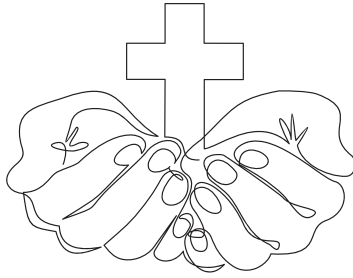


Spread, oh, spread the mighty Word;
Spread the kingdom of the Lord
Ev'rywhere his breath has giv'n
Life to beings meant for Heav'n.

Jonathan F. Bahnmaier, Tr: Catherine Winkworth
The Lutheran Hymnal 507



Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Hebrews 13:8

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

Who Gave Us the Gift of Work?

The week of the Labor Day holiday is a good time to explore what the Bible says about work. And there is no better place to begin than at the very beginning. In the Garden of Eden we see how God not only made Adam (and later Eve) with the mental capacity and the physical ability to work, the Lord made their residence their workplace as well. It was a natural fit. We see evidence of this in the way Adam familiarized himself with the animals of the Garden in giving them names appropriate to their natures. (Gen 2:18-20) He likely did the same with flowers, trees and bushes as he put together plans for trimming, cultivating and harvesting Eden.

When God presented Adam with the perfect coworker He made for him (Gen 2:21-23), there was, no doubt, much they did together as they used their gifts and abilities to tend and keep the Garden the Lord had told Adam to take care of.

When we look back on our first parents in their perfection, we might well envy the joy and delight they must have taken in their work—without the aching muscles and mental fatigue we often feel after work. But scenes from Eden should also move us to give thanks to God that, despite diminished abilities of mind and body and the sin-plagued world we live in, we are still given the gift of work. We still have the opportunity to reach out in love to God and those around us through things we make and do. Still we can praise and thank God for the gifts and abilities He gives us by the way we use them—and with the fruits of our labors.

The world will always have misguided ideas about work, but as Christians we know work has been a gift of God from the very beginning.

Heavenly Father, I thank and praise you for the gifts and abilities you've given me—and for the opportunity to use them to Your praise and the benefit of others. Amen.

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord.

Colossians 3:23

What is Work?

Labor Day celebrations in the U.S. and Canada began in the 1880's. Labor unions strongly urged setting aside a day to honor the "working man". Over the years the holiday has become different things to different people. Family time. Last weekend of summer. A Picnic in the park. It's also a time when children ask their parents, "Why do so many people not work on Labor Day?"

One would hope children also find it odd that years ago many looked down on people who made a living "working with their hands." That is, people who worked in factories or fields or in the building trades. They know their parents work hard, whether their job is at home or somewhere else, and whether they sweat and strain in their work—or mostly sit alone in front of a computer and think.

In leading people back to the Scriptures Martin Luther did much to change peoples' attitudes towards work. People had been taught to think that only those with church-connected occupations were serving God in their work. When the Lord led Luther to realize that there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation, then the purpose of any work became clear. As the Reformer once wrote, "Every occupation has its own honor before God. Ordinary work is a divine vocation or calling. In our daily work, no matter how important or mundane, we serve God by serving the neighbor and we also participate in God's on-going providence for the human race."

In writing to the Colossians the Apostle Paul told them that "whatever they did"—whatever task or role was theirs, they were to work with hearty commitment to doing a good job. These words also remind us that any time anywhere we use the gifts and abilities God has given us, to do whatever task is at hand, that is work.

Heavenly Father, let me do everything you give me to do in a manner pleasing to you. I ask this in the Name of your Son, Jesus, whose every work was done for me. Amen

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

Colossians 3:23-24

Who Do You Work For?

The Apostle Paul wrote these God-inspired words to members of the church at Colosse who were slaves—either as a result of war or voluntarily (a bond-servant to work off some debt). But what Scripture here says applies to all believers involved in any kind of work, for no matter what your station in life, you are responsible to the One who died to make you His own.

In Genesis 29:20 we're told, "Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her." The debt (dowry) Jacob owed was the result of a trick of Uncle Laban's. While Jacob worked those 7 years, his heart was not filled with hatred for Laban, but love for Rachel. Some compare Jacob's love to that of Christ's for the Church. But Christ worked for more than 7 years and then died for us. Maybe a better comparison would be our working for Christ in every task of life always remembering, "we love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

Through the words of Paul, Jesus does even more to encourage us to find joy and purpose in everything we do. He reminds us of the eternal inheritance that is ours in Christ. Do we consider some work we're doing as commonplace or mundane? Can't be. Our work is part of our thanksgiving to the Lord who's saved us. You aren't paid nearly what your job is worth? Your Savior has credited your account in heaven (your inheritance!) with riches beyond counting.

Let us commit to working heartily for the Lord, as He here encourages us to, and we will find a spirit of joy filling all we do. And our endeavors will reach a level of excellence impossible when merely working for oneself, for money, or to please other people.

Jesus, in Your name begun Be the day's endeavor;

Grant that it may well be done To Your praise forever.

Lutheran Service Book 869:4

“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

John 6:27

What Do You Work For?

Jesus had fed the five thousand just the day before. Now the crowd excitedly gathers around Him when He returns to Capernaum. They want to make Him their king—a Bread King. They are making what is temporary the “main thing.” So Jesus speaks to them plainly, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.”

They were among the thousands Jesus fed with one boy’s lunch. But their response was not, “Wow! You must be the Messiah!” Instead, it was, “That was great! What’s for dinner?”

When daily bread becomes a person’s chief pursuit, their hearts’ main focus is not the Bread of Life. And as Jesus tells us straight up, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger...”

We live in a society that focuses on this life and things material. As Christians, we also value these things (food, clothing, home, family, sports and activities, etc.). They come to us from the hand of the Lord who multiplied barley bread on a hillside in Galilee. But these blessings are not our chief need. Jesus Himself, the Bread of Life, is.

So, our Lord, here calls upon us to make a serious “heart examination”. Who or what is on the throne there? Two gauges give us readings that show us if the temporary things of this life are encroaching on the rulership of Christ in our hearts: how we use our time, and how we spend our money. We need to consider our daily schedules. How much time do we spend in the Word of Christ, the Holy Scriptures? In prayer? In worship? We need to review our monthly budgets. What percentage are we allotting to things eternal? How much do we spend on the Gospel?

Lord Jesus, work through Word and Spirit in my heart and life so that you always have first place in both. Amen.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

What Is Job #1?

This Scripture is often called the Great Commission of the Church and the mandate of the local congregation. But some think that Gospel outreach is only the work of those the church calls, sends and supports—like pastors, teachers and missionaries. But if the spread of the Gospel of Christ is not the work of every Christian church member, how is it going to be the emphasis of what they do together as a congregation? When Jesus spoke these words He was not speaking only to His apostles but to all His disciples—then and now.

In 18th century England a 17-year-old cobbler named William Carey was brought to faith in Jesus. He was filled with a burning desire to be an instrument of God in bringing others to faith in Christ. After he became a pastor he was confronted by a neighbor who felt he spent too much time preaching—to the neglect of his shoe business. He replied, “My real business is to preach the gospel and win lost souls. I cobble shoes to pay expenses.”

No matter where God has put us, what gifts He has given us, or what responsibilities He has placed upon us, Job #1 is to speak to others about our Savior. One of the most important places we are to do this is in our own home. After all, the Good News of Jesus is not only the Spirit’s tool to bring us to Christ, it is the means He uses to grow our faith and equip each of us to share our greatest blessing.

His strength within my weakness Will make me bold to say
How His redeeming power Transforms my stubborn clay;
His touch of fire ignites me, With courage I am sent,
My tongue-tied silence broken, With grace made eloquent.

Worship Supplement 772:3

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Write out as many vocations (Father/Mother, Worker, Student, etc.) the Lord has called you to as you can.
2. How am I serving the Lord in these vocations?
3. Consider your vocations as work which flows from Job #1, spreading the Gospel. Does the focus on sharing the Gospel change how you go about those vocations? Why or why not?

[illegible]

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe. The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, And like a high wall in his own esteem.” Proverbs 18:10-11

Wise Sayings: Where to Find Safety!

Where should a man go to find safety or comfort? What words should he seek to find rest for his soul?

Say a man comes home from work one day with burden and stress upon his heart and mind. He gazes at his living room coffee table and finds two objects lying there: the family Bible and a bank envelope which contains his savings account statement.

Now picture the man ignoring the Bible to open the envelope, unfold the statement, and stare in fascination at the many zeros under the total of his statement. He’s loaded. He can rest in peace, like how a rich man in ancient times felt behind his tall, impenetrable walls. That’s a foolish thought, as Jesus shows us in His parable: “Fool! Tonight your soul will be required of you. The things you have prepared—whose will they be?” (Luke 12:20)

All that money can disappear in a flash and can’t be taken with you when you die. Wealth brings no real comfort. Instead, the Lord calls us to dwell by faith in the strong tower of His name. His name is everything He has revealed to us about Himself in His Word. We are safe in that because He has revealed Himself to be the King, the slain Lamb, who protects us. He is the ever-living Redeemer who purchased us with His blood, which is more valuable than the largest savings account in the world. He is the God and Lord who hears us as we come to Him in His saving name.

Thee will I love, my Strength, my Tower;

Thee will I love, my Hope, my Joy;

Thee will I love with all my power,

With ardor time shall ne’er destroy.

Thee will I love, O Light Divine,

So long as life is mine

The Lutheran Hymnal 399:1

“My son, eat honey because it is good, and the honeycomb which is sweet to your taste; So shall the knowledge of wisdom be to your soul; If you have found it, there is a prospect, and your hope will not be cut off.” Proverbs 24:13-14

Wise Sayings: True Wisdom is Like Honey

In the ancient days of the Old Testament, honeycomb and the honey that filled each of its wax cells was considered a sweet-to-eat delicacy, while also serving as a super food, much healthier than the processed sugars of our modern times. It can be said that adding honey instead of sugar to cereal, coffee, or tea is a doctor-approved alternative to enjoy sweetness without taking unnecessary health risks. Honey is nutrient rich, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, good for gut health, and acts as a cough suppressant! Can something sweet be this good for you? Sure, if it's consumed in moderation.

There is a delicacy as sweet as honey, also good for you, that you can and are encouraged to consume constantly. This super food is the wisdom of the Lord. His true wisdom, which is revealed in His Word, is sweet to us. The wisdom shown in the Gospel of Jesus is rich in sweetness while being good for you! It's the antibacterial that wipes away sin and the remedy that takes away guilt. This is so because we learn from the Lord that Jesus gave His perfect life for your innocence and paid the price of your sins. It's rich in nutrients—providing peace with God, joy in times of happiness and hardship, comfort in distress, and hope in the age to come! It's the cough suppressant that drowns out the old, mucous-like, sinful flesh and brings forth the new man, breathing the life of love and service to the Lord.

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear!

It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,

And drives away his fear.

The Lutheran Hymnal 364:1

“Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin’? Diverse weights and diverse measures, they are both alike, an abomination to the Lord.” Proverbs 20:9-10

Wise Sayings: No Excuses... Lord, Have Mercy!

Though these verses treat two different subjects, they both condemn the sin of lying. Verse ten puts the sin of lying in the context of the seventh commandment, “You shall not steal.” If you’ve ever paid for produce at a grocery store, you know that the cost of some items depends on how much they weigh. The same was true in Old Testament times, however, their scales were not digital. Back then, to determine the price, they used a balance scale which had a horizontal bar in the middle with two pans hanging from either end. On one end was the produce, and the other end a measured weight, usually a stone of some kind, that served as a standard of comparison. These standards were supposed to be honest and uniform within a region.

Say the measured weight was hollowed out. It may look like the same stone, but now it is lighter. When put on the balance scale opposite the produce, the produce would weigh more than usual, thus costing more. The Lord hates this sort of dishonesty and the motivation behind it. Greed is a horrible thing, and all forms of cheating money out of people are displeasing, no matter how “fair” they appear.

When compared to what is expected of us in the seventh commandment, we fall short of God’s glory. To double down in our sin, make our lies more convoluted, and not confess them would be a shame. Solomon is right; our hearts are full of sin, and we can’t make them clean. In contrition, our hearts are exposed, and the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin. All the sins of lying we’ve committed have been washed away by the drops of saving truth that poured from Immanuel’s veins.

With broken heart and contrite sigh,
a trembling sinner, Lord, I cry.

Thy pard’ning grace is rich and free—O God, be merciful to me!

The Lutheran Hymnal 323:1

“Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.” Proverbs 26:20

Wise Sayings: Don't Fuel the Gossip Fire!

If you don't want a fire to continue, don't put any more firewood on. The same is true with gossip fires. In Old Testament times, before lighter fluid and propane torches, fires took time to start. They started small, seemingly harmless. They then grew, demanding respect lest land, possession, and people be burned. Though gossip does not demand respect, it does act like fire. It starts small, grows in size, and burns with reputation, leaving damage difficult to repair. A little lie about another individual's sin and shame grows in quantity as it spreads to more ears and in quality as the story grows more serious with every telling of it. Pretty soon, your neighbor is made out to be a murderer when you could have confronted him with love (provided you knew the matter in truth) or could have shown love by keeping silent and using the best construction.

But for every tale you've spun or enabled, every gossip fire that earned you eternal fire, Jesus puts it out with His sacrifice on the cross. He forgives you for all your sins, even those against the 8th Commandment, and redeems you to serve Him in love. He even blesses you to this end, giving you the Gospel lens through which to view your neighbor. Through this lens, you see that your neighbor has been redeemed by your Savior Jesus as well. Share this with him and view his name as a name cleansed beneath the fountain of Jesus' blood. As you do, fulfill the godly desire and don't add a log to the flames of gossip. Put the best construction on your neighbor and watch the blessings play out for him.

Oh, let me never speak what bounds of truth exceedeth;
Grant that no idle word from out my mouth proceedeth;
And then, when in my place I must and ought to speak,
My words grant power and grace lest I offend the weak.

The Lutheran Hymnal 395:3

*“Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die):
Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither
poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me;
Lest I be full and deny You, And say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or
lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.”*

Proverbs 30:7-9

Wise Sayings: Keep Me Humble; Give Me What I Need

This proverb reminds us of the Lord’s Prayer and its petitions. The first request recalls all petitions but the fourth; we’ll save that one for the other half of the proverb. No lies or falsehood, please, Lord. We ask that Your name be kept holy among us, in teaching and life. No lies to lead us from the kingdom, please, Lord. No lies and falsehood, Lord, nor their father the devil. Curb their evil will that Yours may be done. No more lies or falsehood about our sins either. Help us to confess them and give us the free and full forgiveness offered in Christ. Reveal the temptation in our lives to be lies and falsehood and show the danger that they bring. Don’t let lies and falsehood even come near us!

The second request of the proverb connects to the fourth petition of the Lord’s prayer, “give us this day our daily bread”. The proverb puts it this way, “give me the food allotted to me.” We give thanks and remember that the Lord provides us with temporal blessings. We ask the Lord to give us just what we need. Don’t give too much, lest we be tempted to think we don’t need God. Don’t give too little, lest we be tempted to sin by stealing and dishonor the name of God (for theft does not befit an ambassador of Christ). However, the Lord knows exactly what we need, and He will give it; He may give much so that we may give much back to support His kingdom work. He may give little so that, through the witness of our Spirit-given faith, we may give glory to His name in our weakness.

Seek first God’s Kingdom and His grace,
His holy Name in all you do;
Christ first and last in ev’ry place;
All else will then be given you.

Worship Supplement 789:5

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Select a chapter of Proverbs and read through it. You will notice that much of what is written is given in the form of directions, advice, and principles to live by. When God lays out His holy will and commands, we know that these are teachings of the Law. After each verse, consider how we have failed to practice the proverb in our lives and write down your considerations.
2. Next, draw a cross through all those wrongdoings. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, consider your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Consider how He kept each of those proverbs in His life and write down your considerations. Once finished, at the bottom write, "This is my righteousness."
3. In consideration of wisdom, re-read the Table of Duties in Martin Luther's Small Catechism. After each section, first meditate upon how you have fallen short of it, how Christ has lived and died for you in each place, and how then you may show the praise of His name in each duty. Then, offer a prayer in each section in which you thank God for the blessings He gives, confess your failures and plead for forgiveness, and ask Him to help you fulfill your duties.

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5:3-5

The Pain of Loss

Many times during our brief stay here on earth, we will be subjected to the pain of loss. Loss is one of many tribulations that we, as people, endure.

The sadness is sharp at first when you come to the realization that your loved one has left this earth. At first, you can't believe it. You recall that last conversation you had with them and think to yourself, "He can't really be gone. Why, I just talked to him the other day." And then that sick feeling creeps in and you fully realize you won't speak to him again during this life. However, the next thought that the Christian has is one of hope and joy. Jesus is welcoming the redeemed one into heaven with the words, "Well done, My faithful servant."

Losing loved ones is something Jesus can relate to. When Jesus learned that His good friend Lazarus had recently died, He wept bitterly. He did this, even though He knew He would raise Lazarus from the dead in short order. Jesus groaned within Himself, in pain, at the loss of His dear friend. So do we. However, we look to that same Jesus as the great One who raises us from death to everlasting, joyous life.

Reunion with loved ones, praising our Saviour, and weeping for joy, all await those who hold fast to Christ. We look forward to life everlasting with our Lord, and this comforts us after the many losses we face.

If death my portion be, Then death is gain to me
And Christ my Life forever, From whom death cannot sever.
Come when it may, He'll shield me, To Him I wholly yield me. Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 526:3

Lord, help us to never despair when we lose those redeemed children of Yours, whom we love. Help us to look forward to our glorious reunion in heaven. Amen.

Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5:5

Sadness

“All heaviness of mind and melancholy come from the devil: . . . Whosoever you are, possessed with such heavy thoughts, know for certain, that they are a work of the devil. God sent His Son into the world, not to affright, but to comfort.” Martin Luther, Table Talk

During Luther’s life, he suffered from a condition he called *Anfechtungen*, which we would probably call depression. Luther understood that this condition was brought on by Satan as a means of oppressing him. At one point, in 1527, he wrote that he felt as though he were being “tossed to and fro in death and in hell.” He believed he had lost Christ completely while he was drowning in misery and despair. However, prayers from his wife and dear friends sustained him. God’s mercy guarded Luther’s soul from death and hell, even though doubts plagued his mind. We don’t have to feel ashamed if or when depression touches our lives. Rather, like Luther and others, the mercy of God will deliver us. Prayers of our friends to God may indeed lift us up!

We observe sadness as an epidemic in our modern world. Broken relationships, isolation, and anxiety abound. What is all this a result of? While there is a natural cause to depression, we see the effects of people refusing to live in the peace and comfort Christ has won for us. Christ, by His work on the cross and ever-certain presence in our lives, gives us a reason to be happy and at peace. We can find fulfillment and joy in our lives, even in the midst of sadness, by serving Him in all that we do. True happiness lies in imitating our Saviour. Self-sacrificial love and service to others are answers to our melancholy. Let us think of our neighbor and his needs before our own.

Lord, keep us from the devil’s influencing us towards despair and misery. Give us good cheer as we trust in you for forgiveness and life. Help us to imitate You as we care for our neighbors and think less of ourselves. Amen.

And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience. Romans 5:3 KJV

Tribulations

Christians are the only ones who can truthfully say they glory in tribulations. Others can only feel immense sorrow and oppression.

Although we may feel isolated as we go through the trials of life, we can confidently say that Christ's love will sustain us and preserve us. Romans 8:35,37: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." Nothing, notwithstanding how awful it may be, can separate us from our Lord's love towards us. Our God will not allow any trial to enter our lives unless He knows we will be able to withstand it through His grace. He provides a way for us to escape our tribulations so that we can be strengthened through them and not crushed.

Our God is the One Who faced the most gruesome tribulation to bring comfort and rest to those whom He calls His children. He was hung on a cross, the emblem of shame. Through the shame and humiliation, He crushed Satan's head. Let us, as Christians, feel blessed and honored to suffer for living out His Word.

Luther once said about the tribulations he faced in his life, "If Satan had not so plagued and exercised me, I should not have been so great an enemy unto him, or have been able to do him such hurt. Tribulations keep us from pride, and therewith increase the acknowledgment of Christ and of God's gifts and benefits." Martin Luther, Table Talk

The tribulations we face keep us humble and focused on the mission of spreading the Gospel. If our life was nothing but endless happiness, then we would soon forget God and the tasks He has given us.

Dear Lord, thank You for the tribulations I face, for they redirect my gaze to You. Amen.

And patience, experience; and experience, hope.

Romans 5:4 KJV

Feeling Inadequate

Feeling inadequate is a bad feeling. As people, we long to be in charge and in control of our surroundings. However, through experience, we learn that nothing is really in our control. God ordains everything as it happens, and while we follow His commands and make life decisions, we realize how insignificant we are. From this realization wells up a spring of hope. There is nothing to be anxious about because God is the One Who is in control. He is reigning over all things now and forever. So we have no need to fret or feel inadequate. Instead, we are simply to “Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” Psalm 37:3

The Apostle Paul tells us that tribulation works patience in our lives, which in turn gives us experience and hope. These words are comforting to young people who haven’t experienced all of life’s ups and downs yet. A new job, a new relationship, or a new house can all make a young person joyful, but also anxious. Setbacks occur on a daily basis; however, these setbacks give us experience to know how to trust God in our hectic lives. As we learn to trust God, more and more, instead of leaning on our own understanding, we develop hope for the future. And hope is a virtue we must all strive for as Christians. And what could give us more hope than knowing the forgiveness and love our Savior showers us with? God is a loving Father and friend to us as we stumble through life seeking to honor Him in our actions.

All honor, praise, and majesty

To Father, Son, and Spirit be,

Our God forever glorious,

In whose rich grace

We’ll run our race

Till we depart victorious.

The Lutheran Hymnal 524:7

And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. Romans 5:5 KJV

Hope

The hope that we have through Christ will not deceive us. Those who hope in God have received multiple promises in Scripture about the end results of their hope. Psalm 22:5 “They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.”

The righteous ones who have the Holy Ghost in their hearts will be delivered from sin. They will not be ashamed or confounded because God has given them spiritual renewal and boldness to live in gladness. Proverbs 10:28 “The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.”

Luther said of the Holy Ghost’s comfort to us Christians: “The Holy Ghost is not such a comforter as the world is, where neither truth nor consistency is, but He is a true, everlasting, and constant comforter without deceit and lies.”

When we suffer persecution for Christ, as Christians do, then we must hold fast to the love of God, working in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. His comfort and love are constant in the midst of our chaotic lives. If we put our trust in God, we will not be deceived, but truly comforted and strengthened.

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 have nothing won;
The Kingdom ours remaineth. Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 262:4

- [illegible]

And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!”

Revelation 19:10

Michael and All Angels Day

There are few things more intriguing, awe-inspiring, mystical, and yet comforting than angels. Angels are amazing creatures created by God. They are described in many grand and glorious ways in the Bible. They appear as chariots of fire; as stately, glorious beings with six wings; as four-headed creatures engulfed in fire; and as ordinary men. They are most often seen protecting God’s people or bringing God’s message.

It’s no surprise then that for centuries the church has celebrated the angels with special feast days. September twenty-ninth was considered a major festival in the church year known as St. Michael the Archangel’s Day. Other angels were celebrated on other days in the year. In the twentieth century, the day was changed to include all angels.

It is appropriate to have a day celebrating the angels as long as it is a day to worship God, thanking Him for giving His angels as “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14)

In the opening passage, an unnamed angel was announcing to the Apostle John that “the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.” (Revelation 19:7 NIV) John was so overjoyed and in awe that he fell down to worship the angel. The angel immediately rebuked him and said, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!”

We are not to invoke, venerate, petition, or seek their guidance. Rather, we call upon God and thank Him for giving His angels charge over us to keep us in all our ways. (Psalm 91:10-12)

**Thank You Lord, my heavenly Father, for giving your angels charge over me. May I always glorify You as the angels do.
Amen**

“At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.”

Daniel 12:1

Michael the Archangel

Only two angels are mentioned by name in the Bible. We all know Gabriel, the angel who announced the birth of John and Jesus. The other one is Michael. He is called the Archangel in Jude 1:9. Daniel calls him “one of the chief princes,” (10:13) who contended with the evil spirit that supported the heathen kings of Persia. In the passage above he is called “the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people.”

Daniel foretells the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. That was a time of horrible trouble, worse even than the first destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. The Jewish historian, Josephus, describes the atrocities that went on in Jerusalem during the siege. But God reassures Daniel that Michael will stand watch over your people and that “your people shall be delivered.”

When God speaks of Daniel’s people, He is not talking about the nation of Israel. Many thousands of Jews died horrible deaths in the siege. He is talking about the believers in Jesus Christ, as He describes at the end of the verse, “every one who is found written in the book.” These are God’s people and they were delivered from the horrors in some amazing ways.

We, too, are God’s people by faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we can also know that Michael stands watch over us to deliver us in times of trouble. What tremendous strength, confidence, and comfort we can have in knowing that such a mighty warrior is constantly standing watch over us. What shall we fear?

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept all harm and danger away from me; . . . Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. Revelation 12:7-8 (ESV)

War in Heaven

There is so much we don't know about the spirit world of angels and demons. We just get a few little glimpses into that world. Michael is pictured as the captain of God's army of angels in an all out war in heaven against Satan and his angels.

We know that Jesus, the seed of the woman, crushed the head of Satan. (Genesis 3:15) Yet, somehow, the angels were engaged in this battle over all the demons. Perhaps the demons didn't leave quietly and had to be driven out of heaven.

However, there is great comfort in knowing that the dragon and his angels were defeated. Literally, it says, "He didn't have strength." He wasn't strong enough. Jesus Christ had defeated them, therefore they could not stand against the other angels. The holy angels could cast them out of heaven.

We know there is a spiritual battle going on over our souls. How wonderful to know that Satan has been defeated. Revelation 12 goes on to describe how he has been cast down to earth and he has "great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." (Verse 12) That is why we need to always "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Thankfully, we can now "Resist him, steadfast in the faith," because Jesus has defeated him. (1 Peter 5:8-9 NKJV) He has no strength when we stand in Christ. And we have Michael and his angels fighting behind the scenes to protect us.

Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us.
We tremble not, we fear no ill, They shall not overpower us.
This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none, He's judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.

The Lutheran Hymnal 262:3

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 18:10

Guardian Angels

It is wonderful to know that Michael the Archangel stands watch over God’s people. This passage is even more personal, suggesting that each of us has our own guardian angel. They are always watching over us, and at the same time, they “always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.” In other words, they are constantly looking to God to know what they should do for us.

Psalm 91:10-12 has been a source of great comfort in this regard. “No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” We can live in confidence with a constant awareness of our guardian angels always carrying out God’s will for us.

Jesus is talking specifically about little children in this section of Matthew 18. How reassuring that is for parents. Children have a knack for doing foolish things, and parents cannot watch their children 24/7, but the angels can. Think of the countless times those angels protected these children of God.

The fact that every child of God has their own guardian angels is also a warning to us not to despise one of God’s little ones. God zealously defends and protects His children. Woe to anyone who would harm one of them either physically or, even more, spiritually. Jesus said, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6)

Lord, give Thy angels every day
Command to guide us on our way
And bid them every evening keep
Their watch around us while we sleep. Amen

The Lutheran Hymnal 256:3

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" Isaiah 6:1-3

Around the Throne of God

What a glorious scene! The Lord sitting upon His highly exalted throne, surrounded by the stately seraphim angels. They were magnificent creatures with six wings. We might stand in awe of these glorious angels, but more so, may we learn from them.

They were awesome creatures, who were able to fly, and their voices shook the foundations of the temple, yet they were humble, using four of their wings to cover their faces and their feet before God's throne. How much more shouldn't we humble ourselves before God?

As glorious and holy as they were, they stood in awe and constant praise of the thrice holy God, crying out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" Shouldn't our hearts be filled all the more to give all glory and honor to Him who sits on the throne?

The Apostle John tells us that this was Jesus sitting on His throne ruling over all things in heaven and on earth. (John 12:41) May we respond like Isaiah, who became all the more aware of his own sinfulness when he saw the holiness of the LORD. One of those holy angels assisted in Isaiah's cleansing by bringing a coal from the altar of Christ's sacrifice to purge away his sin.

And may we, like Isaiah, be moved not only to praise Christ with our lips, but to serve Him in love and devotion, who made the ultimate sacrifice for us. May we ever sing:

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;
Holy holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity! Amen

The Lutheran Hymnal 246:1

Weekend Journal

1. Read Hebrews chapter 1. List the ways that Jesus is so much greater than the angels.
2. While we find great comfort in the Bible's teaching about the angels, we remember that they are servants of God just like us. It is great to know that they serve God as "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14)
3. Remember our first passage on Monday where the angels said, "I am your fellow servant." (Revelation 19:10) Think of ways that you can serve God faithfully as they do, "ministering to those who will inherit salvation."

[illegible]

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. John 5:39

The Supplier

Nearby a certain high school lies a sandstone ridge with several prominent cliffs. Inscribed upon the stones at the top of the cliffs are the names and initials of many past students of the high school. Each name scraped into the stone is essentially saying “I was here. I traversed the woods. I crossed the creek. I climbed to the top of these cliffs. I was here.” Each name testifies that the author was there. The same is true for a signature on a dotted line. That signature is a testimony that the author was there and has agreed to whatever is above the dotted line.

The entire Bible is, in a way, God’s signature to us. In Scripture we read God’s testimony of who He is, what He has done, and what He has promised to still accomplish. Essentially God is saying “I was here. I traversed this world without a single sin. I crossed the river of death. I climbed up out of death on Easter morning. I was here.” Scripture is God’s testimony that He was here on this earth as one of us in order to save us. He signed on the dotted line of His Old and New Testaments that He has agreed to all the promises He has for us in His Word.

Now those names scratched into the top of a cliff or inscribed on a dotted line with a fountain pen remain a testimony for as long as the name lasts. The thing is, those names do not last forever. Names on the cliff from even several decades ago are wearing away, and some are already scratched over with more recent names. Documents are lost or even purposefully burned when the terms are completed. The testimony of those names does not last. The testimony of our God though, cannot be permanently lost. God has promised to preserve His testimony forever so that all who read and hear will know that “God was here.”

Savior, thank you for giving me your own testimony of all your saving work. Amen.

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” Acts 20:32

The Recipient

One day at a time. Carpe Diem (Seize the Day). This too shall pass. Mind over matter. Mottos such as these can motivate, encourage, and inspire. However at a certain point they run out of their motivating power. The person who takes it one day at a time can become overwhelmed when worries about the many days ahead pile up. The person who seizes the day can lose the day when a few things don't go their way right away in the morning. One day, a motto can inspire new heights of achievements, but another day, the words fall flat.

The word of God's grace is something entirely different than a motto. Where mottos can motivate through catchy wordplay and tried and true patterns, God's Word motivates through the working of the Holy Spirit in the recipient's heart. Where mottos can encourage through historical precedent, God's Word encourages through God's precedent of sins forgiven on the cross. Where mottos can inspire through personal faith in the truth of the motto, God's Word inspires through the Holy Spirit granted faith in the truth of God's promise of an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. God's Word never runs out of power to lead you in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. The word of God's grace builds up men like Martin Luther to stand firm on scripture in the face of persecution.

The word of God's grace has the power to build up all who hear His Word. God's Word has power to grant an unobtainable inheritance to all those who are sanctified. The preaching of God's Word turns the unobtainable into the already-attained through Jesus' victory. While most things do pass in this life, how wonderful that Jesus' words shall never pass away and that those words work daily miracles in the hearts of those who hear and keep them.

Savior, Your word is truth, sanctify me by Your truth. Amen

[The devil] said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Matthew 4:6

The Deceiver

Pick any novel you want, randomly select a seven word chunk to remove, and the plot and themes of the book will almost certainly remain unchanged. However, if you were allowed to choose which seven word phrase was removed, then you could likely change the whole book. Motives could be changed. Key information could be left out and so make the plot fall apart. The removal of a few important words can change everything.

The devil tried to remove seven English words from Psalm 91:11-12 when he was tempting Jesus at the pinnacle of the temple. By omitting the phrase "in all your ways," Satan completely changed the scripture's meaning. It would have gotten Jesus to sin by tempting the Lord God if Jesus had believed the devil's altered version of scripture. Satan sees scripture as something to alter in ways that appear slight, but in reality, are quite consequential. He did the exact same thing when he tempted Eve in the garden of Eden by trying to edit out the words "You shall surely die" and replacing them with the lie of becoming like God.

The Lord knows how important it is that Scripture remains unaltered. In Deuteronomy 4:2 God told the children of Israel to neither add nor take away from His word. In Proverbs 30:6 He promises to rebuke those liars who add to His word. In Matthew 24:35 Jesus promised that His words will never pass away. While God keeps His Word pure and unaltered through generations, Satan seeks to add or subtract just enough words to change the meaning. A few words can change everything. Praise the Lord that His Word does not change.

O steadfast and faithful Lord, let me never seek to change Your Word to fit my life and desires, but change my desires and life to keep Your Word. Amen.

There are some things in them [Paul's letters] that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

2 Peter 3:16 ESV

The Mutilator

The rabbit was hardly recognizable after its high speed collision with multiple tires on I-25. To say it was mutilated was an understatement. Pancaked, steamrolled, or uninflated would be more accurate descriptions. Sadly the world mutilates and twists scripture to such an extent that it too becomes unrecognizable.

The easiest lies in which a Christian can get caught up regarding Scripture are the lies that are closest to the truth. The world, though, doesn't need a lie close to Scripture, but will believe even the most twisted and mutilated versions of God's Word. Unbelievers can twist what God says about love and so believe the lie that love would encourage people in their sins, while bypassing repentance. Unbelievers can mutilate and chop apart God's Word to such an extent that they have no trouble believing the lie that only parts of Scripture are true and worthwhile today.

The world has twisted scripture since there was scripture to twist. It twisted Paul's letters within years of their writing. It twisted scripture at the time of the Reformation by inserting works into the role of faith. It twists Scripture today to such an extent that Christians should be flabbergasted that some of those doing the twisting still claim to be Christians.

These twistings and mutilations are so sad because each twist and cut of Scripture harms and hurts those who think they are improving Scripture. Instead of bringing about improvement they bring about their own and others' destruction. Rather than twisting and mutilating Scripture in a misguided attempt to improve upon it, may all who read trust the pure Word of God, for as Proverbs 30:5 says "Every word of God is pure."

Lord, let me never change the meaning of Your Word, but simply allow You to speak for Yourself. Amen.

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

1 Corinthians 2:14

The Head Scratcher

Some conversations in life don't make sense. Conversations with the criminally insane will often leave one scratching one's head and wondering what the point of the conversation really was. The sinful flesh sees the Word of God as something to scratch its head over. The sinful flesh just cannot and will not understand the things of the Spirit of God. Informing and transforming the sinful flesh is a lost cause because in regard to God's Holy Word the sinful flesh is criminally insane. The sinful flesh sees the reasonable expectation of God as totally and completely unreasonable. The sinful flesh can only stand there and scratch its proverbial head as the Word of God works to enlighten the new man.

Now if it were left up to the sinful flesh to take to heart both the stern message of God's law and the sweet promise of His gospel, all of mankind would be a lost cause. Thankfully, God knows that the natural man is at enmity with Him and so He grants to all of His children a new man, who holds God's word as sacred and gladly hears and learns it.

This new man given to all believers is going to have to interact with the old sinful flesh and it would do well to remember that in dealing with the sinful flesh, it is dealing with the criminally insane. It makes no sense to trade a clean conscience for a temporary sinful pleasure, but the sinful flesh scratches its head at the Word of God and wants to make that trade. The sinful flesh cannot and will not understand God's plans and designs. In the Lutheran catechism, Martin Luther encourages all Christians to daily drown their sinful flesh with contrition and repentance, thereby letting the new man live each day as the rightful occupant of each Christian's heart.

Lord, allow me to drown my sinful flesh and pattern my life according to your will. Amen.

1. Look up Psalm 119:105 Why does your way need guiding in the first place? How has God's Word shown the correct path for you recently?
2. John 17:17 is laden with scriptural truths. Take some time to read this passage and dwell on the implications of each word of this Bible passage.
3. God's Word is powerful. Write down some ideas for how to incorporate it into your life next week.

[illegible]

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

Immediate Willing Compassion

The Gospel of Mark is thought of as the Gospel of action. Mark uses this action word, "immediately", nearly 40 times. The words of Jesus are central, but just as important are His actions. His words and deeds repeatedly point to the fact that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and God in human flesh.

The words exchanged between the leper and Jesus here prove as much. The man had a great declaration of faith. He believed and confessed that the only thing standing between him and restored health was Christ's will. Jesus' ability for that impossible healing was never in doubt. The power was there. The only question in the matter was His willingness.

Christ's compassion was willing. Even before the healing happened, Jesus was moved with compassion and touched the untouchable. Once His Word was spoken, IMMEDIATELY the disease was gone. While not every prayer for physical healing is answered immediately, this teaches us about His compassion. The power is there. He is able to make you clean. It's true for your body. More importantly it's true for your soul. Ask, knowing that our uncleanness is no barrier when it comes to His unwavering compassion. Whether we are physically healed is a matter of His will and our good. Yet our spiritual healing is certain. Jesus was willing to bear the cross, and that is what it took to cleanse us, restore us, and give us heaven as our home. "I am willing; be cleansed."

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am; Thy love unknown Has broken every barrier down.
Now to be Thine, yea, Thine alone, O Lamb of God,
I come, I come.

The Lutheran Hymnal 388:5-6

“I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!” Mark 2:11-12

Immediate and Authoritative Forgiveness

In this account, a paralyzed man was physically carried to Jesus and lowered down through a roof by his friends, just for a chance at being healed by Jesus. Yet, His words to him were unexpected: “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” (5) Before addressing the physical condition, Jesus deals with his spiritual need.

His divine nature immediately saw the thoughts of the skeptical scribes: But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, “Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk’? (8-9)

Many people want their visible problems dealt with. Jesus fixes the real problem. It’s easier to say, “forgiven” than to say, “arise and walk.” It’s easier because we don’t see the physical evidence. By proving what is harder to say, He also proves what is “easier” to say, but much harder to do: to forgive us our sins.

Forgiveness of sins is easier to say, but much harder to accomplish. It involved Him living perfectly and carrying our sins to the cross. He did what we never could. Are you still carrying around that guilt that Jesus already addressed? Lay it down. He will pick it up and get rid of it. When He says, “Your sins are forgiven you”, you know it has been done. Through faith in His forgiving, authoritative, and immediate Word, those who once were paralyzed by sin and doubt now have eternal healing and comfort.

Thee we own a perfect Savior, Only Source of all that’s good.
Every grace and every favor Comes to us through Jesus’ blood.

Jesus gives us true repentance By His Spirit sent from heaven;
Whispers this transporting sentence, “Son, thy sins are all forgiven.”

The Lutheran Hymnal 358:2-3

Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, “Talitha, cumi,” which is translated, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.”

Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement.

Mark 5:41-42

Immediate Life-giving Power

Jairus’ daughter lay lifeless, and hope seemed lost. Jesus entered the room where mourners were already grieving. Taking the girl by the hand, He speaks gently: “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” Mark records that immediately, she stood up and began to walk around.

But the journey leading up to this moment was also life-giving. As Jesus made the trip to this house, word has already reached Jairus about the outcome of his situation. “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?” (35). The worst of this man’s fears had just been realized. His precious, twelve-year-old daughter had died. Yet, Jesus was right there. He comes back with a simple reminder: “Do not be afraid; only believe.” (36)

It is natural to be afraid of death. Perhaps worse is the fear of the death of a loved one. Death seems like a terrible, final separation. But what seems final to us is not final with Jesus. The tenderness of this miracle is as powerful as the authority behind it. Jesus’ Word is enough. When He calls, life responds. His voice called this girl to rise. His voice calmed Jairus and stirred up his faith. That same voice spoke the world into existence, and it is the same voice that will call us back from the grave. Death can be frightening for some, but our Savior has defeated death. His Word creates life, it assures us of our forgiveness, and it will call us from death and lead us to everlasting life!

Abide with me! Fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me!

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness.
Where is death’s sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still if Thou abide with me.

The Lutheran Hymnal 552:1, 7

And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." Mark 6:49-50

Immediate Calming Presence

After a long and exhausting day, the disciples finally found themselves alone in a boat. They rowed through the night, battling wind and waves, making little progress. But Jesus was watching them. Mark tells us that Jesus saw them "making headway painfully" (ESV v48). Then, suddenly, they saw Him simply strolling out on the water. Instantly and immediately, He was there.

But instead of comfort, fear took over. They assumed He was a ghost and cried out in terror. Given the darkness, exhaustion, and circumstance, their fear is understandable. Yet, immediately, Jesus spoke: "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." This moment reveals a different immediate healing. It is their fear which requires comfort by the presence and word of Christ. Before the storm was calmed, their hearts were calmed.

How often fear becomes our greatest enemy. The storm may be real, but fear multiplies its power. Fear distorts our vision, convinces us we are lost and alone, and can cause us to forget our Savior's love and protection. Jesus did not scold them here. Rather He reminded them of His calming presence. Once He stepped into the boat, the wind ceased completely.

Immediate healing does not always mean immediate relief. Often it means faith steadied and fear silenced by the reminder that our Savior is nearby. Once we remember Jesus is near, fear loses its grip on us. Only He can save when we are overcome by fear. He strengthens our faith which trusts His eternal promises. Jesus can calm any tempest that threatens us. He is the reason we can be of good cheer and remain unafraid, no matter what we are currently rowing through.

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

The Lutheran Hymnal 370:2

“But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” And Jesus said to him, “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” Mark 9:22-24 ESV

Immediate Strengthening of Faith

A father brings his possessed and tormented son to Jesus, desperate for healing or even anything to be done. Perhaps you are able to relate to his desperation. “Please, Lord, do something, do anything!” The situation seemed utterly hopeless.

Jesus here challenges the “if” of the request—not because the man had no faith, but because his faith was under assault by fear and anxiety. Fear tempted him to think this situation was too dire for even Jesus. When challenged on his “if”, the man doesn’t defend himself. He simply confesses all of it... “I believe; help my unbelief!” He takes his faith and his fear and immediately places it in the hands of Jesus.

That confession itself was a gift, and it’s something we can all learn from. Faith is not something that we produce, but something that God gives and sustains. Jesus did not reject his weak faith, rather He strengthened it. Before the son was healed, the father was strengthened and comforted. “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” Psalm 34:18

Jesus healed his son. The power of prayer does not rest on how strong our faith feels, but rather on Whom it clings. When fear threatens to overwhelm us, we simply bring it all to Jesus. Our faith, our fear, our certainty that His good will is done. Immediate strengthening of faith happens when weak sinners are met by a faithful Savior. We are strengthened and sustained by Jesus. All things are possible for Him, and all things are possible for those who place their faith in Him.

Oh, for a faith that will not shrink Tho’ pressed by many a foe;
That will not tremble on the brink Of poverty or woe;

A faith that shines more bright and clear
When tempests rage without;
That, when in danger, knows no fear, In darkness feels no doubt;

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Looking Back at “Immediately”: Throughout this week, Jesus acted IMMEDIATELY—to cleanse, forgive, raise, calm, and strengthen faith.
 - a. Which account from Mark stuck with you the most, and why?
 - b. What does that moment reveal about who Jesus is for sinners and sufferers today?
2. Fear, Faith, and the Presence of Christ: Several devotions dealt with fear—fear of separation, fear of condemnation, fear of death, fear of the storm, fear of unbelief.
 - c. Where do you most clearly recognize fear at work in your own life right now?
 - d. How does Jesus address fear in these passages—not by demand, but by His word and presence?
3. Imperfect Faith, Perfect Savior: The father’s prayer, “I believe; help my unbelief,” reminds us that faith is often mixed with weakness.
 - e. Where have you felt discouraged by the strength (or weakness) of your faith?
 - f. How does this week’s focus shift your attention away from your faith and back onto Christ’s faithfulness?
4. Prayer of Trust: Re-read one of this week’s devotion passages.
 - g. Write a short prayer using the words or action of Jesus in that passage.
 - h. Focus on Christ’s words in Mark 5:36, “Do not be afraid; only believe”. What do those words mean from your Savior to you today? Apply that to something difficult in your life. What do those words mean for you in that situation?

Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” Matthew 28:18

With Jesus’ Authority

The effectiveness of any ambassador is tied to the authority of the person sending that ambassador. If the authority figure is unknown, or suspect, the ambassador’s mission will likely fail. If, on the other hand, that person is well known and his authority clearly established, the ambassador’s mission will likely succeed.

The Bible identifies every believer in Jesus as one of His ambassadors! (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20) Jesus has commissioned us to share His gospel with our fallen world. We live in a world in which every person is sinful by nature. The Bible clearly states: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) We also live in a world filled with sinners who, fortunately, are loved by God—every one of them! The Bible also clearly states: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:19) We, as believers in Jesus, are privileged to share His message of love with everyone, all of whom desperately need to hear of that love!

That is awesome work! It is exhilarating because the message we are to bring is powerful, life-changing, and comforting! However, that work can also be frightening. It is frightening because the enemies of our Savior are many. The apostle Paul warns us: “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12) We can, however, carry out this great commission with confidence, because as we share the gospel, we do so with Christ’s authority backing us! What is impossible for us to do on our own, our Savior enables us to do with His power! So let us get on with it, knowing that our mission will succeed!

Dear Lord Jesus, You have called upon us to be Your ambassadors in this world. Help us to share Your truths faithfully for the blessing of many souls. Amen.

Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “Go . . .”

Matthew 28:18a, 19a

As You Are Going

Most English translations of the Great Commission translate the word “go” as an imperative, that is, a command. The impression can easily be given that Jesus is telling us to leave where we are and go somewhere else. That is most unfortunate, for people may immediately think, “I can’t go... at least not right now!” They can be led sadly to think that they are unable to fulfill Jesus’ commission. A young stay-at-home mother or father cannot simply leave their children and go somewhere else. A middle-aged person in business and supporting a family cannot give up that income and leave for some distant place. A senior in declining health and confined to a wheelchair in a nursing home cannot go wherever that senior wants, even if he or she would like to do so!

The Greek word translated so often in our English as an imperative, however, is not a command in that original language. It is a present participle. That fact makes all the difference! Greek present participles have an implied meaning of ongoing action. A better translation would, therefore, be: “As you are going.” In other words, Jesus is not commanding us to leave one place and go to another. Rather, He is saying that as we are going about our daily lives, wherever or whatever that may involve, we are to be sharing the Gospel with others.

Students, who are in school each day for many years, are to be busy sharing the Gospel with their classmates. Workers, who are putting in forty hours a week on the line, are to be sharing the Gospel with their co-workers. Seniors, who have retired and are now free to travel, or who for health reasons have seen their lives becoming more restricted and are confined to the hallways and dining rooms of nursing homes, are to be sharing the Gospel with their fellow travelers or their roommates and caregivers.

The Great Commission is liberating. It applies to every believer, for as you are going, you are privileged to be sharing!

Dear Father in heaven, open our eyes to the opportunities You give us to share Your truths as we go about our daily lives.
Amen.

Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “Make disciples of all the nations.” Matthew 28:18a,19b

Make Disciples

Jesus’ Great Commission involves a command for us believers to “make disciples of all the nations.” But what does that command mean? A disciple, first, is a pupil, someone who is learning. A disciple, second, is an adherent, someone who follows the teachings learned. To “make disciples” therefore, means to lead people to Jesus, so that they can learn the truths of His Word and then willingly and joyously put them into practice.

To make disciples, we must first be disciples. Jesus said: “Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24) When anyone hears and does what Jesus says that person is His disciple, and He promises that person: “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32) When we know Jesus’ truths, we are free from sin, guilt, shame, fear, death, and Satan. When we know Jesus’ truths and put them into practice, we are free to love, serve, pray, praise, and live with hope. It is regarding that hope, which motivates our Christian lives, that Peter says: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV).

We are privileged to share a message with our world that the Holy Spirit uses to lead people to faith and into discipleship. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,” Paul proclaims. (Romans 10:17) That word of God, when proclaimed, will not return to God without accomplishing what He pleases! Speaking on behalf of God and His word, Isaiah states: “It shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11b) Let us, therefore, listen to and carry out Jesus’ command to make disciples, fulfilling the Great Commission to His glory and for the blessing of all who hear us!

Dear Lord Jesus, help us to remain Your faithful disciples, as we seek to make disciples of all the nations. Amen.

Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “Go... baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:18a, 19a,c

Baptizing Them

Our God made a promise many centuries before Jesus gave us His Great Commission that helps explain why He commands us to baptize people “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” It was a promise given when God gave His Old Testament people the Law. Moses preserved that promise for us in Exodus: “In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you.” (20:24b)

Our God is a God of great blessing! Those blessings are frequently tied to His name! Consider David’s words: “Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Psalm 103:1-5)

It is not surprising, therefore, that we are commissioned to make disciples and share God’s great blessings with others by baptizing them in our God’s saving name. He promised long ago that when parents bring their children to be baptized in that name, or when adults step forward with their baptismal requests, He will come. The apostle Paul assures us: “The kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4-7) Let us, therefore, make disciples whenever or wherever God gives us the opportunity by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!

Dear heavenly Father, come to us with Your blessing as we baptize others in Your saving name. Amen.

Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “Go... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:18a, 19a, 20a

Teaching Them to Observe

How much of God’s word is important to teach? How much of God’s word is important for Jesus’ disciples to know? To confessional Lutherans, those may seem like strange questions, for their answers should be obvious—all of it! But in view of the last 150 years of Christian history, they are questions vital to ask! For the last 150 years, Christians have debated the nature of the Bible. Is it God’s inspired and inerrant revelation to us, or is it merely the uninspired and sometimes errant words we have to say about God? The answer to that question speaks to our entire Christian faith and life!

Let us permit Jesus Himself to answer these questions. When Jesus gave us His Great Commission, He did not say, “teaching them to observe whatever you feel is important,” or “teaching them to observe certain fundamentals that you think are important.” No, He said explicitly: “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you!” The apostle Paul confirms for us: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) Jesus did not give us the option to decide what we consider important, for He and His apostles considered all the Bible important and vital for our instruction and application.

Not everything written in the Bible is directly related to our salvation. Likewise, certain sections of Scripture will have greater application to our Christian lives than other sections. Still, as Jesus’ disciples, we will want to strive to teach everything Jesus has taught and thereby commanded within the Bible. Always remember—you cannot undermine one section of the Bible without beginning to undermine the authority of all the Bible!

Let us, therefore, strive faithfully to fulfill Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded!

Lord Jesus, our precious Savior—help us always to fulfill our callings as Your ambassadors in this world. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

Jesus' Promise: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:20) Ponder this promise of Jesus and then answer the following questions:

1. What is Jesus' promise?
2. How long does it apply?
3. What is the significance of the "amen" at its end?
4. What is the significance of the timing of the promise—giving it shortly before Jesus' ascension?

[illegible]

Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth.

Revelation 14:6 ESV

The Eternal Gospel and the Rest We Need

Most people are tired long before the day is over. Not just physically tired, but inwardly worn down. The kind of tiredness that comes from carrying things that were never meant to be carried—unfinished regrets, unspoken guilt, the quiet fear that not enough has been done, or perhaps cannot be done.

From the beginning, God has addressed that weariness. When the Lord set aside a day of rest, He was not simply protecting the body from exhaustion. He was teaching sinners something deeper: that life does not depend on their effort. It depends on His Word. To rest was to stop pretending that sin could be atoned for by human hands.

Atonement happens only in Christ. When Jesus calls the weary to Himself, He is not offering a brief pause before more striving. He is offering rest that reaches the conscience. In Him, the work is finished. Sin has been dealt with. God is no longer against us. The burden of trying to make things right has been removed.

This is why the Gospel is called eternal. It is not a temporary message for a particular season of life. It does not expire when faith feels weak or circumstances become heavy. It announces what remains true even when everything else feels unstable: that the Lamb has redeemed His people.

Revelation shows that Lamb standing firm, and His redeemed with Him. Their future is not uncertain. The rest they possess now by faith will one day be complete, when weariness itself is gone.

Until then, the eternal Gospel continues to do what it has always done. It calls sinners away from their striving and back to Christ, where real rest and forgiveness is found.

Lord Jesus, we are weary. Give us rest—not the rest we try to earn, but the rest You freely give through Your cross. Amen.

And they were singing a new song before the throne.

Revelation 14:3 ESV

The Eternal Gospel and the Song It Creates

Not everyone sings well. That becomes clear fairly quickly in life. Some voices are confident, others hesitant. Some are loud, others barely heard. Some on key, and some off key. The real difference, though, is not in the sound. It's in whether the heart has been given something worth singing about.

John sees the redeemed standing with the Lamb, singing a new song. It is not new because it has never been heard before, but because it belongs only to those who have been redeemed. No one else can learn it, not because it is difficult, but because it comes from something others do not share—joy in the forgiveness of sins.

Sin produces the wrong kind of singing. It replaces worship with explanation and thanksgiving with self-defense. Even when words are spoken, something is off. The conscience is not at peace, and so the voice cannot be either.

The eternal Gospel changes that. It does not begin with what we have done, but with what the Lamb has done. Forgiveness removes the need to defend ourselves. There is nothing left to prove, and nothing left to hide. That is where the song begins. This song is there when a sinner hears the Gospel and believes it. It is there when Christ crucified is confessed as enough. Even when the voice trembles, the song is real, and it is always new.

One day, that song will be full and unbroken. Until then, the eternal Gospel continues to give it—teaching hearts to sing where once they stood silent.

Lamb of God, give us the song of Your forgiveness, and let our hearts rest in what You have done. Amen.

An eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth.

Revelation 14:6 ESV

The Eternal Gospel That Does Not Wear Out

Many things wear out. Tools become dull. Bodies weaken. Even words can lose their force when repeated often enough. It is easy to assume that the Gospel might follow the same pattern—that it once spoke with clarity, but now feels distant or familiar to the point of losing its joy.

Scripture says otherwise. The Gospel is eternal. Not simply old, but belonging to God Himself, who never tires or weakens. Before the world was made, before sin entered into creation, God had already planned salvation in Christ. Redemption was not a response. It was His will from the beginning.

This eternal Gospel does not depend on the moment we are living in. The world changes. People look for new answers and new solutions, but the problem remains the same. Sin still accuses. Death still interrupts. The conscience still searches for peace.

The eternal Gospel continues to answer that need with the same message it has always spoken: that God has reconciled sinners to Himself through the death and resurrection of His Son. That truth does not weaken over time. It does not need to be updated. It remains.

History shows this clearly. The Gospel has been resisted, reshaped, and at times hidden. Yet it has not disappeared. Not because it was carefully preserved by people, but because the eternal God preserves His Word. For us, that is steady ground. The Gospel that sustained those before us is the same Gospel given to us. It does not wear out. It continues to give rest because God continues to be faithful.

Faithful God, keep us grounded in Your Gospel, and let it remain our comfort in every season. Amen.

These have been redeemed from mankind.

Revelation 14:4 ESV

The Eternal Gospel at Work

The Gospel is not only something to be heard. It is something that itself acts. It accomplishes what it declares. Where the Gospel is preached, something happens. Sins are forgiven. The conscience is made good. A person who once stood uncertain before God is given peace.

That work is not always visible. The Gospel does not draw attention to itself in the way people expect. It works first where the problem is—in the heart weighed down by sin. That is why it can be easy to overlook. We can't see sins being forgiven. Yet, the absence of sight does not mean the absence of power.

Martin Luther knew that struggle. He labored under guilt, trying to find certainty through effort. What he could not produce, the Gospel finally worked in him. The Word of forgiveness did not suggest improvement. It declared reconciliation. That declaration did the work of opening the gates of heaven wide for him.

The same Gospel continues to work in the same way. It does not become effective by adapting itself. It remains what it is—the announcement that Christ has redeemed sinners. And through that Word, God does what no human effort can do. This Gospel does its work through ordinary means. He places His Gospel into human mouths, pours it out on tiny heads, and feeds souls starving for forgiveness and righteousness. Yet the same power works effectively in all who believe its message.

Where Christ crucified for sinners is proclaimed, the Gospel is active—redeeming, restoring, and giving life.

Gracious Lord, let Your Gospel continue its work in us, and give us peace through Christ. Amen.

To proclaim to every nation and tribe and language and people. Revelation 14:6 ESV

The Eternal Gospel We Carry

The Gospel does not stay in one place. In John's vision, it moves outward, carried to every nation and people. This is not accidental. It reflects God's will that what He has done in Christ is for all people.

That same pattern continues. The Gospel that reaches us is not meant to end with us. It is given so that it may be spoken again. Not as a burden, but as something that naturally follows from what the Gospel itself does—it proclaims God's peace.

There is some degree of hesitation we experience in this. We are aware of our limits. Words can fail us. Conversations can feel uncertain. There is always the awareness that our own sins are real. But none of these are to be the deciding factor.

The Gospel does not depend on the strength of the one who speaks it. It depends on Christ, whose holy life and death on the cross give it power. The message carries its own weight because it carries His work—His death and His resurrection for sinners.

This means the task is simpler than it often feels. It is not about producing something new that people will want to listen to. It is about speaking what has already been done. The Gospel itself accomplishes what God intends.

Through ordinary words and lives shaped by forgiveness, the eternal Gospel continues to reach others. It still brings rest through forgiveness. It still opens what sin has closed, which is heaven.

God ensures that His Gospel is proclaimed. And in His wisdom, He allows it to pass through us.

Heavenly Father, keep Your Gospel in our hearts and on our lips, that it may be carried faithfully to others. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Write out, recite, and ponder each word of John 3:16
2. Journal/ reflect on your week. Where did you notice stress affecting you? What did you become preoccupied worrying about? Were there times when you were working to impress others in order not to disappoint? Surrender these to God and return to John 3:16 for comfort.
3. Use and recite the Apostles Creed to affirm your faith in the Gospel.

[illegible]

"I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread."

Psalms 37:25

God's Provision: Richly and Daily

In the Apostles' Creed we declare that we "believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." Of course, God did much more than create the earth and the universe, He also sustains it. He keeps it running and provides for every living thing. But God doesn't merely give us enough to get by. He provides what we need and more. Martin Luther used the words "richly and daily."

This passage from one of David's Psalms underscores that truth. The Psalmist David, as directed by the Holy Spirit, makes an observation. He has lived a long life and no doubt seen many things. However, one thing that he is yet to see is the righteous (believers) forsaken OR his descendants begging bread. We agree that God is gracious...but when we compare God's graciousness to any other kind...there is no real comparison.

I have had the opportunity to travel overseas to third world countries. It's truly eye opening. We in the United States have all that we need and more. We are rich, though we would not define ourselves as wealthy. We don't just have what we need...we have what we want...and we have it all in abundance. It's true. God provides richly and daily.

I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus; Never let me fall.

I am trusting Thee forever And for all. Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 428:6

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 1 Peter 3:18-19

A Victory Tour

As the newspaper gradually slips into disuse and disappears, an entire generation will arise that doesn't know the fun of a comic strip. Like many people, I personally enjoyed Calvin and Hobbes and Peanuts,. I also enjoyed BC by Johnny Hart, which pictured prehistoric individuals. Mr. Hart was also a Christian and it showed in many of his comic strips.

He once did a comic strip about Jesus' descent into hell. It was depicted as a victory tour and the comment is made that Jesus "has the keys to the place" Scripture declares that Jesus suffered and died. It also declares that He was made alive and went and preached to the spirits in prison. Jesus went on a victory tour and announced to the Devil and his host and those in hell that He had won the victory, having made atonement for sin and having defeated death.

In point of fact, Jesus' descent into hell is part of His exaltation, not His humiliation. It's an event that proves that He is the victorious Christ! Maybe we should make a point of pausing after the word 'buried' and then speak with joyful voice, "He descended into hell" because Jesus' burial marks the end of the humiliation and the descent into hell the beginning of His exaltation!

By Pontius Pilate crucified,
He suffered on the Tree and died;
To show of Satan's reign the end,
He did into hell descend.

The Lutheran Hymnal 253:3

“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.” Romans 8:3

What I Can’t...God Did

In the Apostles’ Creed we confess simply, “I believe in the Holy Christian Church.” This is a declaration of faith because no one, save God Himself, has seen the entire assembly of believers in heaven and on earth. We know that the assembly of believers exists because God has promised that His Word will accomplish the thing for which He has sent it. The Lutheran Catechism teaches that where the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed in truth and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s command there will be believers.

The Bible speaks of this assembly of believers in a number of ways. The fact that it exists is a matter of faith. It’s also a reality because what we could never do – keep God’s Holy Law perfectly – God did by sending His Son into human flesh. He lived without sin, where we can only sin. He died to atone for sin, to free us from what is rightfully ours. He rose again and the resurrection stands as the proof, the receipt that we are forgiven.

God did all of this...not us.

People sometimes like to talk about “good Christians”. We are not good by virtue of our living, but the imputed righteousness of Jesus. We are declared righteous by faith (which is a gift) in Jesus Christ.

Lord, by the stripes which wounded Thee,
From death’s dread sting Thy servants free
That we may live and sing to Thee. Alleluia!

The Lutheran Hymnal 210:5

“Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:3

What I Can't...God Did

I have often asked my confirmation students, “Can a corpse comb its hair? Can a corpse shake your hand? Can a corpse brush its teeth? Why can’t a corpse do those things?”

Well because a corpse is dead. It can’t do anything.

The Scriptures declare that we are born “dead in trespasses and sins” (cf. Ephesians 2:1-3). Nevertheless, there are some who say that there is a spark of good in us that enables us to make a decision for Christ or choose Christ. The Word of God declares something very different. The Apostle Paul didn’t pat himself on the back but confessed, “I know that in me (that is in my flesh) nothing good dwells...” (Romans 7:18) It’s the same with us.

What I couldn’t and wouldn’t do...God did for me. He sent the Holy Spirit through the Word of God to work a spiritual rebirth in the Sacrament of Baptism (Titus 3:5-8). God did this... not me. He worked spiritual life in me where there was formerly nothing good, nothing spiritually alive.

We confess with good reason, “I believe in the Holy Ghost (or Holy Spirit).” This too is a matter of faith, for we have never seen the Holy Spirit, but we know His Work within us.

Holy Spirit, strong and mighty,
Thou who makest all things new,
Make Thy work within us perfect and the evil Foe subdue.
Grant us weapons for the strife and with victory crown our life.

The Lutheran Hymnal 226:7

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. Hebrews 2:14

Death is Neutered

There is a piece of artwork on my office wall that pictures a hand nailed to a piece of wood (the cross). Beneath it is the English translation of Martin Luther's – "Es war ein wunderbarlich Krieg." It reads, "It was a peculiar war, when death and life contended. The Life, which held on to victory, has swallowed up death. The Scriptures proclaimed it: How one death devoured the other. Death has become a joke. Alleluia."

In the Apostles' Creed we confess that Jesus died. Where death is usually the end for most heroes, it was not so for the Prince of Life, Jesus Christ. On the third day Jesus rose again. Death no longer has dominion over Him (Romans 6:9).

It was a truly peculiar war when God granted all of humankind life through the death of His Son. The reason that the Son of God took up human flesh and blood was to destroy the one who had started humankind down the wide road that leads to destruction. It was by means of death that God destroyed death and brought life and immortality to us in Christ. Death is neutered. It has no power over us.

The next time that you stand before the remains of a loved one who died trusting in Jesus...remember that because of Jesus' death and rising again to life...death has no more power.

Jesus lives! And now is death
 But the gate of life immortal;
 This shall calm my trembling breath
 When I pass its gloomy portal.
 Faith shall cry, as fails each sense,
 Jesus is my confidence! Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 201:5

Weekend Rest Journal

1. As you go through the day, think about all the things with which God has blessed you. Keep a running list this weekend. Make a point of giving thanks on Sunday!
2. Make an effort this weekend to think about each of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer.
3. Review the Apostles' Creed as you find it in your hymnal. How many of the things for which we pray are a matter of faith, that is, things that we believe simply because God says so, not because we've seen or can fully understand them?
4. Review Luther's Explanation of the 3rd Article and give thanks to God for your Baptism and the ways that He has strengthened your faith during your lifetime.

[illegible]

His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. Revelation 1:14-16

Jesus As He Was Never Seen Before

When John was on the island of Patmos, he saw a vision of Jesus unlike anything he had witnessed. In fact, nobody has seen a person as described in the first chapter of Revelation. Picture this description of Jesus in your mind's eye in all the details. Each of us would have the same reaction as John upon seeing such a figure: "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead," (Rev. 1:17)

Jesus gave pictures of Himself which were recorded in the Gospel of John. Jesus called Himself the Bread of Life, the Light of the world, the Door/Gate of the sheep, the Good Shepherd and the Vine. These pictures based in the real world are easily understood. Through such picture language Jesus provides information about His person work as Redeemer.

This out-of-the-world portrayal of Jesus in Revelation is no different. Though the image seems complex, Jesus provides insight through a dictation of letters to seven churches. From this image we have a pictorial aid which can be etched in our mind. Through it we learn of the characteristics and activity of our ascended Lord. Jesus wants to assure His people that though He may have left the earth with His body, He is present and working on behalf of believers with all the attributes displayed in this image.

Lord Jesus, help us understand how You use all of Your attributes for the good of Your people. Amen.

These things says He ... who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. Revelation 2:1

Jesus Among the Lampstands

When the apostle John saw the extraordinary vision of chapter 1, He saw Jesus in the middle of seven golden lampstands. Jesus does not leave us guessing what this means. He says, "The seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches," (1:20). These seven churches would be recipients of letters from Jesus through John.

What a blessing to know that Jesus walks among believers! We are assured by Jesus' words in Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them." These words were spoken in the context of the authority given for believers to speak on Christ's behalf when it comes to forgiving or retaining sins. That is one way Jesus is among believers, but there is so much more. He gathers believers together to learn of Him, to partake of His body and blood in Holy Communion, to praise Him and to do His kingdom work. Jesus is among us to bless and keep us.

There was also a warning Jesus gave to the congregation of Ephesus. "Repent and do the first works or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand," (Rev. 2:5). We dare not take Jesus' presence among us for granted. We, like the Ephesians, may go through the motions and focus on what we do for Jesus rather than why we do works for Him.

Just as there is nothing better than having Jesus walking among us, there is nothing worse when He is not. Jesus gives us the opportunity to learn from the Ephesian's mistake and realize anew the importance of His presence for forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Lord Jesus, lead us to never take Your presence among us for granted. Amen.

Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.

Revelation 1:16

Jesus With a Sword in His Mouth: Part One

Since the book of Revelation uses figurative language and pictures, it is a good practice to be familiar with the rest of the Scriptures before undergoing a study of this book. Such study pays dividends in determining the meaning of the sharp two-edged sword coming out the mouth of Jesus as seen by John in a remarkable vision (1:12-16).

In Ephesians 6, Christians are encouraged to put on the armor of God. This includes “the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God,” (Eph. 6:17). Hebrews 4:12 makes the same comparison: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.” It is quite fitting that the sword is coming out of Jesus’ mouth.

What a blessing that Christians are allowed to use that very sword! The Word of God is not only a defensive weapon. It is also used for offense. In fact, the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The message of full and free forgiveness won by Jesus Christ takes away the power of Satan’s accusations. When we rely on the Scriptures, we can fend off the temptations of the devil in the same way Jesus did in the wilderness. We also learn from God’s Word about our need for a Savior and have a guide of what is pleasing and displeasing to Him.

We will meditate on Jesus wielding that sword Himself in tomorrow’s devotion.

This world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none, He’s judged the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.

The Lutheran Hymnal 262:3

Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. Revelation 2:16

Jesus With a Sword in His Mouth: Part Two

Pergamos was a wicked city rife with immorality and idolatry. Jesus addressed this congregation in Revelation 2. He told them, “You hold fast to My name.” There were faithful believers who held up under pressure even when one of their own was martyred because of his faith. On the other hand, there were those who succumbed to the temptation of sexual immorality as part of pagan worship, the same trap into which the Children of Israel fell centuries before.

Jesus called for repentance. The lack of repentance would result in Jesus fighting against them with the sword of His mouth, which is the word of God. He would come with words of powerful condemnation.

Understand the purpose behind the threat. When precious souls are in danger, Jesus acts. He wants to protect those who are His. He fights for us against those who would harm us. That included those who lured some members of the church in Pergamos into destruction through immorality and idolatry. Jesus fights against other enemies pictured in Revelation: the Dragon (the devil), the Beast from the Sea (ungodly governments) and the Beast from the Land (the Antichrist).

We do well to heed the warnings of Jesus. At the same time, we rejoice that Jesus loves us so much that He calls us back to Him. Jesus values souls. The value is seen in the price of His precious blood used to pay for them. He will stop at nothing to call souls back to Him, and fight for God’s children until the last trumpet sounds.

With might of ours can naught be done,
soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the valiant One, whom God Himself elected.

The Lutheran Hymnal 262:2

And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, "These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass." Revelation 2:18

Jesus with Eyes Like a Flame of Fire

There have been numerous "hot mic" moments over the years. Oftentimes it is a political figure or entertainer who has words recorded that were never meant for public consumption. In a similar way, private texts and photos make their way to the internet much to the chagrin of the sender. We do not want those things to happen to us. Everyone has had embarrassing or sinful moments that they wish nobody would know about. We do not want people to read our minds.

What is our reaction in knowing that Jesus has "eyes like a flame of fire?" Eyes that see all and know all. Frightened? Ashamed? Guilty? Those feelings certainly come to mind when we're aware of our sin. Daily we need to repent of our sins for which we deserve eternal punishment.

It is equally and amazingly true that Jesus knows all of our sinful ugliness and chose to love us anyways. Jesus knows our inner fears and anxieties. He knows what we can handle and what we cannot. He lovingly takes care of us. Jesus knew in advance that we could not save ourselves. In His love, grace, and mercy He chose to become our Savior. He took our sins—including those known only to Him—and the punishment for sin upon Himself.

Jesus sees you, knows you and loves you. There is no one better in whom to place your trust.

Dear Jesus, thank for Your unconditional love. Amen.

1. Read through Revelation 5. Consider especially verse 9 which explains what makes the Lamb worthy to open the scroll. Meditate on verses 12 and 14 as an evening prayer.
2. Read of the woman (the Holy Christian Church), the Child (Jesus) and the Dragon (Satan) in Revelation 12. Consider how Christians are protected against the devil despite his power and determination.
3. Other pictures of Jesus from the Gospel of John on which to meditate:
 1. The Bread of Life – John 6:32-40
 2. The Light of the World – John 8:12
 3. The Door to the Sheepfold – John 10:7-10
 4. The Good Shepherd – John 10:11-18
 5. The Vine – John 15:1-8

[illegible]

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!” Matthew 24:32-33

Reading the Leaves

You are handed a person's picture and asked to determine when it was taken. What will you look for? The hairstyle might tip you off: beehives, poodle cuts, big hair—each had its day. Clothes may offer a clue: tracksuits, parachute pants, skinny jeans--each appeared at some point in history.

What would you look for to determine how close we are to Judgment Day? In Matthew 24, Jesus revealed signs that would precede the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) and signs that will precede the end of the world. Just as the leaves on a fig tree indicate the season of the year, these signs indicate the end is at hand.

The signs? False prophets, false Christs, wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes; lawlessness will abound and love will grow cold. If this was a punch list, every box would be checked. All of the signs have been and continue to be fulfilled. Each generation can honestly say: “Judgment Day could be today.” The time to be ready is not next week or even tomorrow. The time is now. Either Jesus will come in glory, or we will die and go to Him. Both are reasons to rejoice because Jesus already came here to save us.

Unlike His coming in glory, Jesus first came in deepest humility. He arrived, not to make a name for Himself, but to live a perfect life that none of us could. He then suffered the punishment of death and hell that we deserved. His resurrection proves that we are forgiven. When He comes again, He will take us to be with Him forever. Look at the fig tree; it could happen today.

Nearer is my soul's salvation; Spent the night, the day at hand.

Keep me in my lowly station, Watching for Thee till I stand,

O my Savior, O my Savior, In Thy bright, Thy promised land.

The Lutheran Hymnal 606:3

“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” Matthew 24:42-44

To Catch a Thief

Being a thief is arguably more difficult today than it was in the past. The reason? Security cameras. Nearly every public place, and many private properties, have electronic surveillance that operates 24/7. Those cameras are mainly useful after the fact. Investigators can pore over the footage, searching for clues to what happened. But catching the thief in real time? That requires vigilance.

Judgment Day will arrive thief-like, suddenly and unexpectedly, just as it did in the days of Noah. For 120 years the people had been warned. For 120 years they lived as though it would never happen – until it did. That’s the way it will be when Jesus returns. The Day will be like a thief in the night. Either be ready at the moment He arrives, or be lost eternally.

Frightening? To our flesh it should be. To our faith there is nothing to fear. The judgment for our sins has already fallen. The wrath of God has already rained down upon Jesus in our place. Every sin that we have or ever will commit has already been punished and paid for in full. God’s verdict? “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1)

Will the day catch you off-guard, like a thief in the night? No. The Holy Spirit not only made you ready by giving you faith, He will keep you ready through His Word and Sacraments. “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.” (1 Thessalonians 5:4)

Be Thou at my right hand, then can I never fail.

Uphold Thou me, and I shall stand; fight Thou, and I’ll prevail.

The Lutheran Hymnal 616:6

“The kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the Bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.” Matthew 25:1-13 (Please read the entire section in your Bible.)

Expect Delays

The ten virgins had much in common. All knew the Bridegroom. All awaited his arrival. All fell asleep. All were aroused. All went out to meet Him. But for all the similarities, there had been a major difference all along. Five of them knew that the bridegroom could be delayed so they stocked up on oil. Five of them did not.

At one time, perhaps, all ten had faith. They all knew Jesus and were looking forward to the wedding banquet to which they were personally invited. But they weren't all counting the costs of discipleship. Maybe they didn't expect it to be that difficult or to take that long. The wise were not willing to take a chance on running out of oil. The foolish were.

The wise virgins didn't know when the Bridegroom would appear, so they prepared. They stocked up on oil. It is not possible for us to know when Jesus will arrive. We do know that He has claimed us in our Baptism, died for us on the cross, and rose for us on Easter morning. He now rules heaven and earth for our sakes. He loves us, forgives us, and blesses us through the Gospel. He wants us to be ready by stocking up, by making regular use of His Word and Sacrament.

Ever heard of a Christmas Club? It was a special bank account that you opened in January and made regular deposits every month of the year. By December, you were ready for holiday shopping and wouldn't need to go in debt. That's the wise thing to do with our faith. Use each day to replenish your oil supply by nurturing your faith in the Lord's Word.

With my lamp well trimmed and burning,
swift to hear and slow to roam,
Watching for Thy glad returning to restore me to my home.
Come, my Savior, Come, my Savior, O my Savior, quickly come.

The Lutheran Hymnal 606:4

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.” Matthew 25:14-30 (Please read the entire section in your Bible.)

You’ve Got Talents

Based on an annual income of \$50,000, one day’s wage would be \$192. One talent is worth 6,000 days’ wages, totaling about \$1.2 million. Imagine being given multiples of that, with the instructions to invest it. This is what sets the stage for Jesus’ parable.

The Master who goes to a far country is Jesus. Once His work of saving us was completed, He returned to heaven. The talents are the gifts He’s entrusted to us. Not everyone has the same abilities and aptitudes, but everyone has something. Each has opportunities to glorify God and share the message of salvation with others.

When the Master returned, the results varied. Those who invested their talents saw an increase. That’s what any money manager would expect. But the focus of the parable is not what we expect. It is on the one servant who buried his talent and did nothing with it.

“I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground.” That could be an excuse. It could also be the truth. Unbelief does both. It either makes excuses or is driven by fear. Neither is what the Master desires. Fruits of faith cannot be coerced or browbeaten out of people. They simply flow from hearts that have been touched by the Gospel.

If your talent is making muffins, use that talent to God’s glory by sharing your gift with others. If your muffins make someone’s day brighter, God will be praised. If they open the door for sharing the Gospel, then you can tell others about the difference Jesus makes to you. No coercion is required.

O’er the blest mercy-seat, Pleading for me,
My feeble faith looks up, Jesus, to Thee.
Help me my cross to bear, Thy wondrous love declare,
Some song to raise or prayer, Something for Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 403:2

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.” Matthew 25:31-46 (Please read the entire section in your Bible.)

The Great Separation

A child sorts his Legos by color. Yellow in one bag. Blue in another. Red in a third. They will be mixed together when he plays and sorted again when he's done.

Sheep and goats pastured together during the day, but were separated when they came to the pen at night. Goats to the left. Sheep to the right. What does it mean? During the day, sheep and goats lived side-by-side, just as believers live side-by-side with unbelievers. We get the same sunshine and rainfall, the same viruses and diseases. Though we are vastly different on the inside, we often look very much alike on the outside.

The separation will occur on Judgment Day. Believers will be welcomed into heaven, while unbelievers will be condemned to hell. This isn't because of what we've done or not done. This is about who we are. By grace alone, we are members of God's family. We couldn't accomplish that any more than a goat could change itself into a sheep. It is God's work. He fulfilled the Law for us. He took our place. He purchased our freedom from sin, death, and hell. The Holy Spirit brought us to faith.

We are His children, sheep of the Good Shepherd. That shows in ways that we aren't even aware of. On Judgment Day, Jesus will disclose the deeds that reveal a person's unbelief. He will also show acts of faith that happened simply because we belong to Him.

Today Thy gate is open, And all who enter in
Shall find a Father's welcome And pardon for their sin.
The past shall be forgotten, A present joy be giv'n,
A future grace be promised, A glorious crown in heav'n.

The Lutheran Hymnal 279:2

*And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches
in glory by Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19*

The Giver of Every Good Gift

In the United States, we pause each year to celebrate Thanksgiving—a time set aside to reflect on gratitude and abundance. While tables are filled and families gather, this day ultimately directs our hearts beyond the gifts themselves to the One who gives them. Thanksgiving invites us to acknowledge not only what we have, but Who provides it.

Every good thing in our lives—every breath, every relationship, every meal, every joy—flows directly from the Lord of the Harvest. James reminds us that “every good and perfect gift is from above.” Luther echoed this in his explanation of the First Article: God gives “clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home,” and all this “purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy.” Thanksgiving begins by recognizing God as the source of all blessings, both ordinary and eternal.

Psalm 103 calls us to “forget not all His benefits,” not because God needs our praise, but because we need the reminder that we live entirely by grace. Even our ability to work, think, speak, and love is a gift sustained daily by God. And beyond all earthly blessings, God gives us salvation through Jesus Christ—our ultimate treasure.

Thanksgiving, then, is more than a yearly holiday; it is a posture shaped by faith. As we take inventory of our lives, we discover countless reasons to praise the Giver who never stops giving. The Lord of the Harvest provides not only our daily bread, but hope, forgiveness, and life everlasting.

Lord of every good gift, open my eyes to the countless blessings
You pour into my life. Teach me to recognize Your loving hand
in both the ordinary and extraordinary. Shape my heart to live
in daily gratitude, trusting fully in Your grace and provision.
Amen.

“For by grace, you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:8–10

Harvest of Grace

When Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful” He wasn’t speaking of wheat fields but of souls. The Lord of the Harvest sees a world ready to be gathered into His barn by grace. As Lutherans we confess that salvation is entirely God’s doing, “not by works, so that no one may boast.” Faith itself is a gift planted by the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments. Thanksgiving is even more deeply rooted when we realize that before we ever harvested blessings, God first harvested us.

Ephesians tells us that we are saved by grace through faith, not from ourselves. This means our lives are evidence of God’s mercy, not our accomplishment. Jesus also reminds His disciples in John 4 that the fields are ripe. God is already at work preparing hearts, softening soil, and opening doors. We are called not to produce the harvest, but to join the work He is already doing.

As we thank God for earthly provisions, we must also give thanks for His spiritual harvest—every baptism, every restored sinner, every answered prayer, every moment when Christ pulls us deeper into His love. The greatest harvest is not in barns but in heaven.

Lord of the Harvest, thank You for gathering me into Your kingdom by grace alone. Open my eyes to see people who need Your love and make me willing to be Your worker in the field. Strengthen my faith, plant seeds where none exist, and gather many into Your eternal harvest. Amen.

“Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” Matthew 6:25

Daily Bread and Daily Trust

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to ask for “daily bread”, a phrase Luther explained as everything we need to live: food, home, work, peace, family, and even good government. Thanksgiving becomes an act of trust, recognizing that God will be present each day with His ongoing care. Psalm 145 tells us that the eyes of all look to God, and He opens His hand to satisfy every living thing.

Yet Jesus also knows our tendency to worry. That’s why He urges us not to be anxious about tomorrow. Like a loving Father, He invites us to rest in His provision. The birds do not labor, yet God feeds them. The lilies do not toil, yet God clothes them. If God cares so beautifully for His creation, how much more will He care for His children? Thanksgiving reminds us that we are not alone; God is with us in every need, every uncertainty, every tomorrow.

Philippians 4 invites us to bring our requests to God with thanksgiving. Gratitude and trust go hand in hand. When we thank God for what He has given, we also trust Him for what He has promised. The Lord of the Harvest who provides today will not fail us tomorrow.

Heavenly Father, You provide all that I need for life each day. Teach me to trust You more fully and to bring my worries to You with a thankful heart. Help me rest in Your faithful care, knowing You are always working for my good. Amen.

Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:17,18

Gratitude in All Seasons

Giving thanks “in all circumstances” is one of Scripture’s most challenging commands. It does not mean pretending everything is perfect. Rather, it means anchoring our gratitude not in circumstances, but in Christ. Seasons of life change—some are abundant, others are barren—but God’s faithfulness never shifts. Habakkuk 3:17-18 models this beautifully; though the fig tree does not blossom and fields produce no food, he will still rejoice in Jesus his Savior.

We recognize that God works even through suffering. Romans 8:28 tells us that “we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” This passage assures us that God works all things for good for those who love Him—even when that good may be hidden from our eyes. In difficult seasons, thanksgiving becomes an act of faith, proclaiming that God is still present, still good, and still working for our redemption.

Psalms 34 invites us to bless the Lord at all times, not because every moment feels good, but because God remains good. Thanksgiving in hardships softens our hearts and reminds us that Christ walks with us through every valley. In fact, some of the richest spiritual harvests come from seasons of loss, uncertainty, or waiting.

Whether this has been a year of joy or trial, God’s promises remain true. Gratitude lifts our eyes from what has changed to Jesus, the One who never changes.

Faithful Lord, thank You for being my strength in every season. Teach me gratitude even in hardship, trusting Your goodness and Your presence when life feels overwhelming. Anchor my heart in Your unchanging promises. Amen.

“Now the one who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will also provide and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for all generosity, which produces thanksgiving to God through us.” 2 Corinthians 9:10-11 CSB

Blessed to Bless

God blesses us not only for our own benefit, but so that His love may overflow to others. Paul writes, “You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way.” Luther taught that good works are simply the fruit of faith—natural expressions of a heart transformed by God’s grace. When we recognize the generosity of the Lord of the Harvest, we naturally become generous ourselves.

In Genesis we are reminded of God’s promise to Abraham: “I will bless you... and you will be a blessing.” This pattern has not changed. God blesses His people so that His goodness can move outward into the world. Hebrews encourages us not to neglect doing good and sharing with others, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Generosity is not measured by amount but by love. A kind word, a shared meal, a patient ear, or a gentle prayer can be a harvest of blessing in someone else’s life. Jesus calls us to let our light shine so that others may glorify the Father. When we love our neighbors, we point them toward the God who first loved us. Thanksgiving becomes our goal when we realize that God’s gifts are never meant to stop with us.

Generous Father, thank You for every blessing You pour into my life. Make me a vessel of Your love so that others may experience Your goodness through my actions. Help me give freely as You have freely given to me. Amen.

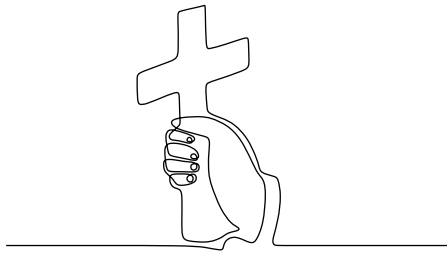
Weekend Rest Journal

1. Write down five everyday blessings—small ones you often overlook—and thank God aloud for each.
2. Pray for one person who needs the hope of Christ. Ask God to open a door where His grace can be seen through your words or actions.
3. Identify one worry that keeps resurfacing. Release it to God in prayer, naming it specifically.
4. Name one difficult experience from this past year. Thank God for how He carried you through and for the unseen good He is still working.
5. Choose one practical act of generosity today—a gift, a word, a prayer, or a service to someone in need.

[illegible]

Lord of harvest, grant anew,
Joy and strength to work for you,
Till the gath'ring nations all
See your light and heed your call.

Jonathan F. Bahnmaier, Tr: Catherine Winkworth
The Lutheran Hymnal 507



Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Hebrews 13:8

