of saving the Jewish people from annihilation.

How about you? Why are you here today? Why are you at your specific job, in your specific neighborhood, shopping at a specific store, or sitting next to someone at a youth baseball or soccer game? Could it be that God has placed you at a specific place, at a specific time to proclaim His Word of comfort and encouragement to someone who desperately needs it? When those opportunities come before you, do not be like Esther who worried about the possible consequences, but recognize that God has put you there for a reason. By using God’s Words of comfort and encouragement, you may save a soul from eternal condemnation.

**We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear;
And, often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 464:3

And when the king came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lion's mouths, so they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you." Daniel 6:20-22

I'll Never, No Never, No Never Forsake!

There is a saying, "if you would be put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" The point is that we should live our lives in a way that everyone around us sees our faith in God. We should not hide our faith, even if we fear ridicule (or in Daniel's case, death). We can trust in God to protect us.

Showing our confidence in God and His promises can positively influence others. In Daniel's situation, King Darius was so impressed that he encouraged his entire kingdom to follow the true God. Likewise, the Holy Spirit can use our confidence in God's Word to bring another person to desire that same confidence for themselves. Like King Darius, that one person may then go on to bring many others to God (which is how many missions in Africa, India and elsewhere began).

We may occasionally find ourselves in situations where we have a choice to either hide or show our faith. We can confidently show our faith in God's Word, excited about the possibility of bringing more people into the Kingdom of God through that powerful Word of God.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never, forsake!

The Lutheran Hymnal 427:7

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” So the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus.” Acts 9:10-11

Facing the Enemy

Ananias responded to the Lord’s call, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” Knowing of Saul’s rage towards Christians, this was not a visit Ananias wanted to make. He probably remembered well one of Saul’s first attacks on Christians—when Stephen was stoned to death, and now Saul had been given authority to arrest any Christian he found. Yet, the Lord was placing Ananias there at that time for a very important reason—to meet with and teach God’s word and will to this man who had made it his career to kill Christians. Despite Saul’s history, God had chosen him to be a faithful believer.

The successful conversion of Saul to a faithful minister of God, renamed Paul, is well documented throughout the New Testament in the many letters he wrote to the churches of God. Ananias was an important part of God’s plan to do this.

We, too, may occasionally be placed in situations facing someone who appears to hate God and Christians. We can be assured that this was not by accident—The Lord specifically places us in those places at those times to witness the Lord’s love and glory. He has also promised, “Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” Luke 12:11-12.

Wisdom and zeal and faith impart,
Firmness with meekness, from above
To bear Thy people on our heart
And love the souls whom Thou dost love.

The Lutheran Hymnal 490:3

Then Moses said to the Lord, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” Exodus 4:10

Don't Underestimate the Power of God

Years earlier, God had set the stage for Moses to lead the Israelites out of captivity. When Pharaoh had commanded all baby boys to be killed, God preserved Moses by having his mother put him in a basket amidst some pond reeds where Pharaoh's daughter found him and raised him as her own. Because he was raised in the palace, Moses was well educated. Yet, Moses gave the sorry excuse in our text when God told him that the time had come to lead the Israelites out of captivity. God responded to him: “Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”

The Lord will at times place us in a position to lead someone out from slavery to worry or sin. That person could be a friend, a co-worker, a neighbor, or someone we meet at a soccer game. You should not worry about not coming up with the right words, but realize that God has put you there at that time and that place as the one best able to comfort and encourage this person, and to bring them the peace they need. God's promise to Moses is just as valid for you: “I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”

He is thy Treasure, He thy Joy, Thy Life and Light and Lord,
Thy Counselor when doubts annoy,
Thy shield and great Reward.

His wisdom never plans in vain, ne'er falters or mistakes;
All that His counsels did ordain a happy ending makes
Upon thy lips, then, lay thy hand and trust His guiding love;
Then like a rock thy peace shall stand
Here and in heaven above.

The Lutheran Hymnal 535:2,8,9

Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? “Father, save me from this hour”? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name. John 12:27-28

Jesus Carried Out His Purpose

The greatest example of someone being placed at a specific place, at a specific time, for a specific purpose, is that of Jesus. As soon as mankind (Adam and Eve) rebelled and separated themselves from God, God put into play His plan to return them to His kingdom. Throughout the Old Testament, He laid out the details of His plan of sending a Savior—both true God and true man. He foretold where the Messiah would be born and to whom He would be born (a virgin, descendant of David). God, through the Old Testament prophets, described the Messiah’s life leading up to and including His death as satisfaction for the sins of the world. Jesus’ resurrection was also foretold, which would be proof that the world had truly been redeemed.

Jesus’ humanity was especially shown while praying at the Garden of Gethsemane: “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). As true man, He did not desire the coming trial, beatings and crucifixion. Yet, as also true God, He understood “for this purpose I came to this hour.”

How blessed we are that Christ fulfilled all of the prophecies, showing without a doubt that He was the promised Messiah. How blessed we are that Christ understood His purpose and willingly carried it out for the salvation of mankind. How blessed we are that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Let us share this good news with others!

Dear Lord, to Thy true servants give
the grace to Thee alone to live.

Once bound by sin, but saved by Thee,
They go to set the pris’ners free.

The Gospel message to proclaim
that man may call upon Thy Name.

The Lutheran Hymnal 482:1

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read about the following servants of God, and write down (1) what was God's purpose for them, (2) how God directed their lives to meet that purpose, (3) what were their reactions to God's plan in their lives, and (4) what blessing did God bring to others through them.

Genesis 37-45; Jonah 1-3; 1 Samuel 17; Ruth 1; Joshua 1

Can you think of any others?

[illegible]

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Isaiah 1:1

He Saw Visions of Things to Come

God has forbidden attempts to see into the future by means of superstitious devices such as horoscopes, crystal balls, or Ouija boards. (Deuteronomy 18:10, 11; Revelation 21:8; 22:15) Knowledge of the future belongs to God alone; if it is to be revealed in advance, only He can reveal it. Only the knowledge of the future that He reveals in His Word is good for us.

Here in the first verse of the book of Isaiah we learn that God did make future events known to the prophet. Isaiah could rightly say, “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days...” (Isaiah 2:2)

This opening statement of the book also reveals something about the way God made future events known to the prophet. It was by visions; “he saw” what would befall Judah and Jerusalem.

But it wasn’t just events of the immediate future that Isaiah saw. It was also the more distant events in the life and work of the Messiah. These things Isaiah was permitted to see and to report as one who saw them with his own eyes. Here we think especially of Isaiah 53, where he speaks of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ in the past tense. It was as if these events had already happened, for the mouth of the LORD had spoken them.

The visions shown to Isaiah are to us a powerful witness to Christ and His work by which He has brought to us the blessings of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Father, we give You thanks and praise for the picture of Jesus Christ that you have given us in the book of Isaiah. Through these prophecies give us comfort and joy in the certainty that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world. Amen.

“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” Isaiah 6:5

He Was a Penitent and Forgiveness Sinner

In Isaiah 6, the prophet records his calling to be God’s representative and spokesman, describing the experience in detail. It took place in the year that King Uzziah died. He was in the temple where he saw a vision of the LORD. Every detail of the vision exhibited His transcendent greatness and glory: the train of His robe filled the temple; He was accompanied by holy angels, six-winged seraphim; when He spoke His voice shook the posts of the temple door and filled the building with smoke.

Seeing this vision of unveiled divine glory and hearing God’s voice, the prophet was terrified. Like others in the Bible who were granted a personal manifestation of God, Isaiah felt that he might not survive the experience. Being in the presence of God and His holy angels brought the prophet to a keen awareness of his uncleanness and the uncleanness of his people.

This sinful unworthiness Isaiah confessed freely. He humbled himself before the LORD. How could he, a poor miserable sinner, serve as the LORD’s spokesman and convey His message to a sinful nation?

The LORD answered Isaiah with the assurance of the forgiveness of his sins, offered in a most dramatic way. One of the seraphim flew to him with a live coal he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched the prophet’s lips and declared, “Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is purged.” (Isaiah 6:6, 7) Thus assured, the prophet answered the divine call.

Father, grant us the grace of Your Holy Spirit to confess our sins every day and to believe that the blood of Your Son Jesus Christ cleanses us of all our sins. With this assurance send us out to live as salt and light to the world. Amen.

The burden against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw. Isaiah 13:1

He Was a Prophet to the World

It was a common belief in ancient times that there were many gods, and that whatever power these gods had was mostly limited to a certain tribe or people and the geographic area in which they lived. It was expected that each nation would have its own deities.

These ideas are not as far removed from modern religious ideas as we might think. It is a common belief in our day that different peoples and nations should have their own religious ideas and practices, and that all of these are somehow valid.

In contrast to these ideas—both ancient and modern—the Bible reveals that only one God is the creator of all things and Lord over all things. He says, “I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another.” (Isaiah 42:8) He rightfully lays claim to the devotion of every person in the world.

The one true and living God who called Isaiah to be His prophet had things to say not only to Israel but to all the nations, including world powers such as Babylon. Isaiah’s God-given message to this mighty empire is called a “burden,” which has the sense not only of an oracle or prophetic message, but also a verdict or judgment. God is the “judge of all the earth.” (Genesis 18:25)

But it isn’t only God’s justice that extends to all the world. His grace likewise is offered to all nations. God sent His own Son in the flesh as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. And God offers His grace in Jesus Christ to every person in the world, promising that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Father, I thank You for the “whoever” of John 3:16, which assures me that though I have sinned against You, I will not perish. Trusting in the blood of Your Son, I thank you for the gift of everlasting life. Amen.

But 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

He Was a Prophet of the Christ

A man who worked in a large office building printed out this verse on a plain piece of paper without giving its source. He showed it to many different people in his building, asking if they could tell him the origin of the quotation. Again and again, he was told that the verse was from the New Testament and that it was about Jesus.

The Holy Spirit revealed the Savior to Isaiah and inspired him to describe Him and His work so clearly and vividly that anyone who reads of Jesus in the four Gospels will recognize Him as the one Isaiah wrote about hundreds of years before Jesus walked this earth.

In this week's series of devotions we have noted that Isaiah was shown visions; He saw things that God Himself revealed to him. We see this especially in what Isaiah records in chapter 52:13-53:12. The prophet wrote as an eyewitness testifying to what he saw. He wrote in the past tense, describing things as though they had already taken place: the passion, death, burial, and exaltation of Christ. He also revealed the meaning of those events. By His suffering and death Christ took our sins upon Him and atoned for them. In Him we are healed and have peace with God.

These prophecies and their fulfillment in Jesus assure us that the events of the passion history were not the result of chance happenings or human designs. Jesus was crucified, buried, and arose from the dead according to the "determined purpose and foreknowledge of God." (Acts 2:23)

Lord, by the prophecies and their fulfillment in Your marvelous Word assure us of Your great love for us and give us an earnest desire for our salvation. Amen.

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. Isaiah 65:17

He Was a Prophet of Good Things Yet to Come

There are many things about the present heavens and earth that are beautiful and wondrous, for they are God's creation and bear witness to His power, wisdom, and glory.

Since the fall of Adam, creation is also under the curse of sin. Not only did sin corrupt human nature and cut off man from fellowship with the Creator, but the very ground was cursed for Adam's sake, producing thorns and thistles, making food production an activity weighted with sweat and toil. (Genesis 3:17-19)

Though millennia have passed since God first proclaimed it, this curse is very much in evidence today. The natural world isn't all beauty and wonder; the news of the day constantly brings reports of violent and destructive storms and upheavals. These things teach us that the present earth and universe will not continue forever. By them God wants to direct our attention to Judgment Day, so that we repent of our sins and place our hopes in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, and the eternal life promised to all who believe in Him.

The heavens and earth that now exist will come to an end when Christ returns according to His promise. Then "the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up...Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3:10, 13)

When Peter speaks of "His promise," he is referring to this passage from Isaiah. Through Isaiah and Peter, God revealed His plans for a new creation freed from sin and its curse.

Father, when this world disappoints us and when we see our life in it passing away, bring to our minds Your faithful promise of the new heavens and new earth and the place in them that is ours through the work of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. The outstanding feature of the profile of Isaiah that we find in the book that bears his name is his role as evangelist of the Old Testament. To him the LORD revealed the person and work of Christ. Write about how Christ fulfilled the prophecies in the following references from Isaiah and what they have to do with His work as our Savior from sin.

Isaiah Passages: 7:14 (Matthew 1:22, 23), 9:6 (Luke 2:11; Ephesians 2:14-18), 11:1 (Acts 13:22, 23), 11:2 (Luke 3:22), 28:16 (1 Peter 2:4-6), 42:1-4 (Matthew 12:15-21), 50:6 (Matthew 26:67; 27:26, 30), 53:3 (Luke 23:18; John 1:11; 7:5), 53:4, 5 (Romans 5:6, 8), 53:7 (Matthew 27:12-14; John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18, 19), 53:9 (Matthew 27:57-60), 53:12 (Mark 15:28), 61:1, 2 (Luke 4:17-19, 21)

2. Isaiah 1:1 records that the prophet had an extraordinarily long career, serving during the reigns of four kings of Judah. Write about the span of time that God has given to you. What blessings has He given you? What trials has He brought you through?
3. Most of us are not called to influence kings as Isaiah was. But think about those in your circle of family and friends that could yet be blessed with words of Scriptural guidance, comfort, and encouragement from you. Write a prayer for God's help.

These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name. John 20:31 (ESV)

The Most Important Teaching of All

What is the most important teaching in all of Scripture? Let us answer like children: “Jesus!” And let us remember the Formula of Concord, SD Article 3: “This article concerning justification by faith is the chief article in the entire Christian doctrine.” And add to that the words of Martin Luther, “Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered...even though heaven and earth, and whatever will not abide should sink to ruin” (The Smalcald Articles, Article 1) It is “the article of a standing or falling church,” yea, “and of a standing or falling soul” (1930 ELS convention essay).

Those answers are all the same, but they grow progressively more specific. It is as if we asked a series of narrowing questions: “What is the Bible about?” Jesus. “What about Jesus?” How He saves. “How does he do that?” By justification through faith alone.

This is the very heavenly doctrine which God came down to give and reveal to us. It is not simply one teaching of Scripture among others but rather the teaching of Scripture. Every single word God has given to man is ultimately about this, and together, every doctrine, like brushstrokes on canvas, makes up the whole of it.

Christ testifies to this in John 5:39, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.” Paul also writes in Romans 1:16-17, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”

Whoever holds this doctrine in true faith can never fall, and whoever lets it go can never stand.

**My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus’ blood and righteousness,
No merit of my own I claim but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.
On Christ, the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.**

Lutheran Service Book 575:1

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed.

Romans 3:20-21a

Forensic Justification

In Romans 3:20-21, the same Greek root word appears here as both a verb, “justified,” and a noun, “righteousness.” The basic meaning is “To declare not guilty.” Paul has been making the case that if we are judged by the law, then no one can be justified before God since we have all sinned. Wherever the law finds sin, it always condemns it and never excuses or forgives it.

“But now!” Paul says, “a righteousness has been revealed apart from the law.” That means having nothing at all to do with the demands or condemnations of the law. Then, he says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Notice the group of people he says are “justified” are the same “all” who have “sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” Since those who have sinned are condemned by the law and cannot be righteous through the law, Christ enters in, “whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood.”

A propitiation is a sacrifice that atones for sin. It is Christ paying the debt you owed so that God’s wrath is removed. The result is that “He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” It is the sacrifice which changes the condemnation of the law into the justification of the gospel. This we call “forensic” justification, meaning a legal decree. Christ by His perfect life and innocent death has taken your place so that God’s decree for you is “not guilty.” More than that, it is “righteous!” For a switch has taken place. He was made sin for you and you were made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). He took your place and you took His. He died your death and you live His life.

**Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free;
For God, the just, is satisfied, to look on Him and pardon me.**

Lutheran Service Book 574:4

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:19 (ESV)

Universal Justification

To whom does this decree of justification apply? Who is declared “righteous” through Christ’s death and resurrection? Scripture is clear: everyone.

Some limit the meaning of “world.” They say God only justified some. If so, how can you know this is for you? Do you have to be good enough? Or did Christ only accomplish this for those He knew would believe in Him? Must you then be the cause, the doer, the chooser of your own justification? Must you be left in blank despair and doubt? No!

Consider again Romans 3:23-24, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God being justified freely by His grace.” The “all who sinned” are the same “all who are justified.” And since there is no person who does not sin, it is every person who is justified.

Do you want more proof? Trust these words from 1 John 2:2, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” That is, not for believers only, but also for the whole world. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice, by His holy, precious blood and innocent sufferings and death, He has declared His righteousness, His forgiveness, His salvation for this whole world.

This is why you can know that it is for you! There is no special category you have to fit in, no box you have to check, no work you have to do. Are you a part of the world? Justification is for you! Are you a sinner? Justification is for you! Are you human? It is for you! “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 ESV)

**Lord, I believe, were sinners more
Than sands upon the ocean shore,
Thou hast for all a ransom paid,
for all a full atonement made.**

Lutheran Service Book 563:4

* Editor’s Note: Please refer to Friday’s devotion for more on the subjective aspect of justification and faith.

Righteousness shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. Romans 4:24-25

Objective Justification

The word “objective” means that something is true outside of you—not based on your personal feelings or condition. Such as the fact that the laws of gravity are true and act upon you whether you know about them, understand them, or agree with them. Sometimes the terms “universal justification” and “objective justification” are used as synonyms. But in truth, that’s not exactly the case. The fact that justification is universal is one way in which it is objective. But it is not the only way. Christ’s work is also objective in that it was and remains finished before and outside of you. It is true apart from anything you do or think or believe.

When Jesus proclaimed “It is finished” on the cross, that meant that justification was complete. Or as Paul puts it, “righteousness shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”

His death and resurrection mean that all is done. Everything that was necessary for your sins to be forgiven and your debt to be paid was complete when Jesus left the tomb empty. He who died for your sins left them buried in the grave so that Satan’s threats and accusations are now as empty as Jesus’ tomb. Therefore, there is nothing left for you to do to earn it. This is why Paul writes in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

There is no level of goodness you have to reach to be worthy. There is no one else you have to be better than to earn it, there are no strings attached, no bargains, no payments left outstanding. “It is finished!” (John 19:30)

Thy works not mine, O Christ, speak gladness to this heart;
They tell me all is done, they bid my fear depart.
To whom save Thee, who canst alone for sin atone,
Lord, shall I flee?

Lutheran Service Book 565:1

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

Romans 4:5

Subjective Justification

What good would all the money in the world do you if you were dead? What joy would sunshine give you if you locked yourself away inside? Or what gladness would all of spring's bright green bring if you refused to open your eyes?

God has declared you righteous in Christ. This is an objective fact truer and brighter and better than the rising sun. But only by faith can this be received. You see, justification is a free gift and promise. God's declaration of righteousness and forgiveness is indeed for all, but it does no one any good unless they believe it. Just as a gift that is scorned profits nothing.

So like the sun might warm you and gently invite you to step outside and feel it, the objective and universal nature of justification is proclaimed and this sweet preaching invites and calls forth faith. This is the subjective reception, like opening a gift.

The only condition is the condition of faith. Faith does not make justification true. Faith receives it because it is true. Faith does not cause forgiveness; it believes it. And it is only faith that can. Because that is what faith is. God is not holding out a contract to be signed, He is not offering conditions to be met, He is not sending you on a quest to earn something. He is delivering to you a gift. The only thing to do is to rejoice in it! That is why we who boast in faith boast only in the Lord.

"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law... But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness... Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure." (Romans 3, 4)

God loved the world
so that He gave His only Son the lost to save,
That all who would in Him believe
should everlasting life receive.

Lutheran Service Book 571:1

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read Romans 5:1-5 and write down some ways that the good news of justification applies to you.
2. Read Psalm 32. In this Psalm David rejoices in the wonderful gifts of the forgiveness of sins. Write down some of the words or phrases David uses to describe God's forgiveness.
3. Consider the way David says he felt in Psalm 32. How did he feel when he was impenitent, refusing to acknowledge his sin and not turning to God for forgiveness? How you ever felt that way about some sin? What advice does David give you?

[illegible]

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours. 1 Corinthians 1:2

Saints: Who Are They?

The term “saint” is used in several different ways by different religious groups. Some use the term to refer to people who lived particularly holy lives. Sometimes it is used to refer to those whom the Lord has called out of this world of sin. There is some truth to these uses, but neither encompasses the full meaning of the Biblical word.

The word “saint” in both the Old and New Testaments literally means “a holy one.” But a study of how this word is used throughout Scripture reveals some important things.

First, being a saint is not based on the action or work of the saint, but only on the action of God. Paul refers to the believers in Corinth as “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” Literally, that means they were “dedicated or separated for holy purposes in Christ.” He also says they were “called to be saints.” Being a saint is not about the works of the individual, but about the work and calling of God. They are called “holy ones” because their sins have been removed through the life and death of Jesus. Now, by the work of the Holy Spirit, they have been set apart for holy purposes, both in time and in eternity.

In addition, Paul refers to those who believe in the true God as saints. Paul equates the term “saints” with the phrase “church of God.” The term saints, or those who believe, includes those who are alive as well as those who are asleep in Jesus. All those who have been brought to faith in the promises and work of God are saints.

Lord, thank You for Your work of calling sinners as Your saints through the Gospel. Amen.

**Glory to God and praise and love Be ever, ever given
By saints below and saints above,
The Church in earth and heaven.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 360:7

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2

The Great Cloud of Witnesses

In Hebrews chapter eleven, the Holy Spirit reviews some of the “Heroes of the Christian Faith” from the beginning of mankind’s history. Abel, Noah, Abraham, and Moses are all mentioned there, as well as Sarah and Rahab. The holy writer recounts the struggles they faced as well as how the Lord revealed His power in their weaknesses.

Then, in the verses above, the holy writer reveals why the lives of those who have gone before us are important for us. These believers of the past serve as a great “cloud of witnesses” for us. Their faith and example in trials motivate us as we face the difficulties of this life with the assurance of God’s love and power in our lives. Their lives remind us that we are going to face many challenges and difficulties as children of God, but they also assure us that God’s love and power supersede any power that will confront us.

The lives, the struggles, the victories, yes, even the deaths of believers of previous generations encourage us to look to Jesus as we run the “race that is set before us.” By God’s grace, they have finished their race and received the crown of righteousness which Jesus won for them by His life and death on Calvary. As we run our race, we can and do benefit from seeing the strength and faith which God supplied them, knowing that He will sustain us as He did them.

Lord, strengthen us through the example of believers who have gone before us. Amen.

Oh, may Your soldiers, faithful, true, and bold,
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old
And win with them the victor’s crown of gold.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

The Lutheran Hymnal 463:3

Through faith [they] subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Hebrews 11:33-35

The Victories of the Saints

In the battles and struggles of this life, it matters who is on your side. The Psalmist declared: “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Psalm 118:6) The Apostle Paul wrote: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31) This is the confidence of the saints!

When we consider the lives of believers who have gone before us, we can see just how true this victory is. With the Lord on their side, His saints have won many astounding and unbelievable victories. Abraham defeated Chedorlaomer and his allies with just three hundred eighteen of his servants. The people of Israel conquered the powerful Canaanite nations and inherited the promised land. Daniel was protected by the Lord when he was thrown into the lion’s den. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael escaped Nebuchadnezzar’s burning furnace without harm. Gideon defeated the Midianite army with only trumpets and lamps. Moses stood before Pharaoh and led Israel out of Egypt. David defeated the mighty Goliath with a sling and a stone. And Elijah brought a woman’s young son back from death.

The same is true for His saints today. He still protects His saints and gives them strength to face the enemy. The enemies that we face are not always physical. Paul wrote: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.” (2 Corinthians 10:3) God works through His people—you and me—to work righteousness and to obtain His promises. Human odds don’t matter when God is on your side.

Lord, thank You for Your power and protection. Amen.

Amen, Lord Jesus, grant our prayer;
Great Captain, now Your arm make bear, Fight for us once again!
So shall Your saints and martyrs raise
A mighty chorus to Your praise, World without end. Amen.

And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. Hebrews 11:35-38

The Trials of the Saints

Many social gospel preachers point to the victories of the saints and promise their listeners earthly rewards in their daily lives. If those victories don't come, they are told, "You didn't believe enough." While the Lord has and does grant many victories, He does not promise that our lives will be easy or full of earthly successes. After describing many examples of victories in the lives of the saints, the Holy Spirit goes on to describe what might look like examples of failures and defeats.

Think about the many saints whose lives were full of suffering, pain, and loss. Abel was killed by his jealous brother. Joseph was slandered by his master's wife and wrongfully imprisoned. David spent years on the run in the wilderness, hiding from mad King Saul. Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern and left for dead. Daniel and his friends were abducted from their homes and taken into captivity in Babylon. Stephen was stoned to death because of His confession in Jesus, and James was killed by Herod. There were many others. The elderly Christian pastor Polycarp was burned alive while tied to a post. The noblewoman Perpetua and her servant Felicitas were taken from their children, scourged, and attacked by animals before being put to death by the sword. All for the sake of Jesus. All with His suffering for them in mind as they followed in His steps.

Of saints like this the world is not worthy!

Lord, give us Your strength to bear the crosses and trials of this life. Amen.

And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

The Lutheran Hymnal 463:5

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"
Revelation 7:9-10

The Communion of Saints

There is an ancient tradition in the Christian church to celebrate the saints on November first. While some churches have either abused or lost sight of this tradition, there is still great value and meaning for Christians when this is celebrated properly. The Feast of All Saints is a joyful celebration of the unity between the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant.

The Church Triumphant includes all those saints who have finished their race and who are at rest with the Lord. For "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (Matthew 22:32) The Church Militant refers to those saints who continue to fight the fight of faith while waiting for the Lord to call them to glory. "For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:8)

Though separated by time and space, these saints are one communion, one fellowship. The description of this communion of saints in Revelation shows great size and incredible diversity. But what stands out most is what they have received from their Savior. They are clothed with white robes, robes cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.

This is the means by which one becomes part of this group. Jesus and His work are the key. His blood cleanses them from sin, and makes them holy, separated from sin, and united with Him and with one another by faith.

Lord Jesus, thank You for cleansing us from sin and joining us with You and all believers. Amen.

When His servants stand before Him, each receiving his reward;
When His saints in light adore Him, giving glory to the Lord,
"Victory!" our song shall be like the thunder of the sea. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Look up the word “saint” in a Bible Concordance or a Bible app. It occurs almost 100 times in the Old and New Testaments. Pick a few verses that use the word and study the context of those verses. How does God use the word “saint” in His word? To whom does it refer? What do we learn about saints from these verses?
2. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. What is the work of a saint while we are part of the Church Militant? How are the saints equipped for this work?
3. Read Psalm 116:15 and the context around it. What comfort does this verse offer us regarding those who believe? Why?

[illegible]

Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David! `Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' Hosanna in the highest!" Matthew 21:9

Purple: The Color of Royalty

In ancient times, purple clothing was extremely expensive to purchase and tremendously difficult to produce. Usually those in positions of royalty were the few that could afford such expensive clothing. Purple robes were hard to come by and cost a lifetime's worth of wages to acquire. Jesus, our Royal King, did not pay money to receive His purple robe. He received it through pain and shame, as King Herod's entourage mockingly dressed him with a robe of purple.

The seasons of Lent and Advent (traditionally purple in color) both include the account of Palm Sunday. On the first Sunday in Advent and the Last Sunday in Lent, we see our King coming in lowly and humble fashion. Having put on the form of a lowly servant, He humbled Himself to the point of death, so that he may raise you and me, broken and contrite sinners, to the position of royal, adopted children of God.

This season is seen as a time of repentance, sorrowfully turning from sin to the forgiveness found in our gracious and loving King Jesus. The advent of our King always provides sweet assurance that our shouts of Hosanna ("Save now!") have been answered through Christ's suffering in our place. When our humble King is seen suffering on the tree of the cross, it does show us the deep consequence of our sinfulness. However, it more importantly shows us that our sin debt has been paid through the innocent suffering and death of our Lord.

In these seasons of penitential sorrow, lift up your head to see your Royal Monarch, your gracious King Jesus, riding into Jerusalem to endure suffering, pain, loss, and even death for you. See the royalty of our Lord and the richness of His grace so benevolently poured out on you and know that your sins have been forgiven in Him.

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

The Lutheran Hymnal 162:5

Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. Luke 23:44-45

Black: The Color of Death, the Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord

Of the colors of the church year, black is reserved for Good Friday, the day where our Substitute and Savior, Jesus Christ, endured our suffering—the suffering of hell—on the cross and thus completed the work of our redemption.

When viewing the black paraments that, on Good Friday, adorn the furnishings of the church, it leads me to think of the unusual darkness that took place at that time. The sixth hour for the Judeans would have been our noon. So, from noon until three o'clock, there was darkness all over the earth. What a moving display of deep seriousness and sorrow over the Son of God dying: the first thing ever created—light itself—ceasing for three hours across the world. This is what disobedience to God's will has done. Doing what God forbids and leaving undone what He has commanded is what brought about three hours of worldwide darkness, the ultimate "power outage." Human sin and human salvation is what drew the creator of light to the tree of the cross.

Yes, black is a fitting color for our Lord's suffering and death, yet, though dark like ebony ashes, out of this day comes forth life. Some may claim that Good Friday is too gory and gruesome to celebrate, but these abysmal claims amount to nothing more than shrouding the cross and redemptive death of our Lord. Good Friday is a day of victory. It is a good day, for it was the day where "it" was finished. "It" refers to the salvation of our souls, the atoning for our sins, the reconciliation with our God, the ransom payment given. On this day the veil of sin separating us from our God was ripped in two, allowing us to have full communion with Him in prayer, praise and every blessing, temporal and eternal.

Silent thro' those three dread hours,
wrestling with the evil pow'rs,
Left alone with human sin, gloom around Thee and within,
Till th' appointed time is nigh, till the Lamb of God may die.

The Lutheran Hymnal 174:2

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. John 1:4

White: The Color of Unending Light

In Jesus there is life, eternal life given to you through Him. This life that Christ gives you is your light. What better color is there for the seasons of Christmas and Easter? White communicates the bright goodness of Christ's light.

In Christ we have our white light, our eternal life. When we observe Christmas, we observe the gift given by our loving and gracious Father. He sent His Son from His eternal throne to this earth as a lowly infant, set under the Law as a human being. Jesus, the Son of God, joined us by taking on flesh, and He was made our brother by joining Adam and Eve's family tree. He wasn't just any human, He was the perfect human. Furthermore, He was also fully God as well as man, able to serve as the perfect representative for you. He came down from heaven to give light to those dwelling in this world. He gave you light by being both the perfect man for you and the perfect sacrifice for your sin.

This is fantastic! But how do we know that the plan worked? Christmas isn't the only season of the church year that bears the color white. After Good Friday passes and Easter Sunday arrives, the black paraments are replaced with white. The perfect Son of God has life in Him once again, and this life is the light of men. When He died, He atoned for the world's sin. Moreover, He did not remain dead, but was raised to life three days later, proving that God's plan worked, that Christ's sacrifice for our sin officially canceled the debt of our sin. There still remains life in Jesus Christ and His Word, and one day we shall shine bright in glory because of the beaming life that Jesus, our risen Lord, has earned for us.

For the joy Thine advent gave me, For thy holy, precious Word;
For Thy Baptism, which doth save me,
For Thy blest Communion board For Thy death, the bitter scorn,
For Thy resurrection morn,
Lord, I thank Thee and extol Thee,
And in Heaven, I shall behold Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 207:6

Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:3-4

Red: The Color of Fire

Red is not often used in the church year. It is reserved for Pentecost, Reformation Sunday, and occasions such as confirmation, mission festivals, and church anniversaries. The common factor found among these observances would be the Holy Spirit's work of Sanctification. The Spirit works through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament to sanctify Christians, that is, He sets them apart as holy through faith in Jesus Christ.

The color red is a clear reference to the fire of Pentecost where the Spirit equipped God's messengers with gifts to assist in the spreading of God's Kingdom. The Holy Spirit's work conveys the thought of never-ending activity and growth in God's grace. Fire produces heat, as substances react with oxygen, causing all sorts of rapid activity. The Gospel of Jesus Christ works on a person's heart, causing all sorts of rapid activity. This begins with the first embers of faith and develops into a bonfire of faith and its fruits. The Spirit accomplishes this by pointing to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. On Confirmation Sunday, we see the flame that began in baptism increasing in young catechumens. For a Mission Festival, we hear how the flame may be kindled and maintained in others. This can include encounters as close as our own living room and as far away as Africa. Reformation Sunday and church anniversaries focus on tending and preserving the fire of God's Word, as God has from age to age.

O Source of uncreated light, The Father's promised Paraclete
Thrice holy Fount, thrice holy Fire,
Our hearts with heavenly love inspire
Come and thy sacred function bring
To sanctify us while we sing.

The Lutheran Hymnal 236

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." John 15:5

Green: The Color of Growth

Green is usually used for the non-festival portion of the church year. It is a time where we focus on the Christian life. The Gospel of Christ and Him crucified is the only source that can maintain and motivate the growth of life. The festival part of the church year shows us how our eternal future has gone from wrath to reward, hell to heaven, despair to deliverance. Our fate is determined, our futures are certain, our lives have been spared. Rejoice! Now, in the non-festival half of the year, you are encouraged to live out your faith in Christ and serve Him in righteousness, innocence and joy. Do this knowing that we are called by God to live on this earth as His people, to serve our neighbor through our callings and to proclaim the excellencies of God who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

In this time on earth, while performing our callings, we struggle in a constant war between the sinful flesh and the new man. This struggle will not end until we reach heaven, but to endure this battle, we must remain connected to the Vine, trusting in Jesus' saving life, death and resurrection. Through the Gospel of Christ, we remain green and growing, and we avoid becoming dried twigs reserved for burning. This Gospel, the Good News of our perfect and merciful Lord Jesus and His sacrifice, is the only way that we will produce green and fruitful branches.

May God shower His pure and saving Word upon us every day, that we may be like green trees planted by streams of water and yielding fruit in due season.

Oh, that the Lord would guide my ways
To keep His statutes still!
Oh, that my God would grant me grace
To know and do His will!

The Lutheran Hymnal 416:1

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Pick a seasonal section of the hymnal (for example: Lent in The Lutheran Hymnal—hymns 140 through 159) and read through the hymns in that section. As you do that, write down common themes that can be found throughout the section.
2. Christmas and Easter are sometimes referred to as the high festivals of the church year. Both services focus on fundamental portions of our Christian faith. How would our faith be impacted if Christmas were true, but not Easter? How would our faith be impacted if Christmas didn't happen? Reflect on how these two festivals relate to one another.
3. The colors of the church year would fall into the category of adiaphora—matters that are neither commanded nor forbidden by God. However, hearing the Word of God is commanded by God. When we come to church, we come to hear the Word of God to receive rest for our souls. While worshipping God and hearing His Word, how might the colors of the church year be helpful to you?

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Romans 8:35

It's Not the End of the World

What is your worst-case scenario? What is the worst thing that could possibly happen to you? This may be a dark way to think, but I think it's also an interesting thought experiment. Especially when you incorporate your faith in Christ into the equation. Sure, there are things that you would probably like not to experience. But you have faith in Christ as your Lord and Savior. What bad thing could happen to you when you have Jesus?

When something inconvenient happens, the common perspective that is shared is something along the lines of, "Oh well, it's not the end of the world". To many, that is the worst-case scenario. That the world would end. The other things we can get past, deal with, and move on from. But there is no coming back from the end of the world. In that scenario, it's just all over.

Those earthly things Paul mentions, which might theoretically separate us, none of them sound fun. Yet, those things cannot separate us from Jesus. He goes on to further exhaust the list: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (8:38-39) Nothing shall separate us from Christ's love. Not even death itself can separate us from Christ. Even the end of the world. The world ending doesn't separate us from Him, instead it brings us right to Him where we belong! There is no worst-case scenario for the Christian. At the end of the day, and at the end of the world, absolutely nothing can separate Jesus from His loved ones!

Jesus lives! I know full well
Naught from me His love shall sever;
Life nor death nor powers of hell
Part me now from Christ forever.
God will be a sure Defense;
This shall be my confidence.

The Lutheran Hymnal 201:4

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18

The Sky is Falling!

That line comes from the fable Chicken Little. An acorn falls, hitting Chicken Little on the head. She concludes that the sky is falling and tells everyone that “The sky is falling, the sky is falling!” She takes one thing, the acorn, and makes the leap that this event signals catastrophe. Panic ensues.

Jesus does give us signals to look for that the end is near. The purpose is not to terrify us, but rather to comfort us. «And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.” (Matthew 24:6) Yes, we are currently living in the end times, but the sky is not falling. The signs He gives serve as a reminder. Even though the end is not yet, He is coming back.

When He does, the sky will not fall. Rather, that is where we will meet Him. Paul tells the Thessalonians that when Christ does return, the dead in Christ rise first, and then those who are alive shall be caught together with them to be with Jesus. Thus, we shall always be with the Lord. These are comforting words. We do not need to fear catastrophe. Christ’s imminent return is only pure comfort. He has told us, “Let not your heart be troubled; And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:1,3) Christ’s return isn’t catastrophic for Christians. It’s the opposite. What could be more comforting than being together, always, with Jesus?

Jesus!—the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease;
‘Tis music in the sinner’s ears,
‘Tis life and health and peace.

Look unto Him, ye nations; own
Your God, ye fallen race,
Look and be saved through faith alone,
Be justified by grace.

The Lutheran Hymnal 360:3,5

He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work." Revelation 22:11-12

“The Man Comes Around”

One of my favorite Johnny Cash songs is, “The Man Comes Around.” It speaks about what happens when Jesus, the Man, returns. The song heavily quotes and references the Book of Revelation. Fittingly, it was one of the last songs Cash wrote before his death.

The song quotes Revelation 22:11. He says that «He who is unjust, let him be unjust still.” Same with the filthy, the righteous, and the holy. Jesus says that He is going “to give to every one according to his work.” Is that a good thing for you and me? Is that comforting, or a reason to be afraid? Are we in the camp of the righteous and holy, or are we in the camp of the unjust and the filthy?

If all we have to point to is our own works and deeds, then it would be a day of judgement and wrath. But Jesus bore God’s judgement and wrath for us on the cross. Our works have nothing to do with us. Our sins have been carried by the Lamb of God. Our good works have been done out of His love, and they glorify Him. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we are not the filthy nor the unjust. Christ has washed us clean. We are the righteous and the holy, for we have been given His righteousness and holiness through His blood and merit. When the Man comes around, He will not condemn us but rather deliver us to His everlasting salvation! All praise be to the Man, Jesus Christ!

Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin.
Let the healing streams abound;
Make and keep me pure within.

Thou of life the Fountain art,
Freely let me take of Thee;
Spring Thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity.

The Lutheran Hymnal 345:5

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Matthew 3:1-2

The End is Near

Have you ever been at an event and outside of the venue are people holding up signs that say something like, "The End is Near!"? Such people are seen as crazy. Have you ever driven down the road and saw a sign that read, "Hell is real", or "Where are you going? Heaven or Hell?"? It's a bleak message. But do they have a point? I would argue that those kinds of signs are not the best way to "be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." (1 Peter 3:15) We can present the good news of Jesus in a more effective way.

At the same time, they aren't wrong. The end is near. Hell is a very real place. Where we end up, either heaven or hell, is crucial. John the Baptist had a similar message. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" was only the first part of His message. He prepared the way for Jesus with that message, but he also pointed to Jesus and identified Him as, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

The end is certainly near. But that message and that truth is not helpful unless it points to Jesus as the end of sin, death, and hell. True, hell is very real, and it is where I deserve to be because of my sins. But I have a Savior who suffered hell to save me. When He returns, my end is not in question. The end is near, but that end will give way to my eternal life which Jesus won for me! We are going to heaven because we have Jesus!

O Jesus, who my debt didst pay
And for my sin wast smitten,
Within the Book of Life, oh, may
My name be also written!
I will not doubt; I trust in Thee,
From Satan Thou hast made me free
And from all condemnation.

The Lutheran Hymnal 611:5

For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

1 Thessalonians 5:2,4

It's The End Of The World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)

The title of this devotion is the title of a popular song by the band R.E.M. It is quite a bold statement to make. That the world is ending, and I feel fine about it. I remember listening to another band play the same song minutes after the ball dropped on January 1st, 2000. If you are of a certain age, Y2K is unforgettable. There was worldwide panic that our whole system was going to fail. People prepared for apocalyptic fallout. But not much happened. People continue to predict the end of the world. But the world continues to spin.

We could get lulled into thinking that it won't end, but the world will end, and it could at any moment. Jesus is coming back. Jesus tells us, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only." (Matthew 24:36) No one knows when it will end. Jesus tells us to watch and be ready, for His return will be like a thief who comes in the night.

Yet, when He returns, we will be fine. More than fine! We will be taken to be with Him forever. We shouldn't act like this world isn't going to end, because we know it will. We are fine with it ending because we know it means a beginning to everlasting joy and comfort. The world fears the end. In Christ we don't have to. The end of the world means the end of sin, sadness, and pain. The end of the world for the believer means the beginning of eternal joys, happiness, and salvation. Come quickly dear Lord Jesus!

O Jesus Christ, do not delay,
But hasten our salvation;
We often tremble on our way
In fear and tribulation.
Then hear us when we cry to Thee;
Come, mighty Judge, and make us free
From every evil! Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 611:7

Weekend Rest Journal

- 1. A couple of the devotion's passages this week comes from the book of 1 Thessalonians. The congregation was confused about the end times and the last day. Paul wrote to them to explain the coming of the Lord, and what it would mean. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. List the three events in order that will occur at the resurrection?
- 2. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. A. How does this Day of the Lord come? B. How does that affect how we live our lives today? C. Whether we are dead or alive when it happens, what will this Day of the Lord mean for us?
- 3. The end of the world means two different things for two different groups of people. Read Matthew 25:31-46. A. What are the two groups identified by Jesus as? B. What do both groups have in common? C. What makes us able to "(do) it to one of the least of these My brethren, you (do) it to Me.?"

Answers: 1. The Lord will descend, The Dead in Christ will rise, Then we who remain will be caught up together with them; 2.a. Suddenly, as a thief in the night, 2.b. We live soberly, in the light, awaiting His return, 2.c. We will live with Him; 3.a. Sheep and goats, believers and unbelievers, 3.b. They are both found unaware, one of doing good works, and the other of not doing good works, 3.c. Faith in Christ allows us to do good works

I rejoice at Your Word as one who finds great treasure.

Psalm 119:162

Thankful for My Bible

A pastor at a recent conference asked us to name our most valued earthly possession. We thought about that for a moment, and then he said, “Isn’t it your Bible!?!”

What is your Bible made of? If it has been around a few years it may be bound in leather. If it’s a more recent edition, it’s probably made of some imitation material. Or maybe your Bible is a simple hardcover, or even a paperback. Whatever its make-up, it was put together by human machinery using earthly materials. In that sense it’s an earthly possession.

But, of course, your Bible is not just any earthly possession. Every word in it, from Genesis through Revelation, is God’s inspired, perfect, timeless truth. How thankful we are to have God’s own written Word in our very hands, and in our own language. How happy I can be to open it up and know that God Himself is speaking directly to me.

Yes, how wonderful to pick up that Book and seek out its priceless treasure. For when we turn those blessed pages we keep finding Jesus, Who shed His blood to wash us clean of all sin. We find a loving God Who took on our humanity and suffered death and hell to give us forgiving peace, along with unending life in a new and better home.

When we read and study it, we find promises that speak to our hearts, instilling within us courage to face life in a sin-broken world. We find our Father’s heavenly guidance to help us as fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, workers and neighbors. We find real answers to life’s most perplexing questions. We find transforming power to live for Him Who died and rose for all. We find all of that, and so much more!

So pick up that amazing Book. Go ahead, pick it up! As you do, whisper a prayer of thanks to your Lord, Who put His Word into your hands, into your heart, and into your mouth. But don’t stop there. Open it up! Drink it in! Rejoice in it as one who finds great treasure!

**Oh, may these heavenly pages be My ever dear delight; And still
new beauties may I see And still increasing light!**

The Lutheran Hymnal 284:5

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:5 NIV

Thankful for My Baptism

It doesn't look like much. You've probably seen it countless times. A guy in a black robe, pouring a little water on a squirming infant, speaking a few simple words. Then, in a matter of minutes, it's all over.

No, it doesn't come at you with flashing lights or lots of pizzazz. But it's a true miracle each time it happens. Simple water, used by God's command, connected with God's Word, working a wonder of epic and everlasting proportions. We're speaking, of course, of Holy Baptism.

Maybe you remember your baptism. I don't remember mine, but that doesn't matter. With my baptism I have a divine gift from which I can take tremendous comfort every day of my life. On that day I was clothed with Christ, washed of all sin, born anew, rescued from death and the devil. My baptism tells me I am now God's child through faith in God's Son. As His child and heir I have the sure hope of eternal life. In a mysterious way I was actually buried with Christ in baptism—my old, dead, sinful self buried forever in my Savior's tomb. Through my Baptism God gives power to drown my old self, which constantly tries to reassert its wicked ways in my life. In my Baptism God gives strength so that my new self can daily arise and live before God in righteousness and purity now forever. Simply put, when I was baptized, God took the victory and power of Christ's cross and empty tomb and made them personally mine.

God's greatest miracles don't come in showy, flamboyant ways. A humble manger bed was God's crib. A bloodied cross His altar. An empty grave His portal to life without end. Simple water and a handful of words bring sinners into an everlasting kingdom.

How thankful I am to be baptized into God's triune name!

Miracle each time it happens As the door to heaven opens

And the Father beams, "Beloved,

Heir of gifts a king would covet!

Worship Supplement 2000 750:2

“Take, eat; this is My body... This is My blood of the new covenant.” Matthew 26:26, 28

Thankful for His Wonderful Meal

When tomorrow you eat the delicious meal prepared by the cook of the family, will you pat yourself on the back for eating it? No, you’ll thank the one who made it for you and served it to you.

The Sacrament of the Altar, in which Jesus gives us His very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, is not something you do for God. It’s something God is doing for you. God is inviting you to receive a meal that He has prepared and given you at the cost of His Son’s life. In this meal God wants to fill you with confidence that your sins are forgiven, to assure you that the door to heaven’s eternal banquet stands wide open.

Martin Luther once said that if we were handing out gold coins at the altar, the balcony would collapse under the weight of those who would be waiting in line. “Blind people,” he said, “would swim across rivers” to get such a treasure! But the Lord’s Supper is a treasure that moth and rust cannot destroy and thieves cannot break in and steal. Here we have the body and blood of our crucified, risen and ascended brother!

The Lord attaches His words of promise to the eating and drinking of bread and wine. God’s promise, “Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins,” fills our ears and moves our hearts to faith. His grace also touches our lips. We, quite truly, “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Proverbs 34:8). After a week of struggling with sin, there is no more personal way that God could assure us that what was done on Calvary is ours when we come to His Supper!

Is this for me? I am forgiven and set free!

I do believe That I receive His very body and His blood.

Oh, taste and see—the Lord is good!

Worship Supplement 2000 755:5

“Give us this day our daily bread.” Matthew 6:11

Thankful for My Daily Bread

“When you mention and pray for daily bread, you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy daily bread ... Therefore you must open wide and extend your thoughts not only to the oven or the flour-bin, but to the distant field and the entire land, which bears and brings to us daily bread and every sort of sustenance. For if God did not cause it to grow, and bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take bread from the oven or have any to set upon the table” (Martin Luther, Large Catechism).

Daily bread, as Luther teaches in the Small Catechism, includes “godly spouses, godly children, good workers ... good government, good weather, peace, health, education, honor ... etc.” When we pray for daily bread, we pray for all these things and more.

Luther also notes that while Satan tries to wreak havoc in the church with His lies, he also tries to rob us of our daily bread. He “hinders the stability of all government and honorable, peaceable relations on earth. There he causes so much contention, murder, sedition, and war ... he is sorry that any one has a morsel of bread from God and eats it in peace.”

Let us keep this prayer, then, in our hearts and on our lips. Without God’s provision and protection we can enjoy nothing good in this world. Finally, we know that God in His mercy provides daily bread in order to extend people’s times of grace. “God our Savior ... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4). By providing daily bread for all mankind, He patiently gives sinners time to “Come To Calvary’s Holy Mountain” and be saved!

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

The Lutheran Hymnal 659

Darkness came over all the land. Matthew 27:45 NIV

Thankful for Black Friday

If you're reading this devotion in the wee hours of the morning, chances are you've been out shopping, or are planning on going out soon. Yes, today is Black Friday, the biggest shopping day of the year. Not much of a shopper myself, this day holds no special appeal for me.

But I am thankful for Black Friday! Not the one that fills the stores with bargain hunters, but the one that happened nearly 2000 years ago. Today's Black Friday comes with a sea of humanity, and prices that seem hard to resist. The Black Friday of long ago involved all of humanity, and featured a price paid beyond all imagining.

Yes, I'm talking about the day we usually refer to as Good Friday. Nevertheless, the word black fits the day well.

On that day deep darkness came over all the land. For there was God Incarnate nailed to a Roman cross, carrying in his body the awful blackness of all human sin. He did no wrong, but the sin of all time actually and truly became His. He became dirty with my guilt. With your guilt. With Judas' guilt. With every killer and adulterer's guilt. God looked down from heaven and punished the One He loved for the sin of the entire world. Why? Because He so loved the world. Because He so loved me. Because He so loved you.

I can't fathom what that day cost God the Father. But what a bargain for me! At no charge to me, through faith in His Son, I'm set free. Set free from sin and a guilty conscience. From death and the unending darkness of hell. From a useless life of living in the darkness of sin.

It was a terrible day. A black day. But, as I look back, I can rightly call it a good day—a Good Friday. “Surely, I come quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. (Revelation 22:20 KJV)

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them through his blood.

The Lutheran Hymnal 175

- [illegible]

The Word they still shall let remain

Nor any thanks have for it;

He's by our side upon the plain

With His good gifts and Spirit.

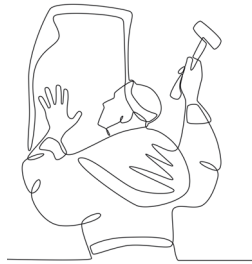
And take they our life,

Goods, fame, child and wife,

Let these all be gone,

They yet have nothing won;

The Kingdom our remaineth.



- The Lutheran Hymnal 262

