

Friday, October 7, 2022

Read Luke 1:1-25

Why We are Doing This

Luke's introduction seems like the perfect time to consider why we continue to share these devotions. When we started writing these daily reflections on God's Word, I put together a four-week schedule. 772 devotions later we are still going, and we will continue to do so.

Over the coming months this time will be spent in the companion books of Luke and Acts. At the outset, Luke makes his purpose for writing clear, and it is the reason why we keep writing 6 days a week. Luke dedicates his work to Theophilus (one whose name could be translated as "beloved of God") saying, **"it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."**

We don't know who Theophilus was, but these are just as much intended "for you," o beloved child of God! We share God's Word for the same reason that Luke shared the good news of Jesus – it is for you! For your benefit. For your salvation, for your peace. The coming of Jesus into the flesh, to share our humanity, carry our sorrows, suffer for our sin, and rise victorious to give us life – every bit is for you. This good news gives life and shapes our lives in time and eternity. Every day we need to be reminded that this living hope in Christ is for us, undeserving though we may be.

As frail, undeserving sinners, we need the constant encouragement of God speaking His Word to us – comforting us, correcting us, forgiving us. We need this regularly **"that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."**

So, we continue to write and rehearse the stories and teachings of the Scriptures for here we meet our Lord anew each day with the certain hope that He comes to bring life and hope for you!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I am humbled to be Your beloved. Encourage me today in the remarkable news that all You have accomplished is for even me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, October 8, 2022

Read [Luke 1:26-56](#)

“Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”

At first glance, the transition from studying the Exodus of God’s people from Egypt to a devotion on Luke’s Gospel seems like a rather harsh “shifting of the gears.” From the deserts of Sinai to Nazareth. From crowds of countless travelers crossing the Red Sea – to a young woman, all alone, in a city in Galilee. But Micah hit the nail on the head Thursday when he wrote about the Tabernacle – “God With Us”. The first words spoken by the angel Gabriel to Mary were, **“the Lord is with you!”**

In this fallen world, that might sound like the opening pitch from a salesman about to sell you some prime swampland. So, hearing that Mary was “greatly troubled” by this shows she’s a cautious person, wise to the ways of scam artists of her day. But the messenger’s words continued, promising things that no one could possibly believe: your Son **“will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.”** **“The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”**

Only a fool could believe such a tall tale! But, when you hear Mary’s incredible, faith-filled wisdom in the words which poured out of her heart about this, you know she’s no fool. Mary “found favor with the Lord” because she knew God’s promises from the Old Testament. She knew God had heard His people’s groanings in Egypt and delivered them from slavery. She knew Abraham and Sarah had miraculously been given a child in old age, just like her relatives Zechariah and Elizabeth were even now expecting. And she knew God had promised Joseph’s ancestor, King David, that **“Your throne shall be established forever.”** She knew these things and, through God’s Spirit, she believed.

After God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt, Moses sang, **“Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.”** Looking ahead to what her Son, her Savior would do, Mary sang, **“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.”** And, just as Moses had witnessed God’s deliverance, she already felt the deliverance that Jesus would offer, **“He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”**

So, as Mary prayed, we join with her: **“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”** Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, October 10, 2022

Read Luke 1:57-80

Because of the Tender Mercy of our God

Nine months of silence can really change your tune! The last time that Zechariah was speaking, he was doubting that God could or would actually provide the child that he and his wife Elizabeth had been praying for over decades. Now at the naming of John, “he spoke, blessing God.” Well, that’s quite a change! Before God’s promises were all somewhat suspect, but now? **“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people!”**

Certainly this 8 lb. 3 oz. (give or take) answer to prayer is the catalyst for this change. Zechariah sees with his own eyes the faithfulness of God to carry out just what He promises. But this is where God’s speaking through Zechariah also teaches us. The miracle child John is not the whole point. The miracle child John is confirmation that God will keep His greater and wider ranging promises. Why? Not only because He keeps His word, but He keeps His word **“because of the tender mercy of our God.”**

In the tender mercy of God, an elderly couple is given unexpected joy in their old age. In the tender mercy of God, Zechariah still receives a son (and his voice back) even though He doubted God’s messenger. In the tender mercy of God, John will prepare the way for the Lord’s own coming. In the tender mercy of God, this coming will be for salvation **“in the forgiveness of (our) sins.”** None of these events should have been expected by Zechariah or by the rest of sinful humanity, but such is the compassionate heart of our God. He not only keeps His promises, but He also keeps them in order to bring forgiveness and joy.

Prayer – Dear Father in Heaven, I am amazed at how Your tender mercies comforted Zechariah and Elizabeth, and also me. Thank you for your tender mercy that knows no bounds. Lead me to show such compassion as a reflection of your mercy to me. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, October 11, 2022

Read Luke 2:1-20

You, too, are His Child

It is amazing and a comfort to see how God uses even the attacks of the devil to fulfill His Word and His desires. When He does that even in His own Son's life, I am reassured that He is doing that in mine as well.

The devil attacked God's Son even before He was born. The emperor, for his own reasons, put a tax on everyone in the empire, requiring everyone to pay it in his own hometown. But this put a tremendous burden on His mother Mary. Mary is 9 months pregnant and forced to walk three full days to get to Joseph's hometown. No wonder the baby, Jesus, comes at the end! Worse yet there is no room for them in the normal guest places - she gives birth in a stable.

So, God's Word is fulfilled - Jesus is from Bethlehem, the birthplace of Israel's human kings! This is promised in His Word. The savior is born in a stable - where the Passover lambs would be kept safe until their sacrifice. God's Passover lamb born with His honored life mates. God uses evil against the desires of the father of evil, to accomplish His purposes. What a promise.

So, I too am His child. He shows me how He keeps His promise, making good come out of what appears to be evil. He shows me how I should trust Him. There are so many things going wrong in the world today. Yet here I see a promise that their results will praise God and keep me in Him.

Prayer: Thank you, my Lord. Thank you for Your faithful work, preserving Your people in the midst of evil. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, October 12, 2022

Read Luke 2:21-52

His Name was Called Jesus . . . Salvation

“And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” Luke 2:21

The first twelve years of Jesus’ life have been described in thirty-one verses in Luke 2:21-52. The Son of God was conceived, born, and named Jesus, as told by the angel (see also Matt 1:21). Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day; He was presented to the Lord at the temple, and His family returned to Nazareth, **“And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him”** (v. 40).

Back to the beginning of this text at verse 22. **“And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’).”** Jesus is presented to Yahweh in Jerusalem. The Word of God in the flesh is among His people. The Holy Spirit was upon Simeon, a devout and righteous man waiting for the comfort and consolation of Israel, **“And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ”** (v. 26). Simeon went to the temple in the Spirit and took Jesus in his arms, blessed God, **“Lord, now you are letting your [δοῦλόν–slave] depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel”** (vv29-32; see Isaiah 42:6; 45:25; 46:13; 49:6; 52:10; 60:3). Simeon held the Christ that was promised to come in his hands, God in the flesh, Yahweh’s salvation for all, Jew and Gentile.

Twelve years later, Jesus is going to the Feast of Passover with His parents. On the way back from Jerusalem, Jesus stayed behind, and his parents did not realize it. Now, finding him in Jerusalem in the temple after three days of distress searching for him, Jesus says, **“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them”** (vv. 49-51). Jesus is astonished at his parents, for He must be about His Father’s business. Jesus is the Son of God, given to die and rise to redeem you and me from sin, death, and Satan.

Prayer - Lord Jesus. Through Your Word, Sacraments, and Spirit, bless my life so that things that seem mundane become a foretaste of blessedness in Your eternal presence. Amen (*TLSB*)

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, October 13, 2022
Read Luke 3:1-22

The King's Herald

When I think of John the Baptist, I often picture a Medieval herald of some kind. His job was to tell news of current events and, on occasion, to announce the entrance of royalty. In Medieval times, heralds called for people to get down on their knees and bow their heads before royalty. Heralds called the people to make themselves low out of respect for their king or queen.

Well, John is nothing short of a herald. We mostly know him as the guy who lived in the wilderness, wore animal fur, and ate bugs, but there is so much more to John that we should recognize and contemplate. He announced the coming of God to all who would listen. John's purpose was to prepare people for Jesus, just as a herald prepared the way for royalty. Throughout his entire ministry, he worked with one hand on the person who he was baptizing and the other hand pointing to Jesus. To John the reality of the incarnation was very clear: "the King is coming! We need to be prepared!"

Jesus was coming. The King was on His way, and it was up to John to announce His arrival. It was his duty to make sure that everyone knew what to do when He came. With this being said, he called for all people to confess their sins and change their ways. John called for the people to repent, to make themselves low. He called for them to approach Jesus, their King, with humility and lowliness because only then could Jesus lift them up. John baptized with water for repentance, but Jesus baptizes with the Spirit for life and salvation.

We, today, are very much like John the Baptist. We are heralds, and the King is coming. It is our duty to prepare ourselves and one another for His coming. May we like John announce to ourselves, each other, and all who might listen, "The King is coming! Get down on your knees! Make yourselves low! For only He can raise you up into glory and life."

Prayer: "Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon ourselves the armor of light now in the time of this mortal life in which Your Son, Jesus Christ, came to visit us in great humility, that in the Last Day, when He shall come again in glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

- *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, "Prayer for Newness of life in Christ," pg. 1319.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, October 14, 2022

Read Luke 3:23-38

Not Just a List

Luke's genealogy has SOOO much to tell us about Jesus. It might just seem like a listing of relatives, but, in them, we get glimpses of what Jesus has come to accomplish as His ministry is about to begin. Here is just a sample...

Jesus is the son of Joseph – adopted by Joseph as a hint of the greater adoption we receive through Jesus by our Heavenly Father.

Jesus is the son of David – our king who will rule over His people forever (see 2 Samuel 7)

Jesus is the son of Boaz – one who redeems us, buying us back from slavery to sin, death, and Satan (see Ruth 3-4)

Jesus is the son of Judah – Judah was far from righteous (see Genesis 38), making it clear that membership in the Messiah's family is by grace, not works.

Jesus is the son of Jacob – Jacob struggled with God (Genesis 32), and our Lord wrestles with God on the cross, carrying our sin, in order to gain for us an everlasting blessing.

Jesus is the son of Isaac – Jesus is the sacrifice for us and for all that Isaac was spared from being (Genesis 22)

Jesus is the son of Abraham – Jesus is the Father of many nations, as the promise to Abraham that His family would bless the whole earth is realized in Jesus.

Jesus is the son of Noah – as the creation was begun again through the flood, Jesus has come to begin a new creation beginning in His resurrection. While we wait for His return to see the creation fully renewed, in baptism we are made new creations in Christ even now. (2 Cor. 5:17, 1 Peter 3:20-21)

Jesus is the son of Adam – Humanity is begun anew in Jesus. "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the son of God – Jesus is not only humanity personified (as the son of Adam), but is also truly God, and in Him, God the Father is truly known. (John 14:8)

So, Jesus makes possible our adoption into God's family, rules as our everlasting King, gains us a blessing, is the sacrifice for our sin, is Himself a blessing to every nation, is the start of a new creation, is the essence of humanity, and is the revealer of God. Thanks be to God for this beautiful list!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in You all God's promises through the ages are realized. Thank you for coming to bring these untold blessings even to sinners like me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, October 15, 2022

Read [Luke 4:1-15](#)

“Hunger”

The story of Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness carries many lessons. The parallels to Israel, similarly wandering the desert, are many. They wandered 40 years; Jesus for 40 days. They were often hungry; our account tells us, **“he ate nothing during those (40) days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.”** They were tempted; Jesus was tempted. Even the words of Scripture that Jesus used were words spoken by Moses to the people in the wilderness.

But the differences are many and significant. When the Israelites were tempted, they built golden calves. They grumbled against Moses and God. They demanded food and water – “Now!” Jesus, on the other hand committed no sin.

But what stands out to me as odd is just a little detail. The reading points out that Jesus ate nothing for 40 days, and then considers it necessary to point out that **“He was hungry.”** I don’t know about you, but if I don’t get breakfast within an hour of waking up, I’m hungry. So why is it so important to point out that Jesus was hungry after missing 40 breakfasts, 40 lunches, and 40 suppers? Of course He was hungry!?

Think about it, though. Had God ever been hungry before? Before Jesus, does the Bible ever record God eating anything? Did God eat the sacrifices offered to Him in the Temple? No. Not until Jesus did God have a mouth with teeth to chew, a tongue to taste, and a belly to be full and content. And, after 40 days without food, Jesus was hungry.

As true God, Jesus may not have even been able to sin, and He certainly demonstrated a willpower previously unseen by Israelites in the wilderness. But he experienced hunger to the 40th degree. A person can live without water for maybe a week. It takes longer to die from lack of food. But 40 days is pretty close. And Jesus did that to understand – to experience – everything you and I experience in our lives.

You and I, like the Israelites in the wilderness, often sin when faced with temptation. Even when we try our hardest to not sin, to repeatedly say “no” to sin, and to turn our backs on temptation – we still find ourselves failing our Lord, again.

This story isn’t told as a formula to avoid sin (although immersing yourself in God’s Word is helpful). It’s not to illustrate Jesus’ power over the devil (although He trounced Satan!). No, Jesus’ temptation shows us that our Savior knows everything we go through. He knows what hunger, pain, suffering, and hurt feel like. And, that despite all those temptations to take the easy way out, to compromise with the devil, our Jesus is victorious over sin. Our sin. Because He experienced all the sins of the world on the cross, He also experienced the wages of sin. But He rose, victorious, and offers His victory to you.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You know me inside and out. You know what I think, what I feel, and You provide everything I need. Thank you, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, October 17, 2022

Read Luke 4:16-30

A Not So Exclusive Deal

Exclusive Deal! Just for you!

This was the subject line in the email, but from the fact that the email was coming from Amazon on a day when they were rolling out big sales, something told me this deal was anything but exclusive. There is something exciting about getting an exclusive deal, though. We are made to feel special, unique, but also it plays to our sinful desire to want to be better than others. “Look what I have that you don’t have!” Sure, that attitude is petty, but that doesn’t mean we don’t feel and think this way at times.

Jesus came to His hometown synagogue. He was soon to be a celebrity preacher “**proclaim(ing) good news to the poor**” and a healer giving “**sight to the blind.**” The little crowd in the Nazareth synagogue were beaming with pride as he read the scroll with an easy command of the Hebrew (it’s easy for us to forget that most people spoke the related language of Aramaic). Not just this, He claimed that “**Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.**” At this, the crowd “**spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming out of his mouth.**” This was exclusive access to the One that everyone was talking about. In speaking well of Him, they were also speaking well of themselves. “Look what good is finally coming out of Nazareth!”

At least, that was the attitude until He kept speaking. He would not be doing any amazing signs. Not just this, Jesus pointed out that prophets usually are listened to at home. They might be bragged about or asked for favors, but listened to when the message became personal? No. So, Elijah left Israel to a widow in Zarephath. Elisha left Israel and cleansed Naaman the Syrian. To this, the crowd doesn’t respond well. They were “**filled with wrath,**” “**drove him out of town,**” and attempted to “**throw him down the cliff.**”

The point to all this? The mercy of God is not exclusive, but to be shared with all. This may not always be received well, but since the extravagant, all-welcoming love of Christ has come even to us – be generous in sharing this universal hope with everyone.

Prayer – Dear Father, my sin should exclude me from Your mercy, but in Christ, You forgive and welcome all who trust in Him by faith. Lead me to be generous in sharing Your all-encompassing love. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, October 18, 2022

Read Luke 4:31-44

My Lord Has Spoken

How the devil wants to confuse me, to load me up with doubts about everything. I look at my life and I wonder if I can do even what I have done in the past. I look at the Bible and wonder if I understand God correctly in what He has said. I wonder... But there is a counter to all this.

My Lord has spoken. He doesn't speak strangely, He doesn't speak in hard to understand, difficult to figure out thoughts and words. Rather He speaks with authority. When He sees the confusion and doubts, He speaks saying, "I am your salvation!". Notice there is no "ifs, "ands" or "buts". He is my salvation.

And so I understand my doubts. I was correct, well sort of, I can't do right, I can't do what I see in my past. But I am not alone. With me is One who Can. Jesus never fails, He moves in my life, He speaks and washes out the questions, drives out the works of the devil. When God moves, it is done!

So I turn to Him, I stop looking at myself and look to He who does and continues to do. My efforts are my problems. It is when I look at how I can do things I wonder. I am not able or responsible for doing good, I can't - but He who is with me can and does those things through me. Leaving me to marvel at His works. Visible in and around me. Truly His Words are authoritative.

Prayer: Continue O Lord. Continue to show your works in my life and continue to uphold me. Let those around me see You according to your Words. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, October 19, 2022

Read Luke 5:1-16

Captured and Cleansed—Jesus Prays

“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.”

Luke 5:10

There are many fears and phobias we sinful creatures have and face. We are astonishingly afraid of things in God’s creation—the dark, light, moon, sun, stars, heights, airplanes, loss, gain, small spaces, open spaces, canyons, caves, bats, spiders, snakes, worms, fish, cows, crowds, public speaking, driving, clowns; afraid of myths—easter bunnies, santa clauses, bigfoots, leprechauns, trolls, Disney, marvel, DC comics; afraid of the weather—clouds, storms, tornados, hurricanes; afraid of germs, smells, taste, noise, blindness, things out of sight, suicide, death, dying, disease, leprosy, sickness, flu, cancer, plagues, famines, pandemic, drought, dust, liquid, milk, water, being under water, boats, being alone, devils, God, Jesus. Look it up, most if not all, of these, have a ____phobia word to describe them. James, John, and Simon were astonished at Jesus’ command and the miracle of the catch of fish, and Simon Peter, frightened of Jesus, said, **“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord”** (v.8). Almighty God was at work before their eyes and was standing in front of them all. Jesus commanded and spoke with authority and power, and it was so.

Jesus said, **“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men”** (v. 10). Jesus, the Son of God, the Word become flesh for, by in, and through which everything was made and created said, **“do not be afraid—(μὴ φοβοῦ, *mē phobou*)”** to Peter. So, do not fear or be frightened, says Jesus.

*side notes: φοβέω, *phobeō* is where we get the word phobia. Jesus also **“said to Simon . . . ‘you will be catching men—ἀνθρώπους ἔση ζωγρῶν—(*zōgreōn*, captured alive).”**

And while in one of the cities in Galilee, Jesus made a leper clean by saying, **“be clean”** (v. 13). Jesus speaks again, and it is so the power of God. These performative speech acts of Jesus, the Son of God, are the same power that spoke creation into existence and commanded the catch of fish and healed the leper and the infirmities of the people of the crowds gathered to hear Jesus and be healed by Him.

“But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray” (v. 16). Jesus would go away to the wilderness to pray to the Father for His divine will and work to be carried out in the plan of salvation for you and me to be captured in His nets and cleansed of our leprous sin. We need not be afraid, for Jesus rose from the dead on the third day after His crucifixion and appeared to His disciples, saying, **“Peace be with you”** (John 20:19, 21, 26), for He is our Lord and our God.

Prayer – “Stay with me, Lord, for I am a sinful person. Grant me repentance and a new life in service to You,” for Your perfect love casts out fear. Amen. (*parentheses TLSB*).

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, October 20, 2022
Read Luke 5:17-26

Jesus' Authority

Authority is a fickle thing. On earth, the term "authority" typically means to have permission to do something. Police Officers are given authority to enforce the law by the Captain. Captains, then, are given authority by the Chief of Police. The Chief of Police has authority only as far as the law allows. So today, there is nothing higher than the law to establish a good and ordered society. All authority held by chiefs, captains, and officers only extends as far as the law allows. Everything that is done outside of this authority is considered wrong and bad.

In our reading from Luke, we find a clash of authority. The Pharisees were like ancient police officers of the religious world. They knew the Mosaic law and had authority to enforce it so far as the law allowed. Anything that was outside of this law was considered wrong and bad. To them, Jesus appeared to be outside of the law. In fact, He claimed to forgive a man's sins! There was not a more blatant disobedience of the law because it is clear that only God Himself can forgive sins! To them, it was very straightforward and clearcut. Jesus was a subject to the law like everyone else, He broke that law, and now He must be punished. This is actually a very logical way of thinking that adheres to how we view social laws today.

But the Pharisees did not realize who Jesus is. Jesus is God. He is not subject to the law as we are. Indeed, He is above the law. Jesus isn't given authority by the law. No, Jesus *gives* authority to the law! Jesus is the highest good. There is nothing above Him.

So contrary to the Pharisees' understanding, Jesus has authority to forgive sins because He is God. Jesus has authority to heal sickness and disability because He is life itself. Jesus has authority to save because He is the one and only sacrifice, the fulfillment of the law. Jesus has authority to do all things because Jesus is authority. And with this authority, He has chosen to forgive, redeem, and save you and I and all who believe. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: "Heavenly Father, God of all grace, govern our hearts that we may never forget Your blessings but steadfastly thank and praise You for all Your goodness in this life until, with all Your saints, we praise You eternally in Your heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

- *Treasure of Daily Prayer*, "Prayer of Thanksgiving to God," pg, 1318.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, October 21, 2022

Read Luke 5:27-39

What are YOU Doing Here?

Pastors are much like school teachers to young children in that they belong only in a certain place. If a child sees a teacher at the grocery store, her whole world is shaken. Often times, young children believe teachers live at school. I've had the same experience with our preschoolers. Many of them believe that I live in my office, and that I never need to leave the church grounds.

Some years ago, I had to return a sweater to Old Navy. On my way home, I stopped by the store and one of the HLECC preschoolers was in line with his mom ahead of me. The little guy just stared at me. He didn't wave or say hi. He just stared. His encouraged him to say hi. He said, "no." Then he asked her, "what is he doing HERE?" She replied, "Maybe he's buying new clothes." The little boy came back quickly. "He doesn't need any new clothes. He already has pastor clothes." Clearly, I just did not belong.

The Pharisees and Scribes sure thought Jesus was out of place. They didn't wave or say hi. They just stared as wondered, "what is he doing HERE?" They were convinced Jesus was in the wrong place, not because He had plenty of Jesus clothes, but because they decided that "tax collectors and sinners" were not Jesus-type people. But Jesus made it clear, these were just the sort of people He had come to be with. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

In other words, in the midst of tax collectors and sinners was precisely where Jesus belonged! You see, outside of the comfortable surroundings of heaven, it would be completely appropriate to consider that Jesus was out of place everywhere in this broken world, except He came to help us sinners. He had not come to hang out with those who thought they had everything figured out. He had not come to congratulate those who see themselves as righteous on their own. He came to heal, forgive, and free sinners. He still comes for the same purposes in His Word and Sacrament. Thanks be to Jesus that He came to where He doesn't quite belong to open to us eternity where we definitely wouldn't belong without Him.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, forgive and heal me, a sinner. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, October 22, 2022

Read [Luke 6:1-11](#)

“The Lord of the Sabbath”



Which order of the worship service does this picture depict?

- A. Divine Service, Setting One
- B. Matins
- C. Evening Prayer
- D. The medical service set up in their sanctuary for their community by a Christian Church in Homer, Alaska in the early days of COVID

By the time of our reading for today, Jesus’ ministry had exploded onto the scene. He’s called His disciples, healed the sick, cast out demons, and forgiven sins. And the scribes and Pharisees don’t like it. Jesus is saying and doing things that only the Messiah can and should do. Therefore, in their unbelieving hearts, He must be caught in His tricks and stopped.

In today’s reading, Jesus claims the right to overrule Sabbath laws like King David had done. And, He healed a sick man on the Sabbath, again in violation of the prohibition to work on the Sabbath, and miraculously healed someone, a deed that only the Messiah should do. The scribes and Pharisees walked away, fuming in anger at Jesus’ offenses. “The ego of this carpenter’s son!”

But Jesus’ message is two-fold: “**The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath**” and “**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.** (Mark 2:27)” While the Pharisees didn’t have ears to hear this message, the Church through the ages has interpreted this in a way that makes “D” the correct answer to the quiz.

Sanctuaries across the Christian Church are ordinarily “holy” (meaning “set aside”) for worship services. But Jesus made it clear that our worship places aren’t to be worshipped, but may be used to worship God through service to our neighbor. But that lesson is just the tip of the iceberg. Jesus Himself didn’t come for the Sabbath; He came for people. He preached and taught and healed people because He loves them. He went to synagogues and the Temple to worship (and teach), but He lived and died for people. And so, the Church’s mission does not end after an hour every Sunday morning. We go to worship to be recharged, but our mission is a 24/7 calling to help our neighbor at every opportunity that confronts us.

Prayer: Lord of the Sabbath, fill us in worship with Your divine Word of healing, forgiveness, and strength. Then, use us to show Your love to our neighbors. Amen.

Read about [the Homer church](#)

Read a [broader explanation](#) of how churches have been used for “other than worship”

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, October 24, 2022

Read Luke 6:12-26

Jesus' Prayer Vigil For His Church

What would it take for you to stay up all night in prayer? On occasion, people will hold candlelight vigil's around the clock following a tragedy or, perhaps, if their child is in poor health and needs emergency surgery. We can probably come up with a handful of extraordinary circumstances when we or those around us might skip a night of sleep in order to pound on heaven's door in prayer.

Jesus stays up all night to pray for His Church. Before listing off the apostles, who were selected out of the larger group of disciples, we could easily miss what our Lord does. "In these days (while being chastised for not taking the Sabbath seriously enough – see Luke 6:1-11) he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God." We are not specifically told what Jesus was praying about, but it's fair to say that He spoke to the Father about the selection of the 12 apostles. It's also a fair presumption to think that while He is skipping the rest of sleep, He will not miss resting in the presence of His Father in prayer. I'd say, it's also fair to say that He is praying for strength as the crowds of Pharisees begin to discuss "what they might do to (Jesus)" (Lk 6:11).

Our Lord stays up all night because sending out messengers to share the saving news of Jesus – that's worth losing sleep over. Making sure that all people (including, eventually, you and me) hear this good news is more important than getting some shut eye. It's easy for us to see the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, but you were the focus of His attention long before Calvary as well. He has not only given His life for you and risen for you, but He has also prayed those He would send from the apostles to missionaries to pastors and teachers. Such is God's great love for you, for me, for His whole Church that well before the cross and empty tomb and the sending of the Spirit, He spent the whole night in a prayer vigil for His Church.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, Your tireless love astounds me, as you spent the whole night in prayer for Your people. Lead me to be faithful in praying for Your church and the expansion of the Gospel message. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, October 25, 2022

Read Luke 8:26-39

Lord, Help Me

I find there are ideas and desires that can grab ahold of me, trying and sometimes making me do them, even when I know they are wrong. Sin is such a dreadful master, and whenever I try to defeat it myself - I lose. But praise the Lord, I am not alone in this world.

When Jesus comes, and builds faith in me, then He is the bulwark, the fortress that protects me from myself. "Lord, help me!" When I turn to Him, He brings me through, He suppresses the bad power within me, releasing me to joy and service to others for Him. He is the key for my life.

There are those who think that God is only there for the last day. At that time, they think He will judge them; but as we all know, if that were so, we would be lost forever. Rather, He is a personal God, One who will live with us, Who took on Himself the penalties of my failing Him. After having done that, who could expect Him to NOT care for us on a continuing basis.

So, when sin knocks on my door, or rather pounds its way into my mind, Jesus is there with me to eject it back out again. I read His Word, the Bible, to teach and remind myself of His love, His activity in support of His people. He cares for individuals, that is He cares for me. With that reminder, I am secure, the idea that sin could force me at all - wrong, and He preserves me through it all.

Prayer: Thank you God for your continuing power on my behalf. Help me to turn to You before I get into trouble. In Your Name, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, October 26, 2022

Read Luke 7:1-17

God Has Visited His People

“Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!”

Luke 7:16

After Jesus had healed, restored, and taught **“all”** of the crowd (healing all their illnesses and curing everyone harassed by demons). Jesus entered Capernaum and healed a deathly ill slave of a centurion. The centurion said to Jesus, **“say the word, and let my servant be healed”** (v. 7). Jesus wondered or marveled at the centurion and said to the crowd, **“I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.’ And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.”** (v. 9-10).

Jesus raised the only son of a widow in Nain from the dead. **“And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’ Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother”** (vv. 13-15). The Son of God’s Almighty creative power spoke to the dead young man, and the corpse obeyed the Lord’s voice and arose and began to speak. Amazing! Fear (φόβος, *phobos*—alarm, fright) came over the crowd (like when Simon fell to his knees, see Luke 5:8; 26), who had witnessed this authority of Jesus. What can we say? Well, the crowd **“glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!”** (v. 16).

We see in Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses said to Israel, **“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—.”** And looking earlier in Luke’s account, we see Zechariah said, **“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people”** (Luke 1:68). These texts reveal how God our Savior was coming and had come to redeem His people and the world from sin. The eternal Son of God incarnate came for you and me. Jesus’ presence is with us today in His Word and Sacraments, given to us freely on account of His blood shed for all.

Prayer – Precious Lord Jesus, You have visited and redeemed Your people by Your glorious death atoning sacrifice for all our sins and Your victorious resurrection from the dead. You have buried and raised us up from the dead with You in Holy Baptism. Thank you for giving faith and life in You in Your Holy Supper, granting us always the forgiveness of sins. For You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, October 27, 2022
Read Luke 7:18-35

Children Before God

Children are stubborn. I've worked with a lot of kids in my life, and I can confidently say that one of the biggest challenges is persuading them of something. Kids do not change their minds easily. Due to their brains not being fully formed, they are incapable of processing information and opinions logically. Instead, they rely almost exclusively on emotions. And emotions are exponentially more difficult to change than logical understanding. Therefore, nearly every kid I've encountered has shared a single trait: stubbornness. Kids are incredibly stubborn, and sometimes nothing you say or do can change their minds.

In our reading from Luke, Jesus addresses doubt and stubbornness. The previous verses of the chapter show Jesus healing others and even raising a man from the dead. These are amazing miracles! But even so, the people doubted His authority, including John the Baptist. Now, John and Jesus were two sides of the same coin. John proclaimed a call for repentance while Jesus proclaimed an invitation to grace. John was the last prophet of the Old Covenant while Jesus was the first and only sacrifice of the New Covenant. John died a martyr's death shortly before Jesus Himself suffered the sacrificial martyrdom of death on the cross. The two men complimented each other, and it is safe to say that John was Jesus' partner in the ministry.

But here in Luke, even John was doubting Jesus' authority as Savior. So Jesus cranked the miracles up to eleven. He healed diseases and plagues, cast out evil spirits, and brought sight to the blind. How could anyone doubt after such a showing! This was certainly enough for John as well as for many with Jesus, but it was not enough for the Pharisees. The Pharisees were, instead, acting like children. They threw out logic and reason, ignored the truth, and stubbornly reject Jesus as the Messiah. They had adopted the wrong childish trait. Instead of living with child-like trust as Jesus tells us to, they were living with child-like stubbornness. And this led them to doubt and even reject Jesus.

Thanks be to God that we have been given faith. For all are children before God. Praise be to God that we are children of faith trusting in His promises rather than children of doubt stubbornly rejecting His grace.

Prayer: "God's own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ! He, because I could not pay it, gave my full redemption price. Do I need earth's treasures many? I have one worth more than any that brought me salvation free lasting to eternity!"

- LSB 594, "God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It"

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, October 28, 2022

Read Luke 7:36-50

Forgiven Much...Love Much

In my years as a pastor, I've learned many lessons that they I was never specifically taught at the seminary. I've learned that you always take a cup of coffee and drink it when it is offered to you (even if you don't really drink coffee). I've learned that if I hand out candy at the Children's Message that I need to make sure the kids ask their parents before they open and eat it (mostly this is because I had one group that just tore open the candy right at the front of the church and left their wrappers, and I had to crawl around in my robe to pick up the trash. What a sight!). I've also learned that the most enthusiastic members are often those who were brought to faith by the Holy Spirit as adults.

This last point is highlighted by Jesus in our reading. As Jesus was sitting down to supper, a woman wept and washed his feet with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with oil. His feet. Caked with sand and mud from walking dusty roads. We might think this is extreme behavior (and kind of gross). The Pharisees agreed.

So, Jesus told a story of two men who owed money. One owed 50 days' wages (a large amount!). The second owed 500 days' wages (a huge amount!). Both had their debts forgiven, wiped out on the spot. And Jesus asks, "Now which of them will love (the moneylender) more?" The answer is clear – the one forgiven two years' wages!

Jesus' point is that the person (like the woman at his feet) who sees the incredible debt he or she has been forgiven will be overwhelmed with love to Jesus.

Dear Christian, you have been forgiven an incredible debt of sin. The amount that you have been forgiven is so great it can't be calculated, let alone paid back. Your only hope (and my only hope) has been that Jesus has wiped the slate clean. New Christians often see this more clearly – thus the extravagant response of the woman in our reading. But the debt you have been forgiven is just as great as any other sinner, no matter how long you have known the forgiveness of Jesus. Do not lose sight of the truly extreme behavior – that is, the extravagant, reckless love of our Savior who has given all to liquidate your sin debt to the Father. Having been forgiven much...love much the Lord who has loved you.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, forgive me when I lose sight of Your extravagant love for me. Give me a heart that loves You and others in joyfully gratitude for the love You have shown to me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, October 29, 2022

Read [Luke 8:1-15](#)

“The Parable of the Sower”

“Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.” Luke 8:1

They say that you can’t be a farmer without having faith in God. When you see the first fragile tip of a new plant push through the soil and peek out into sunlight, it’s a miracle. But today, even with all our genetic engineering, million dollar farming equipment, and satellite-controlled application of herbicide, crops still sometimes fail. Or the rains don’t come when needed. Or come in torrents. Or a hurricane comes through just before harvest, flattening eight foot tall corn to the ground.

Not too much has really changed since Jesus told the Parable of the Sower. The marvel isn’t that so many things can destroy crops, but that anything actually grows at all! It’s kind of like me and fishing – I expect to catch nothing, and I’m astounded if I actually reel in something.

But, when Jesus is the Sower, and He plants His Word in hearts readied by the Holy Spirit, it oftentimes “yields a hundredfold.” Our farmers use science to guide their planting. They’d never waste seed on rocky soil, or thorny ground. But Jesus casts His Word everywhere. It landed on Mary Magdalene, tormented by seven demons. What a waste! Who would expect that to bear fruit?! But she was there at the foot of the cross, and was first to see the Risen Jesus. What kind of Sower would plant seed in Saul, a man known to all as the most zealous persecutor of the Church? But Jesus’ Word and the Spirit took root in Paul and grew him into a mighty apostle.

This parable really describes Jesus’ entire ministry. He constantly proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God to throngs of people. Some didn’t, but many did have “ears to hear.” The expected followers, those leaders in the church, plugged their ears and refused to listen, missing the message. But, in those downtrodden, disabled, and afflicted, the Good News flourished.

The Kingdom of God continues to grow in ways mysterious to the world. In a world in constant search of the “latest thing”, the Church’s message is ancient. Still filled with sinners, not celebrities, God’s kingdom hears and rejoices at His Good News.

Prayer: Sower of the field, continue to plant and water Your Word in my heart. Make it blossom and produce bounteous fruit. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, October 31, 2022

Read Luke 8:16-25

Jesus' Family

Who are you? We could answer this question in a variety of ways. You might simply answer with your name but packed into your name there is more. Sure, your first name may be the way that most people address you, but your last name highlights that you have a history. It may be a history that dates to your conception and birth into a family (which has a history of its own). Your last name may tell a history of the family that you were grafted into by marriage or adoption.

We also sometimes describe who we are by what we do. I'm a pastor. You might be a truck driver, a retiree, a teacher, an accountant, a computer programmer, or a number of other vocations. You may describe yourself through a mixture of your history and what you do – you could be a mom or husband or grandparent.

In our reading, Jesus doesn't completely negate such ways of speaking, but He does make clear that these are secondary (even if we usually use these terms first). When he says that "my mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it," He's making clear that His family is defined by a history and by what is done.

You see, when He speaks of "those who hear the word of God and do it," this is a long way of describing faith. Who hears and does God's Word, except the one who trusts in God and seeks to follow Him? No one! Our primary identity then is not our specific family history, our occupation, or our family roles, but Christian. One belonging to Christ and His family. My history is first tied up in what Christ has done for me in His death and resurrection. What I do (first and foremost) is seek to follow Him out of love and gratitude for all He has done for me. Jesus defines the Christian. Only then, do we sort out the rest of who we are, and through our primary identity in Jesus. His view of me (forgiven, baptized into His family) and His Word shapes my view of marriage and work and family and all of life. And hearing His Word, I carry it into all I do by faith.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, I praise You for making me Your own. Help me to see this as my foundational identity, so that in all I do, I carry Your Word with me and do it. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, November 1, 2022

Read Luke 8:26-39

My Weakness, His Strength

God has done great things for me! How can I not want to share them with others? It is in fact, one way to be saying "thank you". So, I want to tell about His love for me and others.

But I am shy, I am afraid of life, and of rubbing others the wrong way, and I am afraid of doing a poor job. I keep forgetting that someone who has done so much for me, is not going to let me fall apart. Jesus lives in and with me. Of course, He will be there for my sharing.

So, I try to talk about Jesus, but I stumble in my words, forget what I want to say, and generally sound silly, not like a great messenger. But I forget that I am not alone. Jesus is with His message and me. It is not my problem to convince anyone, to even do a "great" job. It is His message, and He makes the message speak to what others need to hear.

God thrives on weakness; He wins by not showing His power. He redeemed me with his death on the cross - there what looks like failure proves to be sacrifice that wins all. His power is shown in weakness. My poor words are used by Him, sometimes to change the heart of one who was resisting in power but was overwhelmed by weakness. Even my poor sharing is powerful when it is used by God - for His purposes. Hurrah!

Prayer: I thank you God that You are dependent upon my power. Thank you for using me. You saved me and let me still serve you. Amen

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, November 2, 2022

Read Luke 8:40-56

Go in Peace

“Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him.”

Luke 8:40

Jesus returned to Capernaum after rebuking the rough wind and waters on the lake and saving a man from a legion of demons in the country of the Gerasenes. In today's reading, Jesus saved a woman from disease and raised Jairus' daughter from the dead.

Jairus fell at Jesus' feet and invited Him to his house. While Jairus was at Jesus' feet, a woman touched the edge of Jesus' garment and was healed. Jesus said, **“Who was it that touched me?”** (v. 45) knowing the woman and the crowd surrounding him, Jesus asked who touched Him, and **“all denied it”** (v. 45). Peter tried to help Jesus by explaining how the crowds were surrounding Him, and, yet, Jesus is fully aware of the situation, **“And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well [σέσωκέν, σώζω—saved /free from disease]; go in peace”** (vv 47-48).

Jesus powerfully saved the woman from her disease and raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (see vv. 49-56). The Word of God in the flesh displayed and spoke His authority and power over all creation, disease, and death in this and other gospel accounts. God saves us from our sins by the power of His Word and His promise in Christ crucified. In Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection from the dead, the power of God is displayed gloriously and profoundly to all who believe, and God's **peace** is for you. Therefore, God's **peace** is being in a state of well-being before God as forgiven sinners on account of Christ, and in Jesus Christ alone, we are saved from the disease of sin and eternal death and raised to life through faith and Baptism.

In Luther's Small Catechism, we see the Words of Jesus, **“go in peace,”** in Confession and Absolution,

What is confession? Answer: Confession consists of two parts. One is that we confess our sins. The other is that we receive the absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the confessor as from God himself and by no means doubt but firmly believe that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven . . .

“I, a poor sinner, confess before God that I am guilty of all my sins . . .

Let the confessor say [further]: “Do you also believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?”

[Answer:] “Yes, dear sir.”

*Thereupon he may say: “ ‘Let it be done for you according to your faith.’ And I by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ forgive you your sin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. **Go in peace.**”* (see Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; 8:48).

Prayer – Gracious Lord Jesus, please turn me from my sins to Your eternal Peace. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, November 3, 2022
Read Luke 9:1-17

God's Provision

The feeding of the five thousand is a familiar story. After the return of His twelve disciples from their own individual adventure of healing and ministry, Jesus withdraws to an isolated place to debrief with His disciples and take a much needed moment of rest. However! The crowds follow them into the wilderness! Even so, Jesus welcomes them and teaches them happily about the kingdom of God. Then, Jesus is teaching for so long that the day grew late and people became hungry. Lacking in food and money, the disciples turn to Jesus for a solution. His solution, then, is one of the most amazing and unfathomable miracles recorded in Scripture. Jesus feeds all five thousand plus people with only five loaves of bread and two fish! And there's more food leftover than there was at the beginning! This is amazing! But what does it mean?

This passage is an illustration of Jesus' provision for His followers. On the surface, it very clearly describes Jesus' provision of our daily bread, that which we need to live day by day. This is most certainly true! But there is one detail that is often overlooked in this story: Jesus welcomed the crowd. Deeper than the provision of food, Jesus provided His time and Himself.

Imagine how the disciples felt at this moment. They just got back from doing real ministry and performing miracles out in the field. Then they get back and there's this huge, obnoxious crowd following them around! "Tell them to go away, Jesus! We've graduated from these local crowds. They're just a waste of time!" The disciples sought to escape the people. They didn't welcome them. Have you ever turned someone away as a waste of time?

Or perhaps you're on the other side of the equation. Have you ever been afraid to reach out to someone for help? My wife is notorious for this. She rarely asks for help, even when she desperately needs it. She doesn't want to be a burden or an inconvenience to someone else. She doesn't like to take up other people's time. Perhaps this more accurately describes you.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus welcomed the crowd! He provided His time. And He still provides for You and me. This is what happens when we pray! Jesus welcomes us, He listens, and He intercedes for us. Now we, being held in His welcoming arms, can welcome others in His same love.

Prayer: "Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge – take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer. In His arms He'll take and shield thee; thou wilt find a solace there."

- LSB, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," 770.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, November 4, 2022

Read Luke 9:18-36

Not Just a Departure

Words matter. I know this is not exactly a bold statement because we all understand this. For example, when you receive a note from the object of your affection and it reads, "I like you," this is VERY different than if the note proclaimed, "I love you."

Words matter. Sometimes, the right words tell you a great deal more than generic ones. For example, imagine someone told you, "I'm going away." This could mean she is going on a trip, going to move, or may soon die. But if what she meant was, "I'm going to Disney," well that's very different: this isn't permanent, she will be coming back soon, she will see the mouse and some princesses, she will likely have fun, but also spend A LOT of money.

Words matter. When Jesus is on top of the mountain of transfiguration, Luke tells us, "two men were talking with (Jesus), Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure..." His departure could mean a vacation, a move, His death, or perhaps something else. But the actual word tells us more. Literally, "Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus." Now that tells us sooo much more!

His exodus. Immediately, this brings to mind the Passover lamb without blemish, and it should! Jesus will be THE Passover lamb who lays down His life, shed His blood, so that all who are marked by His blood in baptism will Passover from death to life. The exodus brings to mind freedom from slavery, and it should! Jesus will set us free from slavery to sin, death, and the devil. The exodus brings to mind entrance into the promised land, and it should! Jesus' death and resurrection opens to us the promised land of the new heavens and new earth for all of eternity.

His departure sounds like He would be abandoning us, but Jesus' exodus is the way in which He will bring about our salvation. You better believe that words matter!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for Your exodus by which You have brought to me freedom and life in Your everlasting kingdom. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, November 5, 2022

Read [Luke 9:37-50](#)

“Greatest of All Time”

Missouri’s own, Rush Limbaugh, loved to egg on his political opponents. Constantly. His final poke at them was on his death certificate, where his stated occupation was, “Greatest Broadcaster of All Time”. That title, “Greatest of All Time”, or “GOAT”, is something that people of the world have fought to claim throughout history. Pick any field – music, sports, politics, art – and countless contenders have dedicated their entire lives to being able to say, “I’m the GOAT!”

In today’s reading, Jesus’ disciples argue over which of them is “the GOAT”. When you think of this discussion, it’s almost comical. What was Matthew’s claim to fame? “I’m the GOAT because I was a tax collector!” Or Peter’s, “I was the greatest fisherman ever!” Nathanael’s may have been the least convincing, “I’m greatest because the Lord called me when I was just sitting under a fig tree doing nothing!”

Jesus’ answer turns the whole concept of GOAT upside down. **“He who is least among you all is the one who is great.”** How often do we argue over which of us is least among us? I mean, where you’re trying to convince everyone that you are the least?! But Jesus’ explanation doesn’t help our human minds very much: **“Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.”** How could helping the helpless make me great? That’s like choosing to be a servant!

But this explanation sheds some light on the miracle told at the beginning of the reading. After Jesus and the disciples came down from Transfiguration Mountain, a man brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus. As only the parent of an afflicted child can do, he describes in detail exactly the symptoms his son exhibits. And, he revealed that Jesus’ disciples were unable to help. They weren’t the greatest at helping the helpless.

Jesus’ answer sounds like the words of a God at His wit’s end, **“O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?”** He’d just taken His disciples to the mountaintop. They’d seen Jesus in glory, and Moses and Elijah. And heard God’s voice speak to them from the cloud! And they’re stuck on which of them is greatest?! “Maybe this whole idea of being born into humanity and coming to save these people from their sins is just not going to work”, Jesus seems to be thinking.

But, no. Jesus continued, **“Bring your son here.”** No, the majestic, all-powerful, all-mighty, all-knowing, glorious, Son of the Creator of the Universe, had become a man and now **“rebuked the unclean spirit”** in this helpless boy, healed him, and gave him back to his father. Jesus received and keeps on receiving this child and you and I.

Prayer: Greatest of All Time, You made Yourself least that I might be healed and brought well into Your family. Praise be to You! Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, November 7, 2022

Read Luke 9:51-10:20

Running In

Every year around September 11th, I am drawn to watch some of the programming that recalls the horrid events of that date twenty years ago. I'm sure there is part of me that just recognizes the tragedy and gravity of the day, but mostly I watch in amazement at stories of those who are running in.

In the footage, there is a mass of humanity running out (if they can) from those two buildings struck by airplanes and smoldering in ash and fire. Little do those escapees know that it is a race against time until the buildings crumble down on top of themselves. Nevertheless, people flee with an urgency that is only possible when life and death hang in the balance. They are running out as fast as they can, but they are not the reason that I watch each year.

It is those who are running in that catch my attention. Firefighters, police officers, and a number of Good Samaritans run against the current of people and against instinct. They put their own lives at greater risk because they are determined to get every person out, if possible.

This is the image you should have in your mind as you Luke's description of Jesus that "his face was set toward Jerusalem." Everyone else is running out, but He is alone is running in. Such is the determination of your Lord to save you. He is determined to take every step that will put Himself in greater danger, for only in going to Jerusalem and before Pilate and to the cross and to death, can He rescue you from sin and death. Such is the persistent love of Jesus as still comes in His Word and Sacrament to speak His life-giving forgiveness to you again and again. In order to save, you always find Jesus running in.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, thank you for setting your face toward Jerusalem. Thank you for "running in" after me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, November 8, 2022

Read Luke 10:21-42

So Much to Do

Oh, Lord there are so many things ... so many things I need to keep in mind! Help me to get them done, in the right order, in the right way. Lord, how can I do all that you put on my plate. I don't see any way to get it all done.

And that which I prefer, that which is most needed for me, is to pay attention to You. To listen to You in Your Word, to grow in knowledge and in action, that is most important, and mostly what I want to do. But there are so many other things; and my status, my wellbeing is dependent upon my being responsible, on my doing ...

Could you put more hours in the day, Lord? Could you strengthen me to make all this easy and fast? How Lord can I do what I want (and need to do) and still make time for You? Would it be alright if I shortchanged you this time?

And now my conscience bothers me. I trust You Lord, and I know what I need to do. First make room for You, first stop other things, first read my Bible, and listen to You. There I know I will receive contentment; I will be reassured of your love and that my needs/duties are fulfilled. All else is extra.

Thank You Jesus, I forgot You, how foolish and sorrowful for me. But you have made me yours! You forgive my lapses and bring me back. Thank you.

Prayer: You are my God, my Savior. Thank you for that. Please keep my eyes on You above all else. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, November 9, 2022

Read Luke 11:1-13

Lord, Teach us to Pray

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Luke 11:13

Jesus was praying, and after He prayed, **“one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples”** (v. 2). So Jesus gave a prayer, and here in Luke’s account, *The Lord’s Prayer* is similar to the *“Our Father”* Matthew’s account (see Matt 6:9-11). The Bible does not show how John the Baptizer taught his followers to pray. However, we know John preached: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”** (Matthew 3:2), and what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, **“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”** (Luke 3:4; see 3:1-22; compare Matt 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; John 1:19-34). God’s Kingdom has come in Jesus Christ, YHWH in the flesh, crucified for sinners, and risen from the dead. Jesus said to His disciples, **“When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come”** (v. 2).

Martin Luther’s *Large Catechism* describes God’s Kingdom come;

“What is the kingdom of God? Answer: Simply what we heard above in the Creed [Apostles Creed], namely, that God sent his Son, Christ our LORD, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil, to bring us to himself, and to rule us as a king of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience. To this end he also gave his Holy Spirit to deliver this to us through his holy Word and to enlighten and strengthen us in faith by his power.”

Jesus teaches us to pray to His Father and our Father, and **“the heavenly Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask”** (v. 13). God’s Name is Holy, and His Kingdom has come in Christ Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Father gives us daily bread, He forgives our sins, as we forgive others *indebted*—(v. 4, ὀφείλοντι, *opheilōnti*—*commit a sin against—a Rabbinic use of owing or indebted to someone*)—to us, and He leads us not into temptation. This prayer is not a conditional Law to keep or a prescription to get what we want or to please and satisfy God. Instead, asking our heavenly Father for His goodness and gifts, and the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon us for Christ’s sake, whose blood washed us clean and atoned for our sin, satisfying the Father’s wrath toward sin. Therefore, we live under YHWH’s loving kindness in His Kingdom come, now and forever in Christ.

Prayer – Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, November 10, 2022
Read Luke 11:14-28

Choosing Christ Daily

I am a huge Star Wars fan. I love the franchise for several reasons, but the most dominant is the dynamic and flawed anti-hero, Anakin Skywalker. Anakin is a talented young man who struggles with arrogance, pride, and the influence of his emotions. Anakin is a deeply flawed man who wants to do good but seems to make the wrong decision at every turn.

Anakin has two mentors training him into the person he will eventually become. On one side is Obi-Wan Kenobi, a selfless man personifying the “good”. On the other side is Chancellor Palpatine, an arrogant man personifying the “evil”. At the peak of his training, Anakin is forced to choose between these two men. In the end he chooses to abandon his identity with the good and completely fill himself up with the evil, becoming the dreaded Darth Vader, the most evil and feared man in all of the galaxy.

The reason I’m talking about Star Wars is because Anakin was faced with a decision. He was given a choice between good and evil, a choice to fill himself up with the teachings of Obi-Wan or to fill himself up with the teachings of Palpatine.

In our Luke reading, Jesus presents a choice between good and evil. Through His death on the cross, Jesus has cleansed us from sin. We are no longer bound to sin, death, and the devil, and instead, our hearts are open. Now you can either fill your heart with the Spirit through faith or you can fill your heart with the devil by rejecting Christ. You can’t live in both camps as Jesus clearly states, “a divided household falls”. Instead, you need to choose.

Now, unlike Anakin, we do not face a single choice that will determine the trajectory of our entire lives. Instead, we face a daily, hourly, even momentarily choice between good and evil. And due to our sinful natures, more often than not, we choose evil. But Jesus is stronger than the devil and all of his demons! No matter how many times we allow evil to occupy our hearts, Jesus is always able and willing to cast them away and fill us with His Spirit, instead. Through Christ, we are **not** enemies of God! Thanks be to God that He has entered into the house of our hearts! Now, let’s fill our lives with His salvation.

Prayer: “Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest, and make our hearts Your place of rest; come with Your grace and heavenly aid, and fill the hearts which You have made.”

- LSB, “Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest,” 499

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, November 11, 2022

Read Luke 11:29-54

The Key to Knowledge

I can't remember the name of the movie, but when I was younger, I remember watching a movie about a treasure hunt. Two different groups of people had a map with various symbols including the traditional "X" marking the spot. The only problem was that many years had gone by and none of the landmarks were particularly helpful. Practically speaking, it was a map to nowhere and everywhere, but finding the treasure would be impossible.

This is the case until one of the groups finds a different copy of the map. All the landmarks are the same, and "X" still marks the same spot, but one important thing is added: a key. The map had been written upside down with north at the bottom and south at the top. Apart from that key, they were going nowhere, but with the key untold treasure was soon at their fingertips.

Jesus rails against the "lawyers" in our reading. This is not an attack on personal injury lawyers (although He might have had a few things to say to them also). These are experts in the law of Moses, who see all the landmarks and fixate on them, and miss the treasure. Of course, they don't miss the treasure because they lack the key, but because they discard it.

The key to knowledge is Jesus and the grace He has come to bring. The law of Moses is good, but it is first of all good for sinners to recognize their need for help. We are not capable of unlocking treasures of forgiveness, life, and salvation, but Christ comes to do just this. He is the key to knowledge. With His grace, we have life eternal and peace with God. With His grace, we are set free to serve our neighbor out of love. With His grace, our eyes are opened to see the incredible abundance that He gives to us both in this life and for life eternal. With Jesus, the key, we can see the big picture in God's Word – both Law AND Gospel. With Jesus, all of heaven's treasures are opened to us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me always to see You as the key to knowledge. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, November 12, 2022

Read [Luke 12:1-22](#)

“Hypocrisy”

Sometimes in the Bible someone will ask a rhetorical question. You know, that’s a question where you’re not expected to answer because everyone knows the answer. After killing his brother Abel, Cain protested to God when confronted over it, **“Am I my brother’s keeper?!”** He thought it ridiculously obvious to anyone that the answer was “No! Of course, my brother should take care of himself.” But in that case, as happens elsewhere, what seems obvious to the world is not obvious to God. God actually wants us to care for our “brothers” (our neighbors).

Today’s reading takes place right after yesterday’s reading, where Jesus had been trying to teach the Pharisees. Now, Jesus turns to His disciples and teaches them the lesson that the Pharisees failed to hear. **“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”** “Leaven”, or “yeast”, makes bread puffed up and full of air. Jesus was saying that similarly, the Pharisees’ hypocrisy was puffing them up, filling them with air, to the point that they convinced themselves that they could follow God’s Law themselves and didn’t need a savior.

I don’t know about you, but I’m a hypocrite. I lie to myself and pretend to myself that, you know, I myself do pretty well. I’m not like those politicians this week, for whom every other word out of their mouths is a lie, right? And I do lots of good things, too. Just like those Pharisees!

But no, you and I aren’t “just like” the Pharisees. We might sometimes sin just like them, but we’ve heard the rest of Jesus’ lesson. We’ve heard His words, **“Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.”** Those are some scary words (especially if you’re a politician)!

We know we’re sinners and can’t hide our sin from God. And we know the correct answer when, later in our reading, Jesus asked a seemingly rhetorical question: **“Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”** The world would say no one can judge their neighbor. But we know that Jesus will judge us all on the Last Day.

And that doesn’t scare us in the slightest. We’re sinners and know Jesus will be our judge. But we also know He **“knows the number of hairs on our heads”** (even if that’s “zero” or “grey”). God cares for the sparrows who only cost 2 cents for five, and **“you are of more value than many sparrows.”** Jesus loves us and will judge us “innocent” because He made us so.

Prayer: Lord God, hypocrite and sinner I am. But Jesus my Judge has washed me clean and made me righteous. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, November 14, 2022

Read Luke 12:23-34

Worry

Do you know why Jesus was always saying to His disciples, "Don't worry?" It was because they were always so worried!

Do you know why it is written down in Scripture so often? Because we are always so worried!

When Jesus tells us in the reading today, "do not be anxious," this is not about the psychological condition. This is about a heart condition. Why do I say that? Because of the last verse: "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." When our treasure is found in your life, what you eat, what you wear, you'll be plenty anxious because there are no guarantees with these things.

Worry is a destructive thing. Obviously worry can hurt our physical well-being. Eventually it can kill a person. To top it off, there is another destructive dimension to worry that is even worse than the loss of physical life. Worry can destroy a person's spiritual life. Worry is one of Satan's favorite weapons. He encourages us to believe that worry isn't all that serious. Meanwhile he uses worry to separate us from our heavenly Father by doubting His love and care. Before we know it, we can find ourselves worrying about virtually everything. When we get to that point, worrying has actually become idolatry. Worry has become our god...a matter of the heart.

Knowing what worry is--a temptation of Satan, a matter of the heart--we take our worries to God in prayer. Jesus has come to be our great treasure that brings life, rescue from worry and temptation and sin. He comes to bring peace, that can only be found in Him. Remembering that He is our true treasure (given freely by His love), He invites us to trust that He will also give us the gifts we need for the lesser needs of life.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, give me true peace by seeing You as my true treasure. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, November 15, 2022

Read Luke 12:35-59

I Still Live Here...With Him

I am so glad that my Lord has come to me and saved me. He has taken the power of sin and broken it. What a blessing for me! And yet ... He tells me to be ready, He says that He has a great home for me in heaven, He tells me that I should be ready to come home anytime. But ...

All that I can handle. The problem is...I still live here. I still have concerns for this life in this crooked world. I need Him right now, not some indefinite time in the future. And He has recognized that as well.

He has promised to be with me and live with me. Paul says, 'Put on Christ' talking as if Jesus is a piece of clothing! It's true, I can't endure it alone, but I am not alone. He lives in and guides, protects, teaches me.

He does care for me now. Those promises I appreciate, but in some ways, I appreciate even more the fact that I am not alone now. He maintains my faith, so I can see, understand, and resist the ploys of the devil. The troubles the world brings to me here and now, I can withstand - because He is with me and has defeated all of that.

It's not a question of prayer or personal faith - those come from Him too - but it is the fact that He is with me. With Him all else fades. Thank you, Jesus. You keep saving me!

Prayer: Thank You Jesus. I was alone and now am not. Thank you for the fact that You will keep saving me from my worries and failures. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, November 16, 2022

Read Luke 13:1-17

Jesus Does Glorious Things

In today's reading, some of those in the crowd told Jesus about the blood of Galileans Pilate mingled with their sacrifices (v.1). It seemed that Pilate had these Galileans killed amongst their sacrifices somewhere between the Gentile's and priest's court. Jesus said, **"Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"** (vv. 2-3). Again, Jesus tells them, **"unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"** (v.5), after He explained about the tower that fell in Siloam that killed eighteen people—how they were no worse offenders than those in Jerusalem.

The Lutheran Confessions speak about Luke 13:5,

"The little word "repentance" is not used in just one sense in Holy Scripture. For in certain passages in Holy Scripture it is used and understood as the entire conversion of the person, as in Luke 13[:5], "Unless you repent, you will all perish," and in Luke 15[:7*], "There will be joy over one sinner who repents ..." (SD: V, 7).*

Jesus told a parable about a fig tree and a man who sought its fruit. There was none (v. 6). He said, **"Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?"** (v. 7). The vinedresser advises to leave it alone for a year to dig around and fertilize it with manure. **"Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down"** (v.9). This rightly compares to **"unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"** (vv. 3, 5), and there is joy over the sinner who repents.

Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath and freed a woman from **"a disabling spirit"** (v. 11). **"When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, Woman, you are freed from your disability"** (v. 12). She was immediately made straight as she could not straighten herself before being bound by Satan and **"she glorified God"** (v. 13). The synagogue ruler throws a fit because Jesus did not follow the Law of Moses to not work on the Sabbath (v. 14; see Exod 20:9-11; 23:12; Lev 23:3; Ezek 20:12). Jesus, **"the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites!"** (v. 15), explaining how they untie their donkeys leading them to water and work on the Sabbath, and the woman, **"a daughter of Abraham"** (v. 16) ought to be loosed from her bondage on the Sabbath. **"All [Jesus] adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him."** (v. 17).

Prayer – Jesus, our eternal Sabbath rest, You do Glorious things. In Your death and glorious resurrection, we have life and freedom from bondage to sin, death, and Satan. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, November 17, 2022
Read Luke 13:18-35

The Narrow Door

The other day, I was speaking over the phone with my father-in-law, and as our conversations usually do, we began talking about faith, specifically about the differences between Lutherans and other sects of Christianity. Over the course of our conversation, he jokingly made the comment, “well, there will only be LCMS Lutherans in heaven, right?” Now, while I know that my father-in-law doesn’t genuinely believe that only LCMS Lutherans will live eternally in heaven, it caused me to pause and reflect on this passage from Luke.

Jesus encourages His listeners to “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” I think that very often, we tend to think of this door as more narrow than it really is. We, like the Pharisees, often grow contempt and look down on other Christians. We sometimes think and act as though we, in the LCMS, are the only Christians who are saved.

But brothers and sisters, we are not saved because we are LCMS Lutherans. We are saved because we are in Christ! Jesus did not plant the LCMS as His mustard seed which will become the home of all nations. Jesus did not hide the LCMS as His leaven within the flour to convert the whole of creation. Jesus did not desire to gather Jerusalem into the brood of the sheltering wings of the LCMS. Jesus is the mustard seed! Jesus is the leaven! Jesus is the hen who collects and shelters His people! Jesus is the narrow door! We are saved through Christ alone!

Now this is not to say that denominational differences don’t matter. Indeed, there are fundamental theological differences that prevent altar fellowship with other groups of Christianity. You and I have chosen to be members of the LCMS because we believe it to be right according to the Scriptures. But the Kingdom of God is much bigger than us! So rather than looking on our brothers and sisters in Christ with contempt, let us look on them with love. Christ has redeemed His people and established His Kingdom, and we are a small part of that! Thanks be to God, that we get to be members of His Kingdom through Christ!

Prayer: “Today Your 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.” Amen.

- LSB, “Today Your Mercy Calls Us,” 915.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, November 18, 2022

Read Luke 14:1-24

Who's Coming to Dinner?

If you could have dinner with any 3 people (living or dead), who would you put around the table? Perhaps you have been asked this question or listened to others ponder it. I have had a variety of answers myself to this question over time: Abraham Lincoln, Stan Musial, Martin Luther, Charles Barkley, Teddy Roosevelt, and (of course) Jesus. I'd have different reasons for my various invites, but it is a fun game to play and imagine who you'd put around the table. You might even have some suggestions for me.

Jesus has some suggestions for who to put around the table, but they are not fascinating historical figures or entertaining personalities. His suggestions include the following: the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. In Jesus' day, these were all individuals who likely would have made a living by begging. These people were not on the list in Jesus' day any more than their names would have immediately come to mind for us in our day. Jesus has a reason to invite them also, and it has nothing to do with what they can bring to the table. In fact, he says you should invite them because they bring nothing to the table. "When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you."

They bring nothing to the table: no entertainment value, no status, probably no side dish or dessert, and no opportunity for them to invite you in return in the future. So why is Jesus telling us that we should invite those with nothing to offer? Because that's who we are before Him.

Martin Luther's last words were famously, "we are all beggars." Before our God, we have nothing to offer, but our sinful hearts. We have no status before Him that He would benefit from. There is no manner in which we can pay back the favor, but in His mercy, He welcomes us to dine with Him, beggars though we are. With nothing to give, He fills up our begging hands as we come to His table, and we receive the feast of Christ as He comes to us.

Now this doesn't mean Jesus frowns on you eating with family and friends this Thanksgiving. No. Times with family and friends are additional treasures from God's generous hand. But here, Jesus simply encourages us to invite those who can't give us a thing in return. After all, what do we need? We already have received everything at the table of Jesus.

Prayer: Thank you for welcoming me, Lord, though I am only a beggar before you. Help me to welcome others to our church and to our home in thanks for your generosity to me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, November 19, 2022

Read [Luke 14:25-35](#)

“The Cost of Discipleship”

Our reading for today would be a great topic for the Sunday morning adult Bible study, “Hard Teachings of Jesus”. Jesus has been preaching to large crowds about God’s invitation to His banquet feast and how all are invited into the Kingdom of God. But following God has a cost – it turns out, a high cost. How high?

When Charles Lindbergh decided to fly from New York to Paris to be the first person to ever fly an aircraft that 3300 mile distance, he had a goal. The Orteig prize included a gold medal, \$25,000 (in 1927 dollars!), and more fame than he’d ever dreamt of. He became an instant hero and the face of adventure in the new, technological age. But that prize had a cost, a high cost. He had to find financiers to back his project and the right aircraft, and finally, he had to put his lanky, pink body into a single engine plane and fly it across all those miles with little more than a compass to guide him. Everyone else attempting this feat thought this crazy and chose much larger, multi-engine planes with crews of pilots. But Lindbergh chose to go it alone.

Before looking at the cost of being Jesus’ disciple, we need to look at the goal. Our goal is to be the “Salt of the Earth” mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount. Like salt that’s used to preserve food and give it flavor, it only takes a pinch to go a long way. In our dark, sinful world, Christians provide that “spice” that preserves the world by being Christ’s representatives. That’s an enormous calling, and requires good salt. After all, salt that isn’t good “is thrown away”. It’s worthless.

What Jesus is saying is that to be His disciple, you must be a good disciple, and that has a cost. You must “hate” your family, bear your own cross, and renounce all you have. That’s a hard teaching if there ever was one!

He’s using a figure of speech in using the word “hate” – He’s not saying to denounce them and remove their “Like” status on Facebook, but that your earthly loved ones cannot come before your love for Him. Same thing for your possessions – loving them more than their Provider damages your discipleship. And, bearing your cross means that there may be suffering in your following Jesus.

But, unlike Lindbergh, we’re not going it alone. Jesus has already done all those things – giving up his family and friends, literally bearing His cross, and then dying on that cross, naked and possession-free as the day He was born. And He’s sent us His Spirit in our baptism to make us “salty” and fill us with strength. He has a tremendous goal for us and bears us on our way.

Prayer: Lord of the Church, make us to be the salt of the earth, protecting us from the hardships that go with it. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, November 21, 2022

Read Luke 15:1-10

Worry

Julia Ward Howe, a prominent woman in Civil War times (and author of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”), visited an “eminent senator” to plead for help for someone in need. But the senator replied that he “was so busy saving the human race that he couldn’t be bothered about an individual.” It sounds cruel, but we can be tempted to the same sort of logic. In the whole mass of humanity, how important is just one, really?

Apparently, to our God, each one is of infinite worth. The first two lost and found stories of Luke 15 are told in our reading for today (and the third one is coming tomorrow). We could take many lessons from these words of Jesus, but one unmistakable lesson to learn is the infinite value of each person to the God who created them and came to redeem them. As Jesus says, “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” Now, the truth is that every person needs to repent, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Yet heaven doesn’t wait to celebrate until enough have repented. Each individual is so valuable that all of heaven throws a party when just one lost one is found by Christ the Shepherd.

Dear Christian, this should humble, astound, and overjoy you! You are so loved. You have been sought out by the One who not only has saved the human race by His death and resurrection, but also knows you personally. He knows your sin and your pains. He has found you to forgive and heal...and rejoice!

Prayer – Dear Jesus, I am overjoyed with thanks at Your love for me – personally! Open my eyes to see others with Your compassionate love for every individual. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, November 22, 2022

Read Luke 15:11-32

He Forgives Them...and Me

I am so ashamed of myself. God keeps telling me that I am not perfect! Well, I know that, but I just don't want to admit it to myself. I am much better resenting God's gifts to others than appreciation what He has done for me! I find myself wanting what they have, I see His bountiful gifts for others, and having just accepted what I have as being rightfully mine, I want God's gifts to others for myself.

God forgives the gross sinner. I applaud God for that, but, somehow, I find myself thinking, "but he got to do those sins and I never got to do that." Complain, complain. I don't really want to do those things, but I find that I just feel that that other person shouldn't get by with all that. I have been "good," and so I think I "deserve" more.

And then my conscience reminds me - I have been forgiven my gross sins. Just because others don't see them, He forgives me just as much as they. If I got what I deserve, it would be condemnation not forgiveness. God has given me the privilege of living in Him much longer than those others I am jealous of. Not only have I been forgiven, but I have had to privilege of living with Him. Those blessings don't come any higher.

Now I want to apologize to my Lord for not appreciating what all He has done for me. It is great to know that He will forgive even me, and His forgiveness for the other is evidence!

Prayer: Thank you God, for forgiving those other people, and thank you for forgiving me my bad attitude. Thank you over and over again. Amen

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, November 23, 2022

Read Luke 16:1-18

Jesus Kingdom

The disciples of Jesus, the Pharisees, and the Scribes are all listening to Jesus tell of a house steward (manager) of a wealthy man who was unrighteous and charged with squandering his means/possessions. The house steward gathered debts owed to his master, and the master admired his efforts in acting wisely or shrewdly. Jesus says, **“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much . . . No servant [δουλεύειν–douleuein, *perform the duties as a slave*] can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money [μαμωνᾶ–mamōna, *wealth, property*].’ The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him”** (vv. 10, 13-14).

Jesus seems to be addressing the hearts of those who are lovers of money, φιλάργυροι–philargyroi, *avaricious–covetous* (see v. 14 above). Jesus said to the Pharisees, **“You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.”** (vv. 15-17; compare Matt 11:12-13). The Good News is preached of the Kingdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the Law, and the Law remains in force and judgment to hearts of covetousness (7th command–Exod. 20:15) and adultery (6th command–Exod 20:14) serving idols, an abomination to Yahweh.

Paul Kretzmann commented: *“The state may, for the sake of expediency, permit many things to the children of the world which God condemns unequivocally; but that fact does not and cannot influence a Christian nor cause him to deviate one inch from the will of God as revealed in the Law . . . The presence of faith is invariably shown by works of love.”*

Jesus stated, in Matthew 5:17, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”** And Jesus came to fulfill all righteousness in His Baptism, **“for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”** (Matt 3:15). Jesus took the sin of the world upon Himself and its punishment. He suffered and paid for our sin in His blood shed on the cross and in rising from the dead so that we would be free from sin, redeemed from eternal death, and released from the Law that condemns.

Prayer – “Lord, teach us to treasure the Law and the Gospel as Your good gifts, fulfilled for us in Christ Jesus. Amen.” (TLSB)

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, November 24, 2022

Read Luke 16:19-31

Thanks Given to God

In our Luke reading, we see a man who struggled with the concept of material blessings. He was a rich man who had many earthly blessings including a large, gated home, fine clothing, and delicious food. He had so many earthly blessings that they eventually took the place of God in his life. Therefore, when he died, he died without the redeeming grace of Christ. The poor man Lazarus, however, did not have many earthly blessings and faithfully devoted himself to Christ, placing him in God's eternal kingdom. This is a pretty clear-cut case of "you can't take it with you," but it's also much more than that. This is a story revolving around God's blessings given to us, and through it we are reminded to always praise God for His blessings.

Now, I'm not saying that rich people are bad and poor people are good. Instead, I'm saying that regardless of where you fall on the spectrum of status, all of your blessings are gifts from God and should be attributed to Him. The real sin of the rich man wasn't that he was rich, but rather that he didn't thank God for the blessings of money.

So today, on this Thanksgiving, I encourage you to attribute all of your blessings to God. Instead of asking, "why do bad things happen to good people?" say, "thank you, God, for the good things in my life!" And as you remember the things for which you are thankful today, attribute them to God. Don't forget the one who blessed you with those things, and don't forget the one blessing that shines above all the others – Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for you and bought for you eternal life.

Prayer: "Heavenly Father, God of all grace, govern our hearts that we may never forget Your blessings but steadfastly thank and praise You for all Your goodness in this life until, with all Your saints, we praise You eternally in Your heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

- *LSB*, "Collect of Thanksgiving to God," pg. 310.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, November 25, 2022

Read Luke 17:1-19

Where are the Other Nine?

It's pretty hard to understand how ten guys living a death sentence of leprosy could be cured, yet only one thought to return to thank Jesus. Like Jesus, we, too, ask, "Where are the other nine?"

Ungrateful, rude, and opportunistic. All these descriptions fit these nine cleansed men who hurried off to show themselves to the priest, seeking reinstatement to community, family, and friends. Certainly, we would have been different had we received such a gift.

But...would we have been different? Sometimes, it is easy to forget the like the lepers, we were also under the death sentence of sin. Without the cure for sin that Jesus provided, we would have met an awful eternal death.

And yet it can be so easy sometimes to neglect the study of God's Word and forget to say our prayers. We quickly turn the page from a day set aside for Thanksgiving and run head long into Black Friday. At times we are ungrateful, but often it's just that we are so quickly distracted that our gratitude is fleeting and small compared to the incredible gifts we are given.

Fortunately, when we are unfaithful, God is faithful to us. His grace is new to us every day (and we need it to be new everyday!). He pardons our forgetful lapses and restores to us the joy of salvation in Jesus.

Prayer: Each day Lord, keep me faithful and thankful for all You have done for me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, November 26, 2022

Read [Luke 17:20-37](#)

"The Kingdom of God"

The concept of "The Kingdom of God (or Heaven)" has been interpreted in many ways over the millennia, oftentimes incorrectly. In the Garden of Eden before sin, and again in eternity in Heaven, we will experience the truest, most perfect "version" of God's rule over His creation. The Creation that He created was and will be perfect, man and woman walked and talked with Him, and "He was their God and they were His people."

In between the first sin and Jesus' return on the Last Day, things became a little less clear. The nation of Israel was God's kingdom in a sense, as long as they trusted in Him, but that wasn't always the case. They finally insisted that God give them a human king to rule them, and they were given what they'd asked for. But a human king doesn't rule over "The Kingdom of God." And Saul, followed by David, then Solomon, then many more, proved that we need more than a human king to live in God's Kingdom.

In today's reading, first the Pharisees asked Jesus about this Kingdom, then the disciples. As the Pharisees were looking for just another, "better" human king, Jesus explained to their unhearing ears that they were looking for the wrong thing, "**for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.**" "Hello! I'm right here!"

To His followers, though, Jesus gave both words of hope and warning, as they didn't truly understand His Kingdom either. As they followed Him, heard His teaching, and lived in His light, they were already living in His Kingdom. Just like you and I today! But He knew that they wouldn't always have Him to see with their eyes. After His ascension, they'd have to live by faith until He returns again.

In the meantime (in our meantime, too), we should not worry about when, or where, or how He will return. When we see it, we will know. If someone tries to fool you, don't be fooled, as it will be unmistakable on That Day. Jesus compared the time leading up to His second coming as similar to Noah's time just before the Flood. To the people of the world, everything was normal, until Noah entered the Ark and the waters swiftly covered the earth.

But, like Noah, although there will be judgement for unbelievers on that day, when Jesus returns we will remain with Him in His Kingdom, just as we've been since our baptism. Noah's life was saved from the flood by God's miraculous deliverance in the Ark. And we're miraculously saved from eternal death by Jesus' deliverance on the cross. We enjoy His rule over us today, and will enjoy it perfectly in Heaven for eternity.

Prayer: King of the Universe, rule over us in the here and the now and, when Jesus returns, take us to Your heavenly kingdom. In His Name, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, November 28, 2022

Read Luke 18:1-14

Persistent Humility

These stories don't seem immediately connected. Jesus tells a parable about a persistent widow who wears out a corrupt judge to finally hear her case, just so she will leave him alone. Then Jesus tells a story about two men in the temple – a self-righteous Pharisee and an ashamed tax collector. But the two stories have one important common detail: prayer.

Dr. Charles Arand has commented that, “prayer is both the evidence and the test of faith.” And in these stories, we see this to be true. Who has faith – the Pharisee who “prays” by congratulating himself on how much better he is than the tax collector OR the tax collector who confesses his sin to God and seeks help? The answer is obvious. Faith is not merely knowing who God is, but trusting Him, looking to Him alone for help. The evidence of faith here is not impressive personal virtue, but humble trust in God alone, for He only is righteous and able to help.

The first story presents the test of faith. Now, Jesus is not claiming that God is corrupt judge who needs to be manipulated. He is telling a lesser to great story. If the lesser example (the corrupt judge) will listen to one who is persistent (like the woman in the story), how much more will the greater One (Your loving Heavenly Father) listen and help you? AND His loving desire to help us should lead us to be persistent. Prayer being the statement of faith that we trust in God to help us and provide what is best for us.

This is the nature of prayer: persistent and humble. We know our need, AND we know the One who can help.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, lead me to be persistent and humble in prayer, for I know my needs that You alone can fulfill. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, November 29, 2022

Read Luke 18:15-30

What I Need

God has been so good to me. He has made me an adult, with an interest in life. I have learned so much, He has kept me learning all my life. As I thank God, I realize again that I know so much more than I did as a child. Then comes temptation, surely, I will think that means that I mean a lot more to God now than when I started learning. I am sure that only someone who grows his faith will be a true "Son of God".

And then I am reminded. Jesus told us that we have to be like a little child to go into God's Kingdom. But, but, then my superiority is good to have, but thinking that makes me better, makes me worse. A child doesn't understand God (not that I do either really), a child simply trusts. That child will trust that God will supply his parents with what he needs for supper and for life. He doesn't need to know how that will happen; he just trusts.

So why do I try to make myself more important, to not need to trust God for everything. Just trust! But that means my knowledge, my efforts are just getting in the way. They block my trust. The more I try, the less I trust.

Oh, Lord, help my lack of trust. Let me my age and knowledge be nice, but not between me and You. You are indeed just what I need, I don't need myself!

Prayer: Father in Heaven, I thank you for making trust the only importance. Please keep me heart simply trusting You and everything. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, November 30, 2022

Read Luke 18:31-43

EVERYTHING Written About the Son of Man Will Be ACCOMPLISHED

“And taking the twelve, [Jesus] said to them, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.’” Luke 18:31

Heading to Jerusalem and drawing near Jericho, Jesus tells the twelve on the way (probably alongside the road) that He is foretelling, fulfilling, keeping, performing, and will accomplish Scripture in His words and deeds by dying and rising. In other words, everything will be kept according to Jesus' Word and actions as He says it is, and it is so.

Notes v 31 - The Greek word τελεσθήσεται, telesthēstai comes from τελέω, teleō—*bring to an end, finish, complete*. Here in v. 31 τελεσθήσεται is nuanced as “to carry out an obligation or demand, carry out, accomplish, perform, fulfill, keep” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, BDAG*).

The third time Jesus foretells His death, suffering, and resurrection here in Luke's Gospel account (see Luke 9:22; 17:22-23; compare with Matt 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; Mark 8:30-31; 10:32-34). Jesus says He will be delivered over to be mocked, shamefully treated, spit on, flogged, killed, and rise on the third day, just as it is written. And **“they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said”** (v. 34; see ahead also to Luke 24:6-7, 44-46 when Jesus opens their minds to the Scriptures). Jesus opens the minds of Baptized Christians, for faith is revealed through means of grace in the Word of Christ and the Sacraments.

Jesus, the Son of Man, foretold in the Scriptures: **“Everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished”** (v. 31). See Psalm 22; 69; Isaiah 50:6; 52:13- 53:12. **“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him . . . his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed”** (Daniel 7:13-14). Jesus, the Son of David, foretold in the Scriptures. Jesus healed a blind beggar who called Him Son of David (vv. 35-43; see 2 Samuel 1:1-17; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; John 2:19-21; Matt 12:6).

Jesus opens sinful hearts and minds to see Him through faith and Baptism. Christian minds, your minds, by grace, and Christ's Word revealed in the Scriptures for all to see through faith. Psalms 113-118 are fitting to meditate on as Jesus goes up to Jerusalem with songs on His lips with the Twelve, glorifying God, **“Praise Yah! Praise, O slaves of Yahweh, Praise the name of Yahweh”** (Ps. 113:1-2, *Legacy Standard Version*).

Prayer – **“Let not sin shield our eyes, O Father, from the truth of Jesus, who bore the cross to be our Savior. Amen.”** (TLSB)

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, December 1, 2022
Read Luke 19:1-10

I Wish to See Jesus

Zacchaeus was seeking to see Jesus. He had heard about all of the amazing things that Jesus was doing, and he wanted to see the man for himself. He was curious about Jesus.

Now it's easy for us to think of Zacchaeus as a good man who found himself in a tax collector role against his will. It's easy for us to think that Zacchaeus was a good person before he met Jesus, maybe even a believer! He just hadn't quite committed to following Jesus yet.

It's easy to think these things, but they are probably all wrong. It's more likely that Zacchaeus was a pretty bad person who chose to be a tax collector of his own volition, extorted money from his clients, and only sought to see Jesus because he was curious, no faith involved. This is probably closer to the reality of who Zacchaeus really was. He was a selfish, cruel, and prideful man who was very comfortable in his own sin.

Zacchaeus was lost. And, though he didn't realize it, the man he was so curious, was the one man who could find him: Jesus.

You see, there's something wrong about our seeking Jesus. Sometimes we seek Jesus for validation of our own opinion. Sometimes we seek Jesus for authority to look on others with contempt. Sometimes, like Zacchaeus, we seek Jesus simply because we are curious. We seek Jesus for the wrong reasons and are often dissatisfied when we can't find Him in the way that we want. But that's because we aren't meant to find Him. Jesus finds us.

Just like Zacchaeus in the sycamore tree, Jesus stops and gazes at us. He finds us with His love, His comfort, His patience, and His strength. Jesus lovingly invited us to allow Him into our hearts. So brothers and sisters, when you wish to see Jesus, pray to Him, open your hearts, and let Him find you.

Prayer: "Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go our with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

- LSB, "Collect for guidance in our calling," pg. 311.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, December 2, 2022

Read Luke 19:11-27 (esp. 19:14)

“We Do Not Want This Man to Reign Over Us”

Have truer words ever been spoken?

At some point, these words have belonged to all of us.

When forgiveness seems to costly, yet we are called to “forgive as God in Christ forgave you.” In that moment, we bristle and decide “That’s easy for Jesus to say, but it’s harder for us.” In our denial of His Word, we echo that “we do not want this man to reign over us.”

When standing for a biblical sexual ethic means stating that all sexual relationships outside of lifelong one man, one woman marriage are contrary to God’s Word, we see how God’s design doesn’t mesh with modern “progress.” In that moment, many bristle and decide, “That’s easy for Jesus to say, but it’s harder for us.” Living together before marriage is “fine,” no fault-divorce just has to be accepted, various sexual lifestyles are just part of modern life. In buying into these notions, we deny God’s Word and echo that “we do not want this man to reign over us.”

When I want to believe that all people are basically good, but Jesus contradicts me saying that “no one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18). I bristle and decide, “Jesus can’t mean that.” In this denial of His Word, I echo that “we do not want this man to reign over us.”

The truth is, according to my sinful nature, I don’t want anyone to reign over me. I want to be my own king, but what would a kingdom of my own making look like? It would be mighty self-centered. And hopeless. “Justice” would rule to make everything turn out well for me, but maybe not for thee.

So much better is His Kingdom. He is mighty in self-forgetfulness. He is the bringer of hope. He sees to it that despite all that I deserve, His kingdom makes everything by faith turn out well for me, but not for Him, as He is crowned with thorns. His reign of mercy and righteousness, perfection and self-giving is so different from how I would reign. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Dear King Jesus, forgive me. Lead me to repentance. Take from me every desire to rule, and shape me by Your true righteousness and mercy. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, December 3, 2022

Read [Luke 19:28-48](#)

“Let the Stones Remain Silent”

One mile to go. The last few weeks had been filled with explosive events and growing excitement. The blind healed. Thousands fed. Parables taught to ever-expanding crowds. And now Lazarus, raised from the dead! This man from Nazareth is the real thing! The weather obeys Him. Demons run away from Him. And now, anointed as a king with expensive perfume, He mounts a donkey to process into Jerusalem. King David rode a donkey! And the prophet Zechariah wrote of the Messiah, **“Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey”**.

The crowds praised Him as their king: **“Hosanna in the highest!”** But as He reached the summit of the Mount of Olives just west of Bethphage, He saw Jerusalem. Glorious, majestic Jerusalem! The home of the Temple, God’s footstool with His people! But, despite the thunderous songs of praise directed at Him, Jesus wept at the sight. **“Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!”** He knew the hearts of His followers – that many of them would be crying out for his death in a few days. That many were there for the wrong reasons – to see a show, to see Israel become mighty again, to witness this man “crash and burn” in front of them. And, because He knew that this city and the nation Israel would be destroyed in a few more years.

But, when **“some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”**

My Grandma couldn’t sing very well. I never thought it that bad, but she wasn’t known as a “good singer.” Married to the pastor, she should have known better than to let her voice be heard. She should have mouthed the words; been gracious enough to spare the ears of those around her. But, no. She wasn’t going to let those stones cry out! Nothing could keep her silent before her Lord, as she sang, **“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!”**

Like many in the crowds that first Palm Sunday, we too don’t understand everything Jesus said. We sometimes come to church for the wrong reasons. But we find here our King and Savior. We may not sing well; we not be artists, or amazing preachers or teachers. But, as even my Grandma’s voice was beautiful music in His ears, He hears our meager attempts at praise. And He weeps tears of joy.

Prayer: Jesus, Savior-King, accept my meager expressions of thanks for Your mighty deeds of salvation, healing, and life. In Your Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, December 5, 2022

Read Luke 20:1-18

The Stone the Builders Rejected

“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” Luke 20:18

These don't seem like great options. Door #1 – you fall on this stone and are broken to pieces. Door #2 – this stone falls on you and crushes you. There is no Door #3. When it comes to eternal life, there are no easy paths.

That's how it is with Jesus. He is a rock of stumbling and a stone of offense according to Isaiah 8:14. The Gospel of a bloody Savior with its message that our merits contribute nothing to our salvation offends our sinful, fallen flesh and causes us to stumble in pride. Like the tenants in the vineyard, we want to run the show and keep at least some of the glory for ourselves. Yet our old Adam must die, or we will be crushed and destroyed like the vineyard tenants.

We must be broken so that the Lord might re-create us and raise us up to a new life in Christ. No, being broken doesn't sound pleasant, but listen to the promise God makes to the broken: “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18). Those broken in repentance are restored and built up again in Jesus.

For the stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone of the house of God – a firm foundation for us. “Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame” (Romans 9:33).

Prayer – Lord Jesus, grant me a penitent hearts and a faith that is built solely on you. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, December 6, 2022

Read Luke 20:19-40

My Image

When I look at the world, I see God's image in the beauty, finely tuned manner in which things work well. I see, also, disruption in His world, decay, and death. That I know is the devil's image. There I see him working. But with God I see goodness, building, and positiveness everywhere.

"Give Caesar what is in his image, to God what is in His image". Caesar here is not only the man who held the office in the Roman empire, here, Caesar is all the power of destruction and power that the world, under the devil, values. But the Bible tells us, people, that is me, are made in the image of God. I don't have to understand it all, there is just this, God wants me to live like Him and gives me the power and strength to resist the devil and continue to live like Him in the life He has given me.

Out, away, those thoughts trying so often to bring me down. I am made in the image of God. He has cleansed me and made me His. When the world overwhelms me, attempts to bring me to despair, with the hopelessness of being a success in the world, I keep coming back to Jesus. To the world, He looked like a failure, to the world, they thought had put Him down, but he rose from the dead.

I live in Him! There is my image, in Him I am like Him. I don't "give" myself to God, I accept His gift of Himself - to live in that Image.

Prayer: I thank you, O God, for your caring about my life. I thank you for giving me life in Jesus and continuing to support and keep me there. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, December 7, 2022

Read Luke 20:41-47

David's Son, Messiah, Yahweh

"How can they say that the Christ is David's son?"

Luke 20:41

Following Jesus' profound words, God is the God **"of the living"** (v. 38); Jesus said to the scribes, **"How can they say that the Christ is David's son? For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.' David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?'"** (vv. 41-44). Jesus is quoting a Psalm of David, which foretells "David's Lord" Messiah (*the Christ*), David's Son, and in the New Testament, revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. Most beautifully, the Psalms are right, **"The LORD [Yahweh] says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool'"** (110:1; Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34). Then Jesus asks another question to the scribes, **"David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?"** (v. 44).

Jesus is at the same time the promised Messiah offspring seed of David foretold and fulfilled, and, at the same time, David's Lord and the Son of God; as Christians, we are the intended readers and receivers of this profound truth through faith. Jesus is Yahweh in the flesh, true God and true man, begotten of the Father from eternity, the living God.

Martin Luther wrote of Psalm 110:1, quoted by Jesus, *"THIS is a true and exalted psalm, the main one to deal with our dear Lord Jesus Christ. Here, as nowhere else in the Old Testament Scriptures, we find a clear and powerful description of His person—who He is, namely, both David's promised Son according to the flesh and God's eternal Son, as well as the eternal King and Priest—and of His resurrection, ascension, and entire kingdom. For this reason it is quite right and fitting always to use or to sing this psalm on the feasts of the Lord Christ, such as Easter, Ascension Day, and the Day of Pentecost.2 Both Christ and His apostles often cite this psalm in the New Testament Scriptures because it serves as the most conclusive basis and confirmation of the article of faith regarding Christ's person and His spiritual kingdom and righteousness. (Luther's Works, vol. 13, Psalm 110).*

Jesus then warns the people of the Scribes to His disciples and all the people there, **"Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation"** (vv. 46-47). This is an outward show to impress the world for personal gain and satisfaction, not from faith.

Prayer – We look to You only, Jesus, and through Your suffering, death, and resurrection for us, we are forgiven and justified through faith and not works. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, December 8, 2022
Read Luke 21:1-19

Temporary vs. Eternal

“By your endurance you will gain your life.”

Jesus has a rather grim message for His disciples in this Luke passage. “Times are going to get hard, and you need to endure them.” Jesus pulls no punches when He informs them of the reality of His plan: they will suffer great persecution.

All earthly things will end – they are temporary. But God is eternal, and through Jesus, the disciples had been given something alien to this world. Eternal life. Jesus tells them that because they possess this, the world would reject and turn against them. They would be persecuted, tried, imprisoned, and questioned. They would have their earthly possessions taken away and their very livelihood ripped from them. They would be made poor in every sense of the word – no money, no possessions, no power – all because they have been given something alien to the world, eternal life.

“Then what should we do,” we can picture the disciples asking, “if we have no earthly merit and the world is against us? What should we do?” Endure. If your possessions are taken, and you are left with nothing but two copper coins to your name, dedicate them to God who has given you an abundance of faith, hope, and love. If the world has turned against you, arrested, threatened, and questioned you, use your breath to proclaim Christ who has given you eternal life. If this temporary world seems to be coming to an end, praise God who has no end and has chosen to redeem you. Endure in the faith of Christ. For only through Christ do we inherit eternal life.

This was Jesus’ message to His disciples, and it is the same message Jesus has for us today. Endure in the faith of Christ. For He is with you. Surely nothing in all of this temporary creation can separate us from the love of God and His promise of eternal life. So let us dedicate ourselves, one another, and our whole life to Christ, our Lord, who has given us eternal life. Amen.

Prayer: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, because of Your tender love toward us sinner You have given us Your Son that, believing in Him, we might have everlasting life. Continue to grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may remain steadfast in this faith to the end and finally come to life everlasting; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

- LSB, “Prayer for steadfast faith,” pg. 311.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, December 9, 2022

Read Luke 21:20-28 (esp. 21:28)

Straighten Up!

I'm not sure who it was in your life, but for anyone with good posture there was someone who served as the Posture Police. Oh it might have been a teacher, mother, grandmother. I see some smiles, you know what's it's like to be busted by the Posture Police. Sit up straight – don't slouch in that chair. Don't hunch your shoulders – you look like an old man. Stand up, head held high - how you stand says who you are. Posture has a way of communicating confidence, certainty, even joy. And just as much, it can communicate fear, doubt and defeat.

In today's reading, we are reminded of an end to time as we know it. We are reminded of an end to sin and suffering and pain, that Jesus will come to set all things right, maybe even our posture. But the reminders, the signs, the pointers to such a coming day are just the kinds of things that make heads droop and make brave men cower in fear.

Jesus dove into this discussion in an innocent enough fashion back in the beginning of Luke 21. Some disciples and perhaps other curious folks were remarking on the beauty of the Jerusalem temple. And in startling fashion, he tells those who are admiring the building that, "these things you see here, the days are coming when these stones will be little more than a pile of rubble." In concern for this civic and spiritual treasure, the crowd asks, "when and how are we going to know? What's the sign to look for?"

Jesus launches into a litany of awfulness. False teachers and wars. Oh, there will be great earthquakes, various famines and illnesses. We've seen all of these. In fact, these things abound in our time and every time since Christ spoke these words. Yet in giving us this litany of awfulness, Jesus knows the default reaction of sinful people. So sprinkled along the way He says, "don't be terrified." "Endure" and "people will faint with fear and foreboding...(but you) straighten up and raise your heads." How? Why? Because your redemption is drawing near.

Remember who is coming, it is the One who is speaking here. This is the One who only shortly after speaking these words would be lifted up to draw all to him. Oh, Jesus would take on a posture of defeat. And As He hung on the cross, sun and moon and stars, the whole creation seemed to convulse. The sky went black. The earth quaked. It was as though the whole world was coming undone. And He lowered his head in humility as his shoulders were slumped, burdened by all our sin – our weak faith, our fascination with false teachers and false teaching. And more than just our sin, He was burdened with all our pain. He carried in His wounds the scars of abused children and the persecuted saints around the globe. All pain and all sin – all for us.

But the wars and the carnage and the storms and even death itself were not going to keep Jesus down. Because sin and death were undone. There is news to straighten our spines and life our heads looking in confidence to the coming of our final redemption, even when the signs might cause us to slouch. We stand tall because we stand on the grace of Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, straighten up my head to look with confidence toward Your coming again. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, December 10, 2022

Read [Luke 21:29-38](#)

“Signs”

When did you first see a sign that Christmas was getting close? Was it that first Christmas carol you heard on the radio back in July? The sales beginning just after Labor Day? Your neighbor testing out his lights in early November? I exaggerate, but there’s no hiding it; we all know that there’s only two shopping weeks left until Christmas. All the signs have made that obvious.

In the readings leading up to today’s, Jesus has been teaching about His return in glory. He says that when that will happen is kind of like Christmas; that when you see the signs, you’ll know that His kingdom is near. And those signs have been a-plenty. Wars, astrological signs, earthquakes, floods, and distress. The Good News is that we know that the kingdom of God is near! But, the bad news is that those signs have been plentiful since the first sin.

Through the ages, people have tried to figure out exactly when the Last Day will be, but Jesus said it best, **“Surely, I am coming soon.”** We know, our response should be, **“Come, Lord Jesus!”** But we would still really like to know more. Thankfully, Jesus tells us more.

In addition to knowing that His kingdom is near, He tells us, **“watch yourselves.”** We know only too well that it’s been nearly 2,000 years since He spoke those words. On our calendar, that’s a long time. Generations have been born, lived, and died since then. Many of us have lived longer than what we’d consider “soon.” So we begrudgingly have no choice but to trust Him. And “watch ourselves.”

We know He’s going to return, just as (after promising to save us) He came as the Messiah. But, those 2,000 years tell us it may not happen in our lives. Since He said, **“that day come(s) upon you suddenly like a trap”**, we also know He may return today. So we stay prepared, and He prepares us by telling us that, even though **“Heaven and earth will pass away, ...my words will not pass away.”** So we “watch ourselves” by dwelling in His Word. We follow His mighty acts through the seasons of the Church, from Advent through the last Sunday in the church year.

The kingdom of God is near! The signs that point to this are difficult to handle, but the Lord of the Church is with us.

Prayer: Come, Lord Jesus, soon. As I live in this corrupted world, strengthen me by Your Word so that on that day I may graciously **“stand before the Son of Man.”** Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, December 12, 2022

Read Luke 22:1-13

Secrets from God

There is nothing hidden from God.

Judas Iscariot thought that he was being really sneaky. He secretly met with the chief priests and officers who were seeking to kill Jesus and was hired by them to keep an eye out for a time when they could privately arrest Jesus without the interference of a crowd. Luckily for Judas, Passover was coming up! Traditionally, during this time families gathered to eat a private meal together in honor of the Passover. This would be the perfect opportunity to arrest Jesus! Judas simply needed to discover the location of their Passover meal, inform the chief priests ahead of time, and then collect his reward for a job well done.

But then when Peter and John asked where they should prepare for the Passover meal, Jesus gave them extremely vague instructions. Their instructions were to talk to a random guy, follow him to his home, and prepare for the meal in his upper room. How in the world was Judas supposed to inform the chief priests of the location ahead of time?! He had no clue specifically where it would be! It's almost as if Jesus knew that Judas was seeking to betray Him and prevented him from doing so by being vague.

That's because Jesus did know! At that moment, Jesus knew exactly what was in Judas' heart. He knew that Judas had been secretly meeting with the chief priests, He knew that Judas was seeking to betray Him in a secluded location, and He knew that if He let Judas succeed, He would be killed shortly after. Jesus knew Judas' intentions, and Jesus knew Judas' sins.

The miracle here is that Jesus knew Judas' sins, yet still prepared a seat for him at the Passover celebration. Regardless of Judas' sins, Jesus still sought to eat with him, show love to him, and forgive him through a holy meal.

So it is with us. Jesus knows our sins. There is nothing hidden from Him. Yet even so, He seeks to eat with us in His holy meal. He seeks to show love to us through comfort, joy, and peace. He seeks to forgive us. Jesus sees us for the sinful creatures that we are, yet He redeemed us anyway with His blood so that new we are created to be something better through Him. Thanks be to God for seeing our sins and forgiving us of them!

Prayer: "O God, You justify the ungodly and desire not the death of the sinner. Graciously assist us by Your heavenly aid and evermore shield us with Your protection, that no temptation may separate us from Your love in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen."

- LSB, "Prayer for aid against temptation," pg. 312.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, December 13, 2022

Read Luke 22:14-30

The Greatest

Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of God? Well, Jesus, of course. But not counting Him, who? Was it one of the disciples? Well, they had the benefit of being with Jesus, so probably one of them. But there are a lot of possibilities. Well, who is the greatest in our congregation?

Jesus told me the answer - it is the one who is the least, who serves everyone. But but, God seems to get everything backwards. The greatest is the one who gives orders, no? Everyone knows that. So it who gives others the orders, who organizes, gives directions to all. Now there I might have a chance. It is easy to tell other people what to do, especially as a way to show my superiority. So why does Jesus claim that it is the servant who is the greatest?

But then ... I remember. He is the greatest, but He didn't come forcing people to do things His way. He is the servant of all. He not only put off His divine prerogatives, He accepted death, then rose again showing that God is stronger than death itself. He is the greatest because He is the servant of all.

Now, I am again unhappy with myself. I wanted to order others around, and thus be the greatest. Rather, I need to humble myself and serve others. Sometimes serving can be organizing, direction, and even giving orders. But only for their benefit. Thank you, God, for again letting Your ways change my heart. Now help me to live that way!

Prayer: Thank you Lord Jesus for being my servant. Help me to let you make me a servant to others, as you have done for me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, December 7, 2022

Read Luke 22:31-46

Jesus Prays, Scripture Fulfilled

*“For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’
For what is written about me has its fulfillment.” Luke 22:37*

Jesus warns all the disciples of Satan's demands to have “all” of them. After Peter’s bold statement of going to prison and death with Jesus, denial is what Jesus knows Simon will do later. Jesus said emphatically, **“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you [ὅμᾶς (plural) you all], that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you [σοῦ (singular) you] that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”** (vv. 31-32). This saying of Jesus is now directed to Simon Peter; here, the warning is not understood.

Jesus then talked about the one who has a money bag and knapsack to take it and buy a sword, **“For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me”** (v. 37a) and that fulfilling Scripture is also what must be done **“And he was numbered with the transgressors”** (v. 37; cited from Isaiah 53:12). It seems that the disciples are still puzzled about moneybags, knapsacks, and buying a sword, not understanding Jesus' fulfillment in His death, resurrection, and ascension, saying, **“‘Look, Lord, here are two swords.’ And he said to them, ‘It is enough.’”** (v. 38).

Paul Kretzmann commented, *“The disciples, after the removal of their Lord, would not find the same kind reception as before; they would have to care for their means of livelihood; they would have to expect bitter enmity. Days of want, trouble, and severe trials and battles were coming, and they should be prepared for them. As for Him, He is under obligation to the eternal plan of God for the salvation of men. In Him the word of Isa 53:12, would be fulfilled, as well as all the other prophecies. His life and work, His death and resurrection, represent the end of Old Testament prophecy; His fate is fixed beyond recall. The disciples, as usual, did not grasp the real meaning of Jesus, but were under the impression that He was referring to physical fighting. So they showed Him two swords which they had procured in some way or had kept from former years. His only remark upon this was: It is enough..”* (Kretzmann Commentary on the NT).

Jesus tells the disciples to pray. Jesus prays, **“‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.’ And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground”** (vv. 42-44).

Prayer – “Go to dark Gethsemane, All who feel the tempter’s pow’r; Your Redeemer’s conflict see, Watch with Him one bitter hour; Turn not from His griefs away; Learn from Jesus Christ to pray.” Amen. (LSB 436:1)

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, December 15, 2022
Read Luke 22:47-62

Convicted

In these verses, Jesus is betrayed twice. The two men who commit these betrayals may not have realized their traitorous actions at the time, but after each betrayal, Jesus makes it know that He has indeed been betrayed. First, Judas betrays Jesus by leading the soldiers and religious leaders to Him in order to arrest Him. Upon doing so, Jesus very plainly asks him, “would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” He makes it very clear that this is a betrayal. Then, while in the courtyard of Jesus’ trial, Peter denies knowing Him three times. After the third denial, Jesus “turned and looked at Peter”. By doing so, Jesus very subtly but also very plainly makes it know to Peter that he has just betrayed Him.

Two betrayals. And two instances where Jesus, not only recognizes, but convicts the betrayer. The point of interest here is how these two men respond to their convictions.

In Matthew’s Gospel, we are told that Judas responds to his conviction by denying the spoils of his crime, fleeing into the wilderness, and ending his own life. Upon being convicted of his crime, his sin, Judas fell into despair and became a victim of sin.

Peter, however, responds to his conviction differently. Luke tells us that Peter recognized his sin, fled, and wept. Upon being convicted of his sin, Peter repented and was welcomed back into Jesus’ fold with open arms. While Judas’s conviction led him to look inward at his own overwhelming sin, Peter’s conviction led him to look outward at Christ who’s overwhelming grace defeats sin. These two men are guilty of the same sin: betraying Jesus. Yet they respond to their convictions in astronomically different ways. One seeks damnation. The other seeks grace.

We so often betray Jesus. Every sin that we commit is a betrayal. And God convicts us of all of them with His Law. There is no escaping Jesus’ questioning or His gaze. Therefore, the question we must ask is this: how will I respond? Will I look inward and despair at my own sin? Or will I look outward and repent, trusting in Jesus’s forgiveness. Let us, like Peter, always choose to seek grace. Because Christ is always ready to give it freely and in abundance.

Prayer: “Almighty and everlasting God, through Your Son You have promised us forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. Govern our hearts by Your Holy Spirit that in our daily need, and especially in all time of temptation, we may seek Your help and, by a true and lively faith in Your word, obtain all that You have promised; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

- LSB, “Prayer in times of temptation,” pg. 312.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, December 16, 2022

Read Luke 22:63-23:5

What Further Testimony Do We Need?

The irony is extraordinary. Jesus answers two questions at his light night trial and declares that He is the Messiah (the Son of Man seated at God's right hand), and then He goes further in sharing words of the religious council, "You say that I am." Perhaps it should be written, "I AM," as in a reference to the divine name Yahweh. In two short responses, Jesus is claiming to be both Christ and God.

So, the doubting council asks, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips." To them, Jesus' words should condemn Him as a blasphemer, falsely claiming to be God. But they didn't need this testimony. Repeatedly, Jesus has made it clear that He is Christ, the one anointed to come and rescue His people, AND He is able to do so because He is the Son of God. But the council didn't listen before. Their unbelief closed their ears.

But we certainly don't need any further testimony. Jesus is shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep (Luke 15). Jesus, "the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath" (Luke 6:5). Jesus has the authority to make the lame walk and forgive sins (Luke 5:23-24). Jesus has "come to call sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Jesus is one who "commands even winds and water, and they obey him" (Luke 8:25). Jesus is the Good Samaritan who gives all and risks all to bring us healing (Luke 10:29-37). Jesus is the "one thing necessary" for life and salvation (Luke 10:42). Jesus is "the Son of Man (who) came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

Having come thus far in Luke's Gospel, we need to further testimony, but Christ will give it anyway in His death and resurrection. In words and deeds, He leaves us with no question whatsoever that He is Christ and God who has come to save even those who would doubt Him.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, remove our doubts and lead us to cling to the testimony of Your grace in the Scriptures. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, December 17, 2022

Read [Luke 23:6-25](#)

“The Verdict”

It’s nearly Christmas. Jesus – God Himself – was born that day of a woman; a little baby. This is such a wondrous, beautiful story of God coming to dwell with us, that today’s reading is an abomination to our minds and hearts. Jesus has been brought to the Roman ruler of Judea, Pontius Pilate, and accused of misleading the people, forbidding tribute to Caesar, and falsely claiming to be the Messiah. The Jewish rulers and the people have all made this accusation against Jesus.

Pilate wasn’t exactly a friend of the Jews. Just back in chapter 13 we read about him having slain Jews while worshipping in the Temple. But he could see no guilt in Jesus, and plainly said so. Learning that He was from Galilee, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, who was nearby, in Jerusalem for the Passover. He was excited to see Jesus, hoping to see some of the miraculous tricks He was known for. And He, too, even though not a believer in Jesus in any way, declared Him innocent.

Returning to Pilate, he declared Jesus “not guilty” for a third time. **“What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death.”** But the Jewish people, the Chief Priests and Scribes, the leaders of the Sanhedrin, insisted, **“Crucify, crucify him!”** Reason and rational arguments could not penetrate their hatred, and they screamed out their demands as if possessed by demons. And, finally, they wore down Pilate’s sense of justice until he, too, added his condemnation of Jesus to death on the cross.

Jesus was sentenced to death by representatives from all groups within Israel and from their secular leaders, even the man representing the Roman Empire. The entire world effectively united in rejecting Jesus. And, our own sin, 2,000 years later, adds our verdict to that condemnation, **“Crucify, crucify him!”**

But, thanks be to God, **“while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.”** **“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** This is why Jesus was born at Christmas, why He was given the name, “Jesus”, because He would save His people from their sin. And the only abomination about this is our own sin. It – and we – deserved the verdict of death. But Jesus took that condemnation for us and gives us Life instead.

Kind of gives Christmas some context.

Prayer: Merciful God, the justice I deserved was instead poured onto Your innocent Son. Thank You for sending Him into our world at Christmas for me. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, December 19, 2022

Read Luke 23:26-43

Remember Me

A professor at the seminary was talking to a group of students. In answering our questions, he quoted a Scripture passage, but couldn't immediately remember the chapter and verse number. One of the students offered the common joke, "you have forgotten more than I've ever learned." To which, the professor offered, "even better is the One who always remembers, even us."

Twenty plus years later, I honestly can't remember which professor that was. (I forgotten a few things over the years myself) But I remember what he said, and it comes to mind whenever I hear the prayer of the repentant thief crucified along Jesus. "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

The simple prayer is our prayer. But even better than our prayer is the One who always remembers, even us. As He is nailed to the cross, He speaks forgiveness for those pounding the nails, and for all of us whose sin led to His crucifixion. Even before our prayer, He remembers us. He doesn't just recall us or anticipate our coming. He remembers. He carries us with Him. His love for us compels Him.

That's not to say that He doesn't forget. He forgets my sin (and yours!) by removing it "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). All to remember us, "for He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14). We are not worthy to enter His kingdom – both on account of our sin and since we are frail, mortal. But in Him? We are remembered. We are forgiven. We are "crowned with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:6), sharing in the majesty that belongs to Him alone.

Precisely in His death, He remembers you and gives you the kingdom!

Prayer: Jesus, remember me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, December 20, 2022

Read Luke 23:44-56

Trust That Overcomes Despair

It was done. The evil deed had come to fulfillment, the Son of God has died. But He didn't die in despair or wishing evil on anyone. He rested in God, "Into your hands I commend my spirit". He trusted His Father, God Himself also, to care for Him in death. Now we know the conclusion of the story, how He rose up on Easter morning, conquering death. But to those watching, it seemed like the end of the world, in despair.

How often I forget the end of the story in my life as well. I try my best and I find that the world doesn't care; that even my own desires beat against me. How I need to look to Jesus, to know His faith is with me, strengthening me against that awful feeling, that everything is lost. Look to Jesus and His faith! So, I tell myself.

There's a deep danger in thinking that I can see and understand everything. There's a constant desire to take over, to not let God drive me into that mess. I feel that I can see what is coming and think that surely can't be what God has planned.

Yet the Resurrection came in God's time. The devil's power is completely destroyed, he can do nothing else. So, I find this truth in my life. When things look worst, when I fail to see God working, then, in patience, as I trust God against my senses, I see His glorious victories. Praise the Lord!

Prayer: Please, O Father, please guard me from my own desires, my own fears. Build my trust in You through any and everything. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, December 21, 2022

Read Luke 24:1-12

Jesus Has Risen As He Said

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.’ And they remembered his words.”

Luke 24:5-8

On the first day of the week, as we recall the beginning, **“God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light . . . God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day”** (Genesis 1:3).

Back at the tomb where Jesus' body was assumed to be on Sunday, the first day of the week, the women were coming to the tomb **“with prepared spices, “Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women”** (v.10), very early in the morning while the sun was rising and found the stone rolled away and going in did not find the body of Jesus, **“but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed [ἀπορεῖσθαι—confused state of mind, at a loss] about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel”** (vv. 3-4). And having been ἐμφόβων, *emphobone*—afraid and bowed their faces to the ground!

As the text reveals, the men in the garments that gleamed like lightning said, **“He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.’ And they remembered his words”** (vv. 5-8). These women told the eleven what appeared to have happened, but they thought it was λῆρος—*idle talk, nonsense, humbug*, and disbelieved, **“But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened”** (v. 12).

Now, in the beginning, on the first day of the week, the Word of God had said, **“Let there be light, and there was light”** (Gen 1:36). And the Word of God became flesh had said He would be delivered over to sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day. Jesus the Christ, by whom all things were made, had promised by His Word and performed exactly what He said He would do. And in your Baptism, your sins were washed away, and you were declared righteous on account of Jesus Christ by God's Word and promise. As God says it will be, your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer – “In keeping with Your Word, fill our hearts, dear Lord Jesus, with the knowledge and comfort of Your empty tomb. Amen.” (TLSB).

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, December 22, 2022
Read Luke 24:13-35

All According to Plan

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

The disciples were lost and sad. They thought that their master, Jesus, was the chosen one who would finally overthrow the Romans and establish a powerful Jewish kingdom on earth. They thought that Jesus was immortal and mighty. They thought that Jesus was God.

But here He had died. Not only that, but He had been betrayed by His own people, beaten by the pagan authorities, and killed as a criminal, naked on a cross. Jesus wasn't just killed, He was humiliated. He certainly didn't look like the king of a powerful kingdom. He certainly didn't look immortal and mighty. He certainly didn't look like God. Jesus had been killed, and this left His disciples looking at one another in shock, asking, “Why? Was this all for naught? What do I do now?”

On the road to Emmaus, we see two disciples in such a condition. They were sad, lost, and scared. They thought that Jesus was gone and that all that they had done and seen had been for nothing.

But they and the rest of the disciples didn't understand the volume of the story. Jesus was a king who established a kingdom greater than any on earth: the kingdom of God. Jesus was immortal and mighty because He defeated death by His resurrection. Jesus was and forever will be God in flesh! And all of these things will be fully realized and revealed when He comes again on the final day. You see, Jesus' humiliation wasn't a failure. It was the successful fulfillment of God's plan from the very beginning. Moses and the prophets and all of the Scripture were preambles to the climatic sacrifice of Christ. Jesus' death and resurrection had been God's plan from the very beginning of time! Jesus didn't fail. He succeeded in a way that was far beyond the disciples' comprehension!

And that success, that victory, was for the disciples. They were saved, redeemed, and alive. What could they do now? Rejoice! How could they do anything but rejoice! And this very same success, that victory, is for you. You are saved. You are redeemed. You are alive. How can you do anything but rejoice?

Prayer: “Almighty God, whom to know is everlasting life, grant us perfectly to know Your Son, Jesus Christ, to be the way, the truth, and the life, that following His steps we may steadfastly walk in the way that leads to eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

- *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, “Prayer for a right knowledge of Christ,” pg. 1320

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, December 23, 2022

Read Luke 24:36-53

Ready for Christmas

If you have not finished your preparations for Christmas, you still have a few hours to pick up some presents, purchase some wrapping paper, grab a ham, bake some cookies, or whatever else is still on your list to accomplish. But even if you don't have time to "Deck the Halls" anymore than you already have, you are ready for Christmas.

Over the next two days, we will rehearse the story of Luke 2 and the birth of Jesus. So, it may seem odd to be reading about the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. But in fact, you are made ready for Christmas by rehearsing today's reading of the risen Jesus.

Let me explain what I mean. Tomorrow night amidst the glow of evening lights and candles, we will hear the words of the angel, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." This announcement is the "good news of great joy for all the people." But what is so exciting about the birth of "Christ the Lord?"

Jesus Himself tells us in Luke 24, "Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled...thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations." This is why the birth of Jesus is good news of great joy for all the people! He was born to suffer and die and rise to bring forgiveness of sins to us and to all nations.

This is the true meaning of Christmas. In movies and songs, you'll hear plenty of other lesser benefits of this festive season presented as the essence of Christmas. They may mean well, but those messages are insufficient or misguided. The Risen Jesus is telling us that to celebrate His coming, to truly rejoice at Christmas, remember why He came: to die and rise, to forgive, to share His resurrected life.

Have a blessed Christmas and rest in the truth that Jesus, the Christ, has made you ready to celebrate.

Prayer: Hail, the heavn'nborn Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
 Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His Wings.
 Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die,
 Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.
 Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!" Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Monday, January 9, 2023

Read Acts 1:1-11

Lessons from the Ascension

Luke and Acts are really one long story split in half. But if this is true, this seems like a bad way to start the second half of the story! The whole story has revolved around Jesus and now...He's gone!

This is the way that I had often thought about the Ascension. But in Jesus' ascension to the Father, He is not leaving us. But we are given some important lessons as we launch into this second half of Luke's story.

First, Jesus goes in order to send His Spirit. The Holy Spirit will give power to the disciples (and to the whole Church!) to carry the message of Jesus far beyond Jerusalem to "Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The coming of the Spirit is an incredible gift to Christ's Church (we'll hear A LOT more about the Spirit in chapter 2), but for now, perhaps the best comfort is that since the Holy Spirit is with us, Jesus has not left us alone. He has given a comforter to be with us forever. (John 14:16) All of us. His whole Church. To the ends of the earth. By the presence of the Spirit, the comforting words and presence of Jesus are with the whole Church on earth.

And second, Jesus will return. Yes, He will be with us through the Holy Spirit, but we are promised that He will return. The strength of the Church to go and proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus always keeps these two truths in mind. We are empowered now by the "Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). And yet, we also look ahead to the completion of the story of God when Christ returns. We joyfully share the hope of Jesus knowing He "will coming in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

These two truths will embolden the disciples through the book of Acts, and they embolden us as His disciples today!

Prayer: Dear Ascended Jesus, strengthen us by Your Spirit to share the hope of Your resurrection and encourage us each day in Your promised return. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, January 10, 2023

Read Acts 1:12-26

Serving as His

I am so thankful to our Lord because He made me His. He took me away from selfish interest, gave me a new heart, and a desire to reach out to others in the Lord. A new life is wonderful, there is so much loving, so much helping, so many ways to be like Jesus. As I live in Him, I learn so much - so much more of the Bible becomes clear, with deep meanings and obvious applications to my life and to the lives of others around me. He lets me teach others, He watches my words and gives life to what I say.

As I see what God has for me and for others, the future clearly to be desired, clearly full of ways I can serve God, especially in reaching out to others who don't have my benefits, who don't understand God's will as I do. I can easily see that God is glorified in what I do. Thank you, God.

Sometimes there comes a time in one's life when the service to God can involve something that looks and sounds, humanly speaking like honor, maybe with the opportunity to reach so many more for God's Kingdom. That is a time when I need to turn back to Him and ask, is it for me? Honor, renown, may not be what is good for me, I may not be the right person for that position. It is hard to be humble, to let God decide. God, please let me follow Joseph Barnabas Justus, and happily serve You when You want.

Prayer: I Thank you my God for your continual care. Let me always want only what you want for me. Thank you that I can trust you that way. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, January 11, 2023

Read Acts 2:1-21

It Came to Pass

“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Acts 2:21

Jesus told the disciples ahead of time that they would “**receive power**” (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49) and “**the promise of the Father**” (Acts 1:4; Luke 24:49), the Holy Spirit would come upon them, “**But the Helper** [*paraklētas—helper, intercessor, advocate*], **the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you**” (John 14:26; Acts 1:8; 2). “**When the day of Pentecost** [meaning the *fiftieth* day, see Leviticus 23:15-21] **arrived, they were all together in one place**” (v. 1).

The house was filled with a strong, forceful wind (wind can be described as breath, see Septuagint–Genesis 2:7), and divided into separate parts, there were tongues as flames of fire that became visible and sat down on every one of them, “**And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues** [*glōssais—(distinctive) languages, tongues*] **as the Spirit gave them utterance** [*apophthengesthai—to begin to speak out/declare loudly and boldly*]” (Acts 2:4. Jesus said this would happen, “**You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses** [*martoores —witnesses (bearing a divine message)*] **in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth**” (Acts 1:8).

Devout and God-fearing men from all nations were in Jerusalem (v. 5). Peter declared loudly to the men of Judea and everyone in Jerusalem, “**these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’**” (Acts 2:15-21; Joel 2:28-32; Romans 10:13). And who is Lord? Yahweh—He is Salvation—Jesus Christ is Lord!

Prayer – Heavenly Father, the day is quickly approaching when You shall judge all people. Because we cannot stand before You on the basis of our own strength or works, we pray that You would move us to trust in Your promised Redeemer, in whose name we will be saved. Amen. (TLSB, Joel 2:28-32).

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, January 12, 2023
Read Acts 2:22-36

Confess and Witness

Let's set the stage. Jesus was killed, was raised from the dead, and then visited His followers. While visiting them, He gave them a job to do. He tasked them with telling the world about Him and what He had done. But they weren't supposed to start right away! Instead, Jesus told them to wait until the Spirit was upon them and they were empowered by God. How hard this must have been for the disciples! They finally understood everything that had happened, they knew their mission to spread the word, but they were left waiting for permission to begin.

Then, on Pentecost, the waiting time was finally over. The Holy Spirit rested on them and it was finally time to begin their task. To start things off, Peter stands up and delivers a beautiful sermon that summarizes the Christian faith as a whole.

The first thing Peter does is explain the importance of what he is about to say. Then, beginning in verse 22, Peter gets into the meat of his sermon. This is Peter's message: Jesus Christ is God! And we sinful beings killed Him. But He, being God, rose from the dead. Now, because of Him, death is defeated! This is what King David was talking about when he confessed that he would be saved from death! Jesus is David's salvation! We know this is true because we have seen it! And now, we are telling you so that you too may see and believe.

In this sermon, Peter does two instrumental things that we can reflect on and learn from. First, he confessed Jesus as Lord. Second, he witnesses this truth to those around him. Confession and witness. We in the Lutheran Church have a word to capture this two-part procedure: the Gospel! The good message of Christ believed and shared is the very essence of the Gospel. This Gospel is the heart of who we are. It is the only way to God, salvation, and life. It is the same Gospel that David believed during ancient times, it is the same Gospel that Peter preached at Pentecost, and it is the same Gospel that we receive today. Let us continue to confess Jesus as Lord, encouraging us to continually see and believe Him. And let us continue to witness the truth about Jesus to others so that they too might see and believe.

Prayer: "Almighty, everlasting God, Your Son has assured forgiveness of sins and deliverance from eternal death. Strengthen us by Your Holy Spirit that our faith in Christ may increase daily and that we may hold fast to the hope that on the Last Day we shall be raised in glory to eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

- LSB, "Prayer for hope of eternal life in Christ," pg. 313.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, January 13, 2023

Read Acts 2:37-41

For All

I've gotten used to exclusions, and I imagine that you have also. Nearly every major store tries to entice people to walk in the door with promises of 20%, 30%, or even 40% off your purchase. The first time that I was fooled by this, I got up to the register and was politely told, "that coupon doesn't apply to your item." At which point, I actually read the LONG microscopic list of all of the items for which you could not use the promised 20%, 30%, or 40% off.

So when I hear such an expansive statement that "the promise is for you and for your children and for all," I tend to start looking for the fine print. But the gift of God's Spirit given in baptism is no gimmick or marketing ploy. In fact, the dual baptismal promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins are for every person who comes to the water.

No one is excluded on the basis of age. (This is for you and your children.)

No one is excluded on the basis of ethnic or national background. (look at Revelation 7 where every tribe and nation and language is represented in Christ's eternal kingdom.)

No one is excluded even on account of their particular sin. (as Paul puts it in Romans 6:3&7, "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death...one who has died has been set free from sin.")

There are no exclusions, exceptions, disqualifiers. The promise is for you and for your children and for all.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for the promises of my baptism, that are mine without exception. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, January 14, 2023

Read [Acts 2:42-47](#)

“Fellowship”

The world today looks at the Church as being largely irrelevant; just a leftover of a bygone era. People say, “It’s a quaint place to go to look at beautiful architecture and art”, “The music, although dated (to the 15th century!), is strangely soothing”, “It’s filled with a bunch of losers who are just as bad as the rest of us!” And when a scandal occurs, it’s further proof to them of the pointlessness of Church.

Of course, you and I know that they’re entirely missing the message. We know the Gospel and know that there is nowhere else to turn but to the Lord. The rest of the world is what doesn’t make sense to us – only Jesus gives true meaning to our very existence! But we still hear the world saying those things, and wonder a little.

We can hear those things and pretend not to – to blink and turn away, acting as if we never heard their put-downs. We’d like to take up the cross and go into battle with them – but remember hearing that “if you have to defend your existence, you’ve already lost the argument.” Or, we can just make ourselves too busy to think about what the world thinks – that works for me!

And then we read today’s reading. It’s a veritable “fairy tale” of how the Church should look: everyone eating together, praying together, getting along, selling their possessions to care for the needy. They were all in awe of God, witnessing miracles all around them. Even the world loved them! And their numbers grew every day. We read this and just wonder – “where did we go wrong?” “What’s happened to the Church?”

Back in the early days of the Church, they had something called “koinonia”. That means “to share, or participate, in something in common” – Fellowship. They knew that no one “owned” what they enjoyed; that if someone had it that that meant that someone else couldn’t have it. No, Jesus gave Himself freely for all, and the early Church wanted to be just like Jesus.

That’s what the Spirit gave the early Church, and still gives us today – Jesus! We have a gift that is too good to be true! We hear about it every time we gather together to break bread, share prayers, and immerse ourselves in the apostles’ teachings. The beauty seen at a children’s Christmas program, the care for one another at a funeral, the Peace which passes all understanding!

The world will never understand the Church. But through all the crime, disease, strife, prejudice, and other sin that the world understands only too well, the Church continues to share His love with one another and the world. And **“the Lord continues to add to their number day by day those who are being saved.”**

Prayer: Lord of the Church, thank You for the fellowship I find among Your people. Continue to care for me and the world through Your Church. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, January 16, 2023

Read Acts 3:1-10

Share What You Have

Today's reading brought to mind a somewhat obvious truth - You can't give what you don't have. And it made me think of a time when I was at the seminary. As I was driving towards an intersection, I saw a man in full military fatigues. He was talking to the driver of each car. When he came to my car, I had a problem – my car windows didn't work. Something was wrong with the wiring in my door, and so I couldn't open any of the car windows. That car did have a sunroof, so I opened it and talked to the young man through the top.

He told me that he was trying to get back to base, and he was just asking for one dollar from each driver. I searched my car, and collected what I had, and I placed two quarters on top of the car next to the open sunroof. The young man smiled and said, "Thank you, sir, but you should keep the quarters. It looks like you need them more than I do." I felt bad, but I thought to myself, "you can't give what you don't have."

Peter shared the same sentiment when he had a man come asking him for money. But Peter (with the aid of the Spirit) was a little quicker thinking than I was. Peter couldn't give what he didn't have, but Peter had something better. "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" And better than collecting a little money, the man got up immediately as "his feet and ankles were made strong."

For those who read this email, some of you may have a good deal of silver and gold to share, while others would strain to pull together two quarters on certain days. But each of us has something of infinite value to share – the love of Christ. We are not guaranteed the ability to share miraculous physical healing (such signs were meant primarily to reinforce the message of everlasting healing in Jesus), but we do have words of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus.

Share what you have, the riches of salvation through Jesus!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to share wisely the earthly gifts that you have given to me, but even more, help me to generously share the riches of Your love. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, January 17, 2023

Read Acts 3:11-26

Surprises

When I plan something and I produce effort towards achieving my plan, and when my plan succeeds, I rejoice. I have obtained what I desired. That is what God made the world to be. But it is not only getting my way, or succeeding in my efforts that brings joy. In fact, the very fact that it was my efforts that succeeded will get in the way of my joy, after all, there is no guarantee that what I succeeded at today will cause me to succeed tomorrow.

So great as my joy over succeeding, there is a greater joy over gifts that God gives us. What I can't do, there is no expectation of "success" of getting that item. Here my self sufficiency fails. Here there can no prospect of joy. But this is just what God loves. He works in secret to accomplish His goals, and one of His goals is to bring me joy. So often I forget about that side of God.

While I worry about what I need in this life, and while I worry about standing up to His standards - which I know I can't do, He is working for my benefit. Sometimes to teach me patience and endurance; but often just to bring a surprise to me, to make me happy. It is that way with salvation, even as I have loved Him all my life, I still find a deeper understanding of His love and what He has done for me. It was, continues to be, and will be wonderful surprise to me.

Prayer: Thank you God for the gift of surprises. Thank you for Salvation and for the other gifts, miracles, or just nice. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, January 18, 2023

Read Acts 4:1-22

The Name of Jesus

Jesus has risen from the dead, **“the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”** (v. 11; Psalm 118:22). Jesus’ Name was proclaimed at the temple. A man was healed in Jesus’ Name at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and Peter addressed the men of Israel, proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus and His power. As Peter and John were speaking to the people in Solomon’s Portico, **“the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead”** (vv. 1-2).

They were arrested and taken into custody until the next day, and those who had heard of the Word of God proclaimed in Jesus, about five thousand men, believed in His Name. The next day Peter and John were being interrogated by the rulers, elders, scribes with Annas and Caiaphas, and all of the high-priestly family **“they inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’”** Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and addressed them (here we recall Jesus’ words in Luke), **“for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say”** (Luke 12:12). Peter boldly answered by what means the man was healed, **“let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well”** (v. 10). Here Jesus is proclaimed as the stone the builders rejected seen in Psalm 118:22, the cornerstone, **“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”** (v. 12)

The *Book of Concord* declares, “Acts 4[:11–12] *‘This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.’* But the name of Christ is grasped only by faith. Therefore we are saved by trusting in the name of Christ and not in our works. For here “name” signifies the cause called upon, because salvation takes place on account of it. To call upon the name of Christ is to trust in the name of Christ as the cause or the payment on account of which we are saved” (*Apology: 4.98, italics mine*).

Prayer – Jesus, by Your Name alone, we are saved, and our sins are paid for. It is right to listen to You rather than men and to speak Your Name when tested, in persecution, and when charged not to speak Your Name, the only Name by which we are saved, for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, January 19, 2023
Read Acts 4:23-31

Live Boldly

The apostles had finally been given the green light to begin their task of felling the world about Jesus, so they eagerly began preaching about Christ and proclaiming His message. While doing this, Peter and John go to the local temple to pray and spread the word about Christ. Little did they know that, while they were there, they would get a taste of what the rest of their ministry would be like.

While there, Peter and John heal a beggar, doing precisely what Jesus commanded of them. And how does the world respond? They get arrested! Peter and John are treated like criminals for doing the Lord's work. After their release, Peter and John reconvene with the rest of Jesus' followers so they can reflect on what had just happened. God had given them a task to do, they had done it, and the world punished them for it. Clearly this whole "go and make disciples" thing was going to be a lot more difficult than they had anticipated. Indeed, the event made it very clear to them that the sinful world didn't want Jesus, and it would do everything in its power to oppose those who attempted to proclaim Him!

So what did the apostles do? What did they do when they realized that their mission was going to be a lot harder and more dangerous than expected? What did they do when the chips were down and they felt like a small group of soldiers against an army the size of the universe?

They prayed. Specifically, they prayed for boldness. They prayed that, though the world was against them, they would not be deterred from completing their mission.

We today, live in this same sinful and broken world. We too are heralds charged with the same task of proclaiming the Gospel to a world that doesn't want to hear it. We too are a small group of soldiers against an army the size of the universe. We too will be punished for completing the mission that has been given to us. So let us, like the apostles, continually pray for boldness. Let us not back down. Because the message of Christ is far too important to not share, no matter the consequences. Lord, make us bold for You!

Prayer: "O Christ, who sent the Twelve on roads they'd never trod to serve, to suffer, teach, proclaim the nearer reign of God: send us on ways where faith transcends timidity, where love informs and hope sustains both life and ministry."

- LSB, "O Christ, Who Called the Twelve," 856.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, January 20, 2023

Read Acts 4:32-5:16

Honest Giving

Wow! This story seems so harsh. A husband and wife sell their property and give a significant portion to the church. And they fall down dead for not giving the whole amount! I don't know anyone who gave all they have (except Jesus). Why is the gift of Ananias and Saphira looked on with such contempt?

It's not their gift that is the problem. The issue lies in why they gave and how they gave.

It seems that everyone was selling off their possessions and giving them to the church for all to share. Undoubtedly, this is a good thing. They were giving in response to having been given all from Christ. In fact, since Christ was their life, everything actually belonged to Christ. These believers rightly saw their possessions as a trust from Christ to be used in service to others. In giving all, the first Christians were just acknowledging these facts.

But they didn't have to give everything. Sure, many chose to do so, but there was no command to do so. Ananias and Saphira did not want to give everything, but they also wanted to look generous and impressive in front of others. So they lied, and claimed they were giving everything, while keeping some back.

Here is the problem: they idolized money and their appearance before others. So they lied, and claimed to be giving all, while holding a good amount back. Sure they were lying to the congregation, but foolishly they didn't just lie to the congregation, "but to God" (Acts 5:4).

Paul points out that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7), but we could add that He loves an honest giver. We will not fool Him into believing we have given more than what we claim. Our actions and motives are always transparent to Him. Likewise, we give in response to the God who gives us all things in our Savior. There is nothing to hide, for our sin is covered in Jesus already. So we ask the Lord to lead our hearts to give freely, generously, and honestly in gratitude to Christ.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, lead me to give generously and honestly from the abundance that you provide to me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, January 21, 2023

Read [Acts 5:17-42](#)

“Filling”

People like to fill themselves. We fill ourselves with food (I believe I’m still full of Christmas cookies!), we fill our ears with music. We binge-watch just one more episode of (your favorite show). Some of us are news-aholics, filling our mind in the quest to know everything that’s going on.

In the book of Acts, the disciples of Jesus (and those with ears to hear) are full of Jesus and His Spirit. They’ve witnessed Jesus’ execution and have seen Him alive after being put to death. They’ve seen miraculous signs – the blind seeing, the lame walking, the deaf hearing – and they know first-hand that God loves them. They knew the promises that God had made to their ancestors, and now are witnessing their fulfillment before their eyes.

They worshipped together, shared their abundance with one another; prayed, sang, and studied the Word together. And Jesus’ followers were filled with the knowledge, no – the Life – that Jesus had given them. But, “being filled” doesn’t describe their fullness – their joy and thankfulness and love overflowed from them and around them and through them. All the world knew what filled them.

The high priest and the Sadducees were also filled. Our reading says they were “**filled with jealousy**” and “**they were enraged** (filled with rage) **and wanted to kill them** (the disciples).” After witnessing these same miracles, seeing and hearing Jesus Himself speak, and knowing better than the common people what God had promised, their hard hearts reacted in hate. While the disciples preached the Good News in the Temple to His people, the high priest (who was charged with teaching the people) plotted how to kill them.

But the will of God will be done. No matter if you oppose it; no matter if you do His will – it will be done. Gamaliel, a highly respected rabbi (he had taught Saul before he became Paul), knew this. And it appears that his heart wasn’t hard as stone. He may not have believed in Jesus, but he knew God well enough to know His will. If Jesus’ disciples were just foolish upstarts – they would fail gloriously. They would die by themselves! But, if what they’re saying “**is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!**”

Wiser words could not have been said. God’s will will be done without our help. But God has invited us to be filled with His Son and His Spirit. He wants us to have the Life that Jesus bought for us. And what a joy that gives!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, fill us with the Life that Your Son gives us. Fill us with the boldness that Your Spirit provides. And make that “filling” overflow through us to others. In Your Son’s Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, January 23, 2023

Read Acts 6

Wanted: Table Servers

It has become somewhat of a national epidemic that nearly every business is hanging out a “Help Wanted” sign. Too few workers means all of the work will not get done, or at the very least, the work will take much longer and wear out the workers who are already there.

In the early days of the Church, there was a small crisis that arose because more help was needed. As the people sought to share all that they had and, especially, to provide for widows and orphans, apparently some Greek speaking Christians felt some of their widows were getting overlooked.

The complaint came to the only place where anyone knew to bring one – the apostles. Yet they quickly point out that, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.” At the same time, getting food in “the daily distribution” matters. So, they have a different solution: they put up a “Help Wanted” sign. Well, not exactly, but the point is that within the church there is a need for some to preach and teach, and there is a need for others to serve tables and show hospitality. We could keep going to point out that there is a need in the Church to deliver food to the food pantry and serve as an usher and cut the grass and make financial decisions.

These various roles give opportunities for many more people to serve AND to make sure that the primary work of the Church to preach and teach the word of God is possible. Perhaps you are not going to preach the word of God, but maybe you would make a wonderful table server. Wherever your gifts lie, be prepared to share because in order for the word of God to be proclaimed, there will always be help needed.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, prepare my heart for ready service (however You deem best) in the knowledge that You have first served me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, January 24, 2023

Read Acts 7:1-53

Stephen

They stood listening to Stephen talk about all the times their ancestors had failed God. I wondered reading it, how could they do that? I mean, its so clear, the very ancestors they claim to be better than acted just like they are acting. Don't they listen?

And the Lord reminds me. This is a lesson for me! Do I always listen to my Lord? Do I eagerly hear how I am wrong, how I, myself, do what I despise those other lost souls around me are doing? Lord, I'm condemning myself!

It's so easy to condemn others, so easy to wonder how they could have been so clueless and end up killing Jesus and attacking His followers. It's really easy to do wrong - and so hard to do right, to do right when that means condemning myself and changing what I am doing.

And now my heart begins to break! How sad it is that those people, trained in the Bible, yet saw only themselves, without seeing their sinfulness. They wanted righteousness, but wanted to take credit for it, and so rejected God and His prophets. Even when they saw and listened to one of His modern prophets, they who knew the Scriptures rejected them.

Lord, keep my soul in Your arms. I cannot resist the temptation to selfishly put myself ahead of my Lord, even after He died for me. But with His help, surrendering to the facts of my sinfulness, trusting Him, and living in His forgiveness, then I can resist and in so doing, find my heart breaking at how their stubbornness cost them.

Prayer: Help me, Lord. Protect from my desire to see myself as so superior. I know I am like them, only with Your help. Thank you. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, January 25, 2023

Read Acts 7:54-8:3

Stoning of St. Stephen/Persecution

Stephen preached a beautiful sermon on *the story of everything* to the stubborn, stiff-necked men who always resisted the Holy Spirit (vv. 1-51), showing that Jesus is **“the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it”** (vv. 52-53). These men of the synagogue of the Freedmen, the council—the Sanhedrin, and the high priest (see Acts 6:8-7:1) were all cut to the heart. **“Now when they heard these things they were [διεπρίοντο ταῖς καρδίαις—*began to be cut to the quick and infuriated in their hearts*] enraged, and they ground their teeth at him”** (v. 54).

Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit in the hall of that court of the Sanhedrin. He **“gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God”** (vv. 55-58). These men rushed Stephen with great shouting voices, stopping their ears, **“cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’”** (vv. 58-59). Stephen cried to the Lord not to hold that sin against those who were stoning him, and then ἐκοιμήθη *died—fell asleep*. After this, persecution came upon the church that day in Jerusalem, **“and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles”** (v. 8:1).

St. Augustine wrote, *Ye have heard therefore how Stephen was severe; now hear how he loved. He offended those whom he was rebuking, and was stoned by them. And as he was being overwhelmed and bruised to death by the hands of his furious persecutors on every side, and the blows of the stones, he first said, Lord Jesus Christ, receive my spirit. Then after he had prayed for himself standing, he bent the knee for them who were stoning him, and said, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge; let me die in my body, but let not these die in their souls.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. After these words he added no more; he spake them and departed; his last prayer was for his enemies.* (Augustine, Sermon NPNF 40.9).

Jesus standing at the right hand of God, the glory of God and exalted King Jesus, was revealed to Stephen, the confessor of the Righteous One who was betrayed, crucified, risen, and ascended for your redemption from sin.

Prayer – “Jesus, in Your dying woes, Even while Your lifeblood flows, Craving pardon for Your foes: Hear us, holy Jesus.... Oh, may we, who mercy need, Be like You in heart and deed, When with wrong our spirits bleed: Hear us, holy Jesus.” Amen. (LSB 447:1, 3).

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, January 26, 2023
Read Acts 8:4-25

Looking Past Prejudice

There was quite a lot of bad blood between the Jews and the Samaritans. Let's go over the history.

At the start of King Rehoboam's reign in Israel (roughly 930 BC), he took to bad council and treated the citizens very poorly. In retaliation, the Israelites (save for the tribe of Judah) rebelled against him, forced him to seek shelter and protection in Jerusalem (the capital city), and anointed their own king, Jeroboam. This caused the nation of Israel to split – the tribe of Judah occupying the Southern country, and the other tribes occupying the Northern country. They became two distinct nations stemming from the original united Israel. The Southern nation with its capital city Jerusalem, took on the name Judah after the tribe who remained. The Northern nation with its capital city Samaria, took on the name Israel, but was more commonly called Samaria after its capital city.

Well, many years go by with both nations having their own ups and downs until in 722 BC, the Northern nation of Samaria was conquered by the Assyrians. In typical Assyrian fashion, they sought to not only destroy, but to expand. So, they repopulated the recently conquered Samaria with their own citizens as well as the surviving Israelites who remained there. These peoples intermarried and shared both cultures and religious practices. What they ended up with after generations of assimilation was peoples known as Samaritans, with a sort of pseudo-Israelite religious practice that accepted some Israelite teaching, but rejected others. Needless to say, the Jews certainly did not accept these Samaritans as real Jews and the Samaritans loathed the Jews for centuries of contempt and mistreatment.

With all of this being said, how amazing it is that Jesus (a Jewish rabbi) chose the Samaritans of all peoples as one of the first stops for His disciples (Jewish men) to spread His Gospel. Surely the Word of God and His salvation is not limited by race or gender or age or anything else. All it requires is pure repentance and trust in Him. May we, like the apostles, look past our prejudices and boldly spread the Word of God to all who have ears to hear.

Prayer: "Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

- *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, "Prayer for guidance in our calling," pg. 1319.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, January 27, 2023

Read Acts 8:26-40

Great Questions!

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” (Acts 8:32-33 and Isaiah 53:7-8)

There are many aspects of being a pastor that I enjoy and even more that I find humbling and fulfilling. But if you were to ask me what my favorite part of being a pastor is, I would probably say teaching Adult Instruction. In those classes, there is often a curiosity that leads to lots of good questions. At other times, we long-time Christians can miss some of the best questions to ask because we think we should know the answers. We would be better off asking, but we are hesitant.

Our reading today gives Philip one class period of Adult Instruction with an Ethiopian man. The man is reading from the book of Isaiah and asks three great questions. These questions are good for him and for us.

First, “how can I (understand this) unless someone guides me?” The Ethiopian teaches us something about a proper humility in reading the Scriptures. It is good to read AND to be taught the Bible. Whether a new believer or a pastor, we all benefit from learning from those who have studied the Scriptures before us.

Second, “about whom does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” This question is from the Holy Spirit! Think about it. If the quote from Isaiah (at the top of this devotion) is about the prophet, it’s just sad. A good man silently suffers unjustly. But Philip “beginning with this Scripture...told him the good news about Jesus.” If you want to understand the Scriptures, you need a guide who will show you how they all point to the good news of Jesus, who suffered unjustly, but intentionally in our place to take our sin.

That good news led to the third question, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” In my years, as a pastor, this very scene has played out in similar ways probably half a dozen times. Someone hears a bit of God’s Word (often from one of you) and is brought to me with questions, and we walk through the Scriptures and rejoice in the good news of Jesus, and they want to share in the gift of baptism.

Dear Christian, bring your questions. As you hear God’s Word, always be looking for how it points to Jesus, and never hesitate to bring a friend with their questions to hear the good news of Jesus that they may share in our baptismal hope!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, remove my pride and let me bring my questions to Your servants to help guide me into deeper understanding. Give me a burning desire to study Your Word, that I may be corrected and comforted, as I see all the more, You, Lord Jesus in all the Scriptures. Then use me, as You see fit, to share this hope with others. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, January 28, 2023

Read [Acts 9:1-31](#)

“Saul/Paul”

I had an uncle who fought in the 2nd World War in the Pacific. He was my godfather, a farmer, and a good Christian man. But, to his last automobile purchase, he never bought a Japanese car. I don't think he hated them, but he'd seen and heard of too many atrocities to bring himself to “sell out” and buy from them. I myself, to this day, can watch video of our American forces attacking terrorists from the skies, killing them mercilessly, and don't feel sadness at their lost lives. How many popular stories and movies have been made about an injustice done to someone, who you then cheer on as they go and wreak vengeance on their attackers?

Righteous anger is a really strong, empowering feeling. We fear it, but simultaneously we enjoy its energy flowing through us. So, knowing of God's great love for His Church, how do you think He felt as He witnessed Saul persecuting His people? **“Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.”** In today's reading, He took it to the next level: **“breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord”**, Saul got authorization from the high priest to hunt down Christians in Damascus and haul them back to Jerusalem, where they'd receive fates similar to Stephen's.

Was God angry at this? Did God want to send armies of angels to bring justice on this man, possessed with such hatred for His Gospel? Did He want vengeance? Read today's entire reading. Paul will repeat its story about 16 times in the rest of Acts. Because, if Paul ever had a day in his life when he felt down and depressed from his suffering for the Gospel, he recalled what God did to him that day on the road to Damascus.

God Himself came to Saul that day, in the form of the resurrected Jesus. And Saul expected God's righteous wrath, when Jesus asked him, **“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”** But Jesus brought him to the same Christians he was hunting down for care, and gave Saul His Spirit. And Saul, now Paul, was a new man. Filled with the Spirit, overflowing with gratitude for God's grace given to him while he was God's chief enemy, he shared this Good News with everyone at any cost to himself.

Jesus didn't come for those who don't need forgiveness. Jesus came for deceitful Jacob, for the thief on the cross, for prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners. He'd have forgiven Judas if he'd repented. Paul is proof that there is no sin so big, so heinous, so despicable, that Jesus wouldn't forgive you in a heartbeat.

Prayer: Oh, the height of Jesus' love, higher than the heav'ns above, deeper than the depths of sea, lasting as eternity, love that found me— wondrous thought—found me when I sought him not. Amen.

LSB 611 “Chief of Sinners Though I Be”

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, January 30, 2023

Read Acts 9:32-43

A Proper Eulogy

Everyone has some familiarity with a eulogy. These short speeches are offered when someone dies to praise and honor them in some way.

When the disciple named Tabitha or Dorcas (just the same word in two different languages – both mean “gazelle”), she seemed to be someone for whom a eulogy might be offered. After all, “she was full of good works and acts of charity” (Acts 9:36). Not only this, the other members of the congregation in Joppa had heard that the apostle Peter was in town. Perhaps he could offer a eulogy. This might have been their thought as they washed the body (in preparation for a funeral and burial), and then made sure that Peter was aware of Dorcas’ death.

Well, Peter came and offered the best kind of eulogy! You see, while the word has come to mean a nice speech of praise offered at someone’s funeral, the literal meaning of the word is slightly different. Eu-logy literally means “good word.” We are tempted to think a proper eulogy would point to the good works and acts of charity/love of someone that have loved and respected.

But a proper eulogy does something else. It speaks of the good works and acts of love given by Christ. So Peter goes to see Dorcas and nearly re-enacts an occasion when Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter. He sends everyone out and then speaks a truly “good word,” as Peter tells her, “Tabitha, arise.” And she does! Peter has been sent with the life-giving, good word of Jesus, and that is the best thing He could possibly speak.

Such signs of Christ’s power over life and death may not be as frequent, but Peter does point us toward which good words matter most when our loved ones die in the Lord. It’s good for us to share stories and praise the admirable qualities of those who go before us in the faith, but there’s a reason that a place for such eulogies is not included in the standard funeral service in our hymnal. Instead, the prayers, the Scriptures, the sermon...everything keeps pointing back to Jesus and His good works and acts of love for us. After all, in the “good word” of Jesus we find something better than pleasant memories, we have hope and life eternal!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, in times of grief comfort me and all Your people with the good word of Your forgiveness, life and salvation for us. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, January 31, 2023

Read Acts 10

Respecting All People

Oh, Lord, You are no respecter of persons, that is You don't prefer one person to another. I know you love all of us. I appreciate that - why else would You care about me? So, I am so happy to be part of Your family. But there so many other people out there. How do You put up with all of them?

But You do, and that puts me in a problem. I do find myself preferring some to others, I find it hard to care about some people. It's not the strangers in the world that I find difficult; it is the ones I know and interact with. There are different from me, and don't do things the way I want them to or think they should do.

I need Your help to be respectful, to be loving, to a child who is throwing a tantrum, to an adult in stubborn opposition to my ideas. Lord, they should change to be better people, in other words to do as I want them to.

Yes, I need your help, because I want to be like You. You are present and forgiving to me when I act up trying to get my way. Help me to be present and forgiving for those others around me, who need You and me to act like you. But You have promised to be with me always, to mold me to being like You. Help my fumbling attempts to love those unlovable people around me.

Prayer: Thank you for Your promises. Thank you that I can trust You to make me able and to do like You. Thank you. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, February 1, 2023

Read Acts 11:1-18

The Message By Which You Are Saved

Peter had gone up to Jerusalem and was criticized for being with Gentiles (*uncircumcised men*) and eating with them. Believers in Jerusalem (*the circumcision party*) took issue with Peter for doing this. Peter explained his vision in Joppa (see Acts 10), how Jesus had said to him, **“Rise, Peter; kill and eat. . . What God has made clean, do not call common”** (v. 7, 9). Not only was this saying of God about all foods being clean, but primarily for the message of salvation in Jesus proclaimed to the Gentiles (see 10:34-43). Peter declared the Gospel of Jesus, the **“message by which we you will be saved”** (v. 14) to Cornelius and his household, and **“the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning . . . When they [the circumcision party] heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”** (v. 15, 18).

Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek [Gentile]”** (Rom 1:16). Salvation indeed has come to everyone, to God’s people Israel and Gentile. To you.

“Therefore, in his immeasurable goodness and mercy God provides for the public proclamation of his divine, eternal law and of the wondrous counsel of our redemption, the holy gospel of his eternal Son, our only Savior Jesus Christ, which alone can save. By means of this proclamation he gathers an everlasting church from humankind, and he effects in human hearts true repentance and knowledge of sin and true faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. God wants to call human beings to eternal salvation, to draw them to himself, to convert them, to give them new birth, and to sanctify them through these means, and in no other way than through his holy Word (which people hear proclaimed or read) and through the sacraments (which they use according to his Word). 1 Corinthians 1[:21]: “Since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.” Acts 11[:14*]: “[Peter] will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.” Romans 10[:17*]: “So faith arises from the proclamation, and proclamation comes through God’s word.” John 17[:17*, 20*]: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. I ask on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word.” Therefore, the eternal Father calls from heaven regarding his dear Son and all who proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name, “Listen to him!” (Matt. 17[:5*]).” (FC SD: II, 50-51, italics mine).*

Prayer – Thank you, Jesus. For Your salvation come to us in Your Word and Sacrament. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, February 2, 2023
Read Acts 11:19-30

Bearing the Name of Christ

A lot can be said of the ancient city of Antioch. Beginning as a rather unknown, small trading settlement, it was established as a notable city under the conquest of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC). After Alexander's death, the land which he conquered was divided up between his generals, one of which was Seleucus who took control of the province containing the city which he called Antioch. Due to its location along the Orontes River which connected to the Mediterranean Sea, Seleucus quickly established Antioch as the capital of his province. After the Romans took control in 63 BC, the city flourished. Due to its access to trade, under Roman rule Antioch became one of the most important cities in the world only after Rome and Alexandria.

Needless to say, Antioch was an extremely important city in the grand worldly scale. However, it was also very important to Christianity, as well. Several influential Christians came from Antioch, most notably Ignatius and John Chrysostom. Ignatius is considered by some to be the most important early church father. We know many of the practices and theology of the generations immediately following Christ because of the writings of Ignatius. Then, three hundred years after Ignatius, John Chrysostom entered the scene. Chrysostom is considered the greatest preacher of early Christianity and his sermons are still powerful today.

With such political power and influential people, there can be no question as to the importance of Antioch. But something else came from Antioch, something more important than trade routes or Ignatius or John Chrysostom: the term "Christian". The people of Antioch were so passionate about faith, they were so determined to follow Christ and live in His forgiveness and Gospel, that they earned the label "Christian". We don't know if this was a term of endearment or of mockery, but regardless, the followers of Christ in Antioch wore the label proudly. They were in Christ's fold and unashamed of that fact. Their names were written in Christ's book of life and they were joyful. They were Christ's people. They were Christians.

And so are we. We bear that very same name today. Christ has done so much for us – saved us from sin, delivered us from death, protected us from the devil, given us life, opened our hearts, and on and on – that we can't help but attach ourselves to Him! Just as the believers in Antioch, we follow Christ and live in His forgiveness and Gospel. We have our names written in His book of life! We are in Christ's fold and unashamed of that fact! We are Christ's people. We are Christians. Let us proudly bear that name – His name.

Prayer: "Merciful Father, through Holy Baptism You called us to be Your own possession. Grant that our lives may evidence the working of Your Holy Spirit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, according to the image of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior Amen."

- LSB, "Prayer for life as a baptized child of God," pg. 310.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, February 3, 2023

Read Acts 12

Answering Doubt

“They said to her, ‘You are out of your mind.’ But she kept insisting that it was so, they kept saying, ‘It is his angel!’” (Acts 12:15)

Peter could not be at the door of the house. It was impossible. There was no way on earth that he would be released from prison so quickly. So, this whole story from the servant girl Rhoda sounded like pure nonsense. Clearly, she was off her rocker. Or, maybe, it was just wishful thinking...so she thought she saw Peter outside.

Even for the early Christians and even while they are gathered together in prayer, doubt was a strong enough force to dash hope. As impossible as it was to see Peter again so soon, it was exactly what they were praying for! Yet while God was answering their prayer, they responded with surprise and disbelief.

Our unbelief is constantly a struggle in this life and leads us to often question the prayers that we bring to God, but in His mercy, our doubt doesn't stop God from answering our prayers. God's answer to prayer is not based on perfect, unwavering faith, but rather in faith that turns to Him when the doubt is creeping in the most. Praying to God isn't just about changing our attitudes. It's about actually asking Him for the things we need, and then waiting on Him to answer. Sometimes, maybe often, He'll surprise us. After all, "He is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20).

Prayer: Lord God, hear our prayers, not because of our faith, but because of Your mercy. Calm my heart, by Your Spirit to trust in Your answers and in Your timing. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

and adapted from Portals of Prayer

Saturday, February 4, 2023

Read [Acts 13:1-12](#)

“Miracles”

Reading from Acts is exciting stuff! It’s full of “tongues of fire”, healing the sick, raising the dead, commanding demons, and other, miraculous stories. These super-men and women of two thousand years ago travel to the ends of the earth and (it seems) their path is made smooth. They walk into strange towns, are opposed by unbeatable enemies, and then – a miracle occurs – and all is well. Many believe, and everyone lives happily ever after. Right?

So, if we’re not getting the same results in the present day, are we doing something wrong? Should we be fasting more (I hope not!)? Do we need to lay on hands more? More prayer, more sharing everything – what’s missing? Or, even worse, is it just that God isn’t there for us anymore? Has He left us to fend for ourselves?

Today’s reading follows this script. Paul and Barnabas have been anointed by the Holy Spirit and commissioned by the Church in Antioch to do “the work to which I (the Holy Spirit) have called them.” They arrive in Cyprus, preach and teach and eventually come upon the Roman governor, who has “summoned them to hear the word of God.” But an evil Jewish magician opposes them, “seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.” Paul looks intently at the magician and says, “Behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” He goes blind and the Church marches on.

See, that just doesn’t happen anymore! What do we need to do or change to restore the vitality of the early Church?

When you ask that kind of question, though, you’re asking the wrong question. It’s never what we do; it’s what God does. We “do” many of the same God-commanded, scriptural practices very similar to the early Church. We worship together, are baptized, pray, eat, sing, and even lay on hands before sending ministers into the world. And God still acts in many of the same ways as back then. He sends His Spirit to us. He speaks to us through His Word and sacraments. He gives us pastors and teachers, organists and grass-mowers. We don’t see a lot of raising the dead now, but our life expectancy is double what it was before Christian hospitals and care entered the world.

And, the miracles in Acts aren’t the whole story. After the magician was miraculously blinded, “Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” The miracle may have caught his attention, but he believed “for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord!” We have that same teaching today, and God is using that Word in miraculous ways all around us now.

Prayer: Almighty Father, thank You for sending me Your teaching through Your Word and the Church. Continue to work miracles in and through me today. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, February 6, 2023

Read Acts 13:13-52

Joy in Adversity

“And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” Acts 13:52

What are you so happy about?

Without a doubt, you have heard someone ask this question. Or perhaps, you’ve asked it yourself. Someone can be going through something extremely difficult and still, somehow, be cheerier than others. To some degree this could just be individual personality or abject denial of the poor circumstances. Yet, the description of the disciples is something very different.

Granted, it seems like a strange time to be filled with joy. The disciples have basically become wanted men – thanks to their preaching about Jesus. They were literally run out of the city. They had just enough time to stop and shake the town’s dust off their feet before hightailing it out of there. Times when you’re unaccepted and unwanted, when proclaiming the Gospel by which you are saved leads to mocking or persecution – these hardly seem like times for joy.

But the word matters. To be happy is a matter of what happens. Good things happen – I’m happy. Bad things happen – I’m not happy.

But joy, especially the joy of the Christian is different. We’re not the sort of people who look forward to suffering because we enjoy pain, although we do accept that to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ is an honor. But we have a deeper, unending joy that belongs to the people of Christ. The fact of who we are as God’s children through Christ withstands all adversity, unchanged because it depends not on us but on the Holy Spirit, who lives in us. This is how the disciples could move on with their message, not despairing, but rejoicing, filled with the Holy Spirit. And two thousand years later, the same joy in yours.

Prayer: O Holy Spirit, awaken in us the joy that never ends and encourages us by Your power in every time of trial and adversity. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, February 7, 2023

Read Acts 14:1-18

God at Work

It seems that everything in life is a danger to my faith. I'm not talking about hardship or threats; rather even good news is a danger. Good news seems to feel like everything is going well, and then, and then, why I don't seem to need my God. Everything is a danger to me.

I haven't been threatened like Paul. He was there when God healed a lame man - and people decided that he did it! And that he was God. What a temptation that would be - hundreds of people worshiping me! Paul resisted, and finally convinced the people that he wasn't God, but that didn't make them love him either. Sigh.

I'm worried about my reaction to others, to others who appreciate me and what God does through me. God uses my quiet words at a tea luncheon, He is with me when someone needs directions, He cures a person as I give him the medicine a doctor prescribes. I want them to see God acting, not me acting.

But it's so easy, to bask in appreciation. It's heartwarming to see others giving me lots of credit, even when things are not truly my doing. So, I turn to God, I ask Him to intervene, to make sure that others don't give me reason to leave God. He helped Paul get out of his trouble. He helps me avoid that problem even as He lives in me, guiding me, and reminding me not to credit. Thank you, God.

Prayer: I thank you my God. It is you in me that gives others that joy that tempts me. It is you who keeps it from truly tempting me. Thank you, God.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, February 8, 2023
Read Acts 14:19-28

The Work and Grace of God

“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” Acts 14:22

Paul and Barnabas were threatened in Iconium; Paul was stoned in Lystra and continued to travel the day after Paul was stoned in Lystra to encourage the disciples, and they returned later to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, where they preached and were persecuted to strengthen the churches in those places, appointing elders, and encouraging the disciples,

“When they had preached the gospel to that city [Derbe] and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (vv. 21-23).

“Curses will not be lacking. But go forth to face them more boldly, be strong, and cling steadfastly to the blessing, no matter how much everything seems to be full of a curse. For this is what we should conclude: It is sure that I have been baptized. I have heard the Word from the mouth of the minister. I have made use of the Sacrament of the Altar. This is the divine and unchangeable truth. Even though I am weak, it is sure and unalterable.... You are children of the kingdom, your sins are forgiven, the devil has been overcome and laid low under your feet, sin and death will do you no harm; but you are blameless. Therefore bear the hostile curses with equanimity” (Luther’s Works 5:145–46).

The brokenness of sin remains in this world today, and persecution against Christians, against you, will continue and remain until Christ’s return on the Last Day. Until then, the Lord Jesus Christ is with you by promise through faith and Baptism; Christ remains in and with you always. Through Word and Sacrament, you are given faith and eternal life in Jesus, for He rules and reigns over all things (see Matthew 28:18-20) now and forever with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, where **“they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles”** (Acts 14:26-27).

Prayer – “Heavenly Father, may Your Spirit move Your Church to spread Your Word. Bring many more people into Your kingdom, and strengthen all believers to endure the trials they face on their way to heaven. In Jesus’ name. Amen.” (TLSB)

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, February 9, 2023
Read Acts 15

Growing Pains

The Church was changing. Due to much persecution, members of the Church were forced to leave Jerusalem and spread out far and wide. Along the way, these believers converted many people (Jews and Gentiles alike) to the faith. However, the work that Paul and Barnabas did in the Roman city of Antioch was a little bit different. They established a full-fledged church there which was made entirely out of Gentiles. This was the first of its kind! Gentiles had certainly been converted to Christianity, there's no questioning that, but in Antioch these Christian Gentiles made their own church! Christ's Church (capital "C") was growing and expanding, and no one denied that this was great news!

But with all this expansion, some new questions were raised. The homebase of the Christian Church which was in Jerusalem was founded on the Jewish tradition. In order to be members of this larger Christian Church, then, would this Gentile-Christian church in Antioch need to follow Jewish tradition, too? I mean, members follow the head, don't they? If they don't, then they must not truly be members. So would the Christians in Antioch need to be circumcised according to Jewish tradition? Could the Gentile-Christian church in Antioch and the Jewish-Christian church in Jerusalem even be in fellowship if they didn't come from the same roots?

Well, it may interest you to know that we in the LCMS have experienced similar identity crises on multiple occasions. For example, when the Saxon Lutherans first came to America in 1838, they were adamant about preserving Luther's German worship service. They thought, "If we don't worship in German (Luther's language), then how can we call ourselves Lutheran?" This was a big concern that lasted for a very long time. My home congregation in Northern Minnesota only stopped worshipping in German 60 years ago! The Lutherans had expanded and changed so quickly that they sought identity in their roots – in their traditions.

But Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James tell a different story. The Jewish-Christian church (and Lutheran) may be built on tradition and heritage which is rich and wonderful in its own right, but the Christian Church (capital "C") is built on the grace of God. Christ transcends tradition. For "He made no distinction between [our tradition] and [their tradition] having cleansed their hearts by faith...But we believe that we will be saved through **the grace of the Lord Jesus**, just as they will." Our heritage as Lutherans is very good – it defines who we are and from where we've come. But Jesus alone saves. And He makes no distinction between traditions.

Prayer: "Almighty God, send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts that He may rule and direct us according to Your will, comfort us in all our temptations and afflictions, defend us from all error, and lead us into all truth that we, being steadfast in faith, may increase in all good works and in the end obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

- *LSB*, "Prayer for the Holy Spirit," pg. 310.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, February 10, 2023

Read Acts 16:1-15

Lydia

Lydia was a “seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God.” This is a way of saying she was in a tough spot. She was in business in a Greek and Roman area, but also worshipped the true God, and so was open to hearing about Jesus. When the Lord opened her “heart to the Gospel” and she was baptized, this put her in a tougher spot. There were at least more Jews in the city than Christians, and the Jews had only the pagans against them. As a Christian she could have both the pagans and the Jews boycotting her store.

But Lydia did not hide her faith. She proceeded to have her entire household baptized. She could have stopped there, but she didn’t. She opened her home to the apostles as a place to stay. She could have stopped there, but she didn’t. It seems her home was not just a place for Paul and Silas to stay, but the home where the Philippian church would gather also.

Maybe just as worthy of notice is that there is no indication of her having abandoned her career at this point. She doesn’t leave Philippi behind and join Paul and Silas. She didn’t make tending to the growing house church her fulltime preoccupation. She stays put in Philippi, where God came and found her. That theme (of God acting for her) runs through the text. Paul was told in a vision to go to Macedonia (Philippi being one town there). How did Paul understand this? “God called us to preach the gospel to (the people there).” Yet God’s grace is emphasized even more that when Paul preached the gospel, and “the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” The Lord sends Paul. The Lord Jesus and His death and resurrection are the content of what Paul preached. And the Lord opens Lydia’s heart to listen and believe.

In every way, the Lord sought out Lydia in Philippi. So, instead of abandoning her career or skipping town, Lydia stays. The Lord converted Lydia and converted her work into a calling to be used to serve the Lord and other people.

What’s it look like to live out such a calling? Being honest and fair, as she represents the God of truth in all she does. Taking care of any employees, for the Lord has taken care of her in Christ. And as Paul would later write, “whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord.” And in all she would do, she would take to heart the word of Jesus, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” The grace of Christ would shape her attitude, and the generosity shown by Christ would light up her actions, as she worked to God’s glory right where He had sought her out.

This businesswoman points us toward how God would have us handle the business we are given. The Lord may have placed you here as a mom, a grandpa, a student, a businesswoman, a truck driver, a neighbor. See them for what they are - your callings. Where Christ has called you to be, and to live and serve as His own. Like Lydia, life with Jesus doesn’t mean leaving these callings, but seeing them as callings - as opportunities to serve the Lord and others – by the way we carry them out (honestly, sacrificially, diligently) and by the hope that we are ready to share within these callings.

Prayer: Lord, help us carry out our callings in service to others and giving glory to You. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, February 11, 2023

Read [Acts 16:16-40](#)

“Unpredictable”

This is a story of contrasts. On the one side, sinfully predictable people. On the other, God and His chaotic, inexplicable, joy-causing grace. As it begins, we encounter a girl who was highly valued by some people. Not because of her individual worth, but because the demon dwelling within her allowed them to get rich off her. She was their slave, and rather than helping her, they valued their own wealth over her life and her soul. Predictable.

But, strangely, God allowed her to follow Paul for days, announcing, **“These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”** After **“many days”** of this, Paul became **“greatly annoyed”** and cast out the demon. Why would God do these things? Unpredictable.

The girl’s owners, concerned that their “cash cow” was gone, grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the Roman praetors. Predictably, they didn’t accuse them of spoiling their money-maker. No, they made vague, baseless charges, riling up the crowd to join them. Also predictably, these rulers, caring more about commerce than justice, rendered brutal judgement. Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten, and imprisoned. Not just any cell, an **“inner cell”** where the fearful jailer fastened their feet in stocks.

This jailer was just doing his job. Predictably, he knew he was accountable for his prisoners, and that if they escaped, his life would be taken in exchange. Unpredictably, **“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.”** Attempting to remain predictable, the jailer prepared to kill himself. But instead, God shook his world.

“Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.”” We don’t know if the jailer witnessed God’s grace in delivering the demon from girl, but he definitely heard the unpredictable voices of beaten men, sitting in the darkest, deepest dungeon, singing at midnight. And who were now, inexplicably, staying in their cells rather than seizing this miraculous opportunity to escape. Freeing them from their shackles, he begged, **“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”** He probably knew nothing of Jesus, but was convinced that his salvation was at stake. This man who had been afraid for his life, now fearlessly listened to them, took them to his home, cleaned their wounds and fed them. And, transformed by grace, he and his household were baptized and rejoiced!

The Law is predictable: **“The wages of sin is death”**. We know and understand that. We know how to handle ourselves in this sin-ravaged world. But, unpredictably, God’s mercy shatters our despair, transforming it into joy.

Prayer: Beautiful Savior, you have unpredictably adopted me, a sinner, as Your brother or sister and a fellow child of God. Make my joy draw others to You. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, February 13, 2023

Read Acts 16:16-40 (an accident in the schedule repeated this reading from Saturday)

A Song to Sing

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” Acts 16:25

Paul and Silas were prisoners in the jail in Philippi, their bodies aching from having been severely beaten with rods. Yet they sang hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

We don't have their list of hymns or even have any specific hymns from that early in church history, but I wish we did. They may have sung hymns of joy and confidence like “I Know that My Redeemer Lives.” It could have been a song of assurance and mercy like “Amazing Grace.” Perhaps they were singing something bold like “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” Or perhaps they were contemplating their own weakness and singing something like “Just as I am, Without One Plea.”

For good reason Martin Luther commented that “he who sings prays twice.” The joining together of music and tune has the ability to convey the content of the faith as well as attitude and emotion that accompanies the truths that God has revealed to us in Christ. That means hymns teach, and they help us struggle with the mysteries of God while being comforted in what God has made known in Jesus.

So, it is a good thing that we have hymns for every occasion that help us reflect on different teachings of the Scriptures and paired with music that can be sorrowful, bold, celebratory, and more. For whether we are imprisoned, rejoicing at a baptism, grieving our sin in Lent, or marveling at God's grace, we have songs to sing of the God who frees captives, welcomes children to His family, corrects and forgives our sin.

Prayer: O Lord, in every circumstance lead me to sing and pray to you, my Savior and deliverer. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, February 14, 2023

Read Acts 17:1-9

Not a Late Comer

I have been so comforted by the knowledge that Jesus is God's Christ that I forget, at times, that He doesn't just appear out of nowhere. We have a whole history of how God said that He would send Jesus, that He would die for the lives of all, that He would rise from the dead, having conquered death. God would have me know that truth as well.

So sometimes I may hear pagans arguing that they are an old religion, that no johnny-come-lately like Jesus could possibly of any value. And then I remember, God created the earth, and Adam and Eve were believers! No fake religion is as old as the true one. And then God promised to Eve that her Descendent would crush the serpents head, as Jesus did on the cross. My faith is based on God's promises over the years.

Abraham trusted God and God reckoned it to righteousness! David trusted in God, even to admitting his own failures in Bathsheba. Elisha, Jeremiah, Daniel trusted the same God as I do. And God rescued them, saved them as His own, even in deep physical trouble.

Jesus is my Savior, not as a late comer, but as the fulfillment of promises, centuries old, as the only one who could, indeed, save me. Yes, I trust Him and He never fails. I trust Him now and there is a whole book from the beginning to tell us that He was, He is, and He always will be.

Prayer: Thank You God. Thank you that I truly trust You, but also that You have given reason for others to trust You too. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, February 15, 2023
Read Acts 17:10-15

The Jew/Gentile Berean Conversions

“They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed . . .”

Acts 17:11-12

Paul and Silas are sent to Berea after they passed through Thessalonica, where they reasoned from the Scriptures in the synagogue of the Jews and preached the Word of God in Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, proclaiming Him as the Christ, persuading some. In contrast, some Jews and others formed an uproar in jealousy against them. Now in Berea, **“these Jews were more [εὐγενέστεροι, *eugenēsteroi*—noble-minded, open-minded] than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so”** (v. 11). Many who heard and examined the Scriptures daily believed and trusted the Word of Christ as well as Greek women of reputable standing and the men. But then came the Jews that started the uproar in Thessalonica to Berea to stir things up among the crowds. Silas and Timothy stayed, Paul was sent to sea and was brought to Athens, and later Silas and Timothy departed from Berea to Paul.

Reading and hearing the Scriptures today is a little different than Paul and Silas' day running from town to town in Jewish synagogues preaching Jesus as the Christ. The same Word remains that Christ was crucified and risen to fulfill God’s promise in Scripture for sinner’s redemption, forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, and Peace with God. Perhaps in some countries, this looks like a missionary(s) sent to pagan cultures translating the Word of God (Scriptures) into their language, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. Or you are sharing the Gospel and reading the Bible with a friend who does not know Jesus Christ as Lord. Or this looks like a Sunday morning Bible Study and Divine Service reading and examining the Scriptures, Preaching Christ, receiving the Word and Jesus' true Body and Blood given for you.

“[Scripture] is the normative authority of God’s Word, because God’s Word provides a norm or standard for all Christian doctrine and life. Scripture itself praises those who use it as the only authority for Christian doctrine. These Jews [in Berea] were nobler than those in Thessalonica. They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. (Acts 17:11) Therefore, as Christians read the Scriptures, they understand them to be the judge of all doctrines, and they use them to distinguish between what is proper for Christians to believe and what is not proper. Christians accept this authority of Scripture by faith. Indeed, non-Christians often read the Bible and reject its claims of authority.” (*Called to Be God’s People: An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 5–6. Italics mine).

Prayer – “Heavenly Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. May it be ‘a lamp to my feet and a light to my path’” (Ps 119:105). Amen. (TLSB)

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, February 16, 2023
Read Acts. 17:16-34

Using the Right Terms

After escaping from the fear of persecution in Berea, Paul finds himself alone in the prominent Greek city of Athens. Athens was known for its great thinkers – Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all hailed from Athens. Unfortunately, this abundance of philosophy without the knowledge of Christ or faith inevitably led to much idol worship. Observing the plethora of temples, rituals, and rites dedicated to false gods throughout the city, Paul became appalled and irritated. It didn't take long for the Holy Spirit to urge Paul into action, and he decided that it was his task to bring Christ to the people of Athens.

There was only one problem: these were very smart people and they knew nothing about Scripture! As said earlier, the people of Athens were great thinkers. The words of Scripture may not have been in their vocabulary, but they knew of many other words of wisdom and "truth" from great Greek philosophers. So here was Paul's big question: How could he preach Christ to a group of geniuses who knew nothing about God and are not afraid to question everything he says? What a tough situation!

Paul's response is quite simple. He meets them where they are at. Since the Greeks in Athens had no concept of Judaism, Paul couldn't speak of Moses or David or the prophets. So instead, he spoke about Jesus using the Greek philosophers and poets they were familiar with. He didn't try to change everything about them and how they thought. No, instead, he built upon their foundation to guide their thinking towards Christ. He met them where they were at. What a brilliant move by Paul! He spoke using their terms, and many were brought to faith because of it.

There are two important things we can learn from this story. First, we as witnesses of Christ must meet people where they are at, just as Paul did. That is the best way to ensure that the Word of God resonates with them. We must tell people about Christ, even if that means using their terms. Second, the Word of God is not bound to one way of speaking. We as believers are part of a much larger and wider Kingdom than Hope Lutheran Church in High Ridge, MO. The Church of God is spread all around the world and populated by many different people, cultures, and languages. How amazing it is that regardless of different nationalities, practices, and terms, we can all be united under one banner of Christ. Thank you, Jesus, for making me a member of Your boundless Kingdom!

Prayer: "Almighty and everlasting God, You desire not the death of a sinner but that all would repent and live. Hear our prayers for those outside the Church. Take away their iniquity, and turn them from their false gods to You, the living and true God. Gather them into Your holy Church to the glory of Your name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

- LSB, "Prayer for those outside the Church," pg. 305.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, February 17, 2023

Read Acts 18:1-17

Do Not Be Silent

“Silence is golden.” The mother who has just managed to get her toddler to sleep will agree with that statement. For a few peaceful hours there will be no shouts of “Mommy look!” or “Mommy I’m hungry!” Silence is also golden for the weary traveler who has finally reached home after hours spent on a plane listening to the throbbing jet engine and the rush of wind passing outside the airplane window.

But silence isn’t always golden. Jesus made that clear to the Apostle Paul in Corinth. Paul may have had low expectations for his preaching in this city. After all, he had just come from Athens, a city that had a reputation for being interested in religion and philosophy. But only a few people believed Paul’s message there. Corinth on the other hand had a reputation for being a sin-city that would make Las Vegas blush. There was a pagan temple there that reportedly employed 1,000 prostitutes! So if Paul’s witnessing in Athens hadn’t gone very well, what chance of success would Paul have in Corinth? Do we make judgments like that about places and people? It’s not helpful if we do because it might lead us to be silent when we should always be ready to tell others about Jesus no matter who they are or what their background.

Paul of course did not remain silent in Corinth. The first people he seemed to meet there were a Jewish couple named Priscilla and Aquila. These two, along with every other Jew living in Rome, had recently been kicked out of that city by the emperor. This inconvenience turned out to be a blessing for them. They were either brought to faith and had their faith strengthened as they hung out with Paul.

But Paul didn’t just share his faith with Priscilla and Aquila. On the weekends he went into the synagogue and tried to persuade the congregation that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament messianic prophecies they eagerly studied there. Unfortunately, this message was not eagerly received by most. So, he then took his message next door to the house of Titius Justus. Yet Paul’s effort in the synagogue was not without fruit. Crispus, the synagogue ruler himself, came to faith. And Crispus didn’t keep that faith to himself. He shared it with his whole family so that they all became believers.

Although it was a great joy for Paul to baptize Crispus and his family, Paul must have been disappointed that more people didn’t believe. He may have even been thinking of moving on to another city because Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision and said: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9b, 10).

As you share your faith with those around you, there is a temptation to be silent and shy away from “speaking about the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). But keep in mind that the same Lord that went with Paul, goes with you. He calms fears. He forgives sins. And He gives you a message worth speaking everyday.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to speak of the hope that I have in You. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, February 18, 2023

Read [Acts 18:18-28](#)

“Mission Work”

“At Cenchreae he (Paul) had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.”

This single sentence from today’s reading tells it all. No, there’s not even a bit of theology hidden in those words, but it describes life in the mission field. Your life goes on, and you sometimes do extreme things to make a point. Acts doesn’t explain this haircut any further, or the vow that apparently led to the trim, but since it’s mentioned here it probably was a part of Paul’s ministry, somehow.

The Acts of the Apostles is the primary instruction manual for mission work to this day. Here we learn of the early spread of the Gospel to the ends of the (first century) earth. We hear of the troubles and travails these men and women faced, in their travels themselves, in the people they encountered, and the issues they faced. Many of those issues have changed; many others are identical. The Epicureans aren’t so prevalent today (at least not by that name), and Christian missionaries no longer begin their work in the local Jewish synagogue. But they still learn the culture they work in, learn the language(s) they need to know to communicate, and they bare their souls to people. All, driven by the Holy Spirit Who opens the Word to their hearts and minds.

My Grandpa’s neighbor was the second missionary to Paraguay for 5 years. His predecessor had been sent there by the LCMS to serve Lutherans that had settled there from Germany, Russia, and Brazil. He’d served in WWI in the German Army with Adolph Hitler, but now shared the Gospel in these several languages by horse, on foot, by canoe, and river boat. In the three villages served, services were in homes in two places, and in a barn in the other. In the 30’s, the Nazi influence forced him to leave, and the congregation president filled in until Pastor Harley was sent in 1943.

Reading Pastor Harley’s account of his work in Paraguay, written 40 years later, sounds remarkably like Paul’s ministry. Plans were made and were modified as God led them. People came forward with teaching, musical, and leadership skills, and Word and Sacrament worship took place, in the small town populated by burros and surrounded by jungle. Conflict took place, but forgiveness and mercy often followed.

Life may be hard and sometimes short in the mission field, but a missionary’s faith grows exponentially as God’s Word is taught and takes root and grows in the former strangers and skeptics that are drawn by the Good News. We do well to study God’s Word and the stories of its spread throughout the world.

Prayer: Lord of the Church, encourage us through Your Word and Spirit to go and baptize and teach, knowing that You are with us always, to the end of the Age. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, February 20, 2023

Read Acts 19:1-20

Continued

“So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.” Acts 19:20

Today, I really just want to focus in on one word in our text: continued. The Word of the Lord “continued to increase and prevail,” and it continues to do so until the end of time, when Christ will return in glory.

But how does this happen? It continues to increase as it always has. It continues to prevail through the simple Means of Grace God has given: through preaching, teaching, and reading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and through the gifts of His Word given through Baptism, Absolution, and Holy Communion.

The Word of the Lord increases by finding a home in new hearts as a person who was not a child of God becomes God’s own child. The Word of God continues on, proving itself again, showing its power to change hearts, and create faith. But it continues not only at the beginning, but also day by day. As the Word takes root and grows, either in the Church or in one person’s heart, the Word of the Lord continues.

Rejoice then that the Word of the Lord continues to “increase” and “prevail” in the world, in the Church, and in you!

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, may Your Word grow among us and in us. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, February 21, 2023

Read Acts 19:21-41

His Will, Not Mine

I have made my plans; I know what I propose to do. God has given me tasks to do, tasks that are difficult but within my reach. Surely, I figure, surely haven't given me these tasks, He will ensure that there are no difficult obstacles in my way. Now, that I know what I should do - the future is clear, and I know God is with me. Only ...

Occasionally God will remind me that I still need Him. The way for Christians is not smooth and easy. Rather, the devil is always there - out to use my pride and confidence in myself to make trouble and possible failure of trust in God. How often I forget what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mountain, how he assured me that I am blessed when troubles come to bring disinformation, physical insecurity, and social isolation on God's children. He says "Rejoice".

It is certain that where God's people are following His ways, there will be trouble from the devil following along. It is not accidental, they do want to hurt you, socially, mentally, physically. Now it is necessary to remember that I am not alone. I am with Jesus, who already went through all this without failing to keep trusting God. All those God given directions I started out with, will be accomplished in His will. Perhaps by me, perhaps not. But that is all right. They are His will, not mine. I don't even possess them as a loan. They are His and they will succeed.

Prayer: Watch over me Lord, don't let my trust fall from my confidence. Teach me to listen to You and not the world. In Your name, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, February 22, 2023

Read Acts 20:1-16

The First Day of the Week

“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread.”

Acts 20:7

Paul was in Ephesus, where the turmoil had finally ceased from the uproar that Demetrius had provoked; the silversmith who caused this tumult (disorder) in Ephesus over Paul’s message against idols, the so-called gods—false gods, **“gods made with hands are not gods”** (Acts 19:26). Now in chapter 20, Paul had gone through Macedonia, Greece, and Philippi, and ends up in Troas with many brothers. In Troas, **“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight”** (Acts 20:7). Paul was there talking and to breaking bread with those gathered: a young man falls asleep falls three stories, and he was picked up dead:

“And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, ‘Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.’ And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed” (vv. 9-11).

Eutychus is restored—resurrected to life after Paul takes him up in his arms, then Paul departs from Troas around dawn. Notably, before dawn, the first day of the week, commentator Richard Lenski observed;

“The break with the Jewish Sabbath became decisive the moment the converted Jews withdrew from the synagogue; they no longer wanted to be identified with the hostile Jews, and the keeping of Sunday in place of Saturday thus received a strong impetus from the beginning. But there is no command anywhere in the New Testament obligating believers to observe Sunday. In the old covenant Saturday was fixed by divine law for the Jews. In the new covenant no day is fixed in any manner by any law. The supposition that Christ or his apostles transferred the legal sanction from Saturday to Sunday is without support. To call our Sunday the Christian “Sabbath” is to apply a wrong and misleading name. Sunday as a day of rest and worship for Christians is just about the opposite of the Jewish Sabbath. The latter was wholly compulsory, the former is altogether voluntary. We keep Sunday because we want and need it for the public worship without which we cannot get along in our Christian life. (Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 825–826).

Prayer – Dear Jesus, thank You for Your resurrection from the dead, which guarantees our resurrection. Through Your Holy Spirit, grant us faith always to remember that physical death is not the end of true life with You. Amen. (TLNB).

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, February 23, 2023
Read Acts 20:17-38

Go and Do Likewise

While hurriedly journeying to Jerusalem, Paul meets with the Church leaders in Ephesus one last time for a very heartfelt and emotional goodbye. Paul doesn't know what's in store for him in Jerusalem, but he does know that whatever it is, it won't be pleasant. He's confident that he will never be making the trip to Ephesus again. And we, blessed with the privilege of hindsight, know that Paul was very right to assume this. Indeed, while in Jerusalem, Paul would be arrested, sent to Rome, shipwrecked, and eventually martyred in Rome. He never went back to Ephesus.

But in his parting words, Paul gave the young pastors in Ephesus a task. He told them, "Remember what I've done for you – taught you, helped you, cried with you, shared my life with you. Now go out and do likewise for others."

We in the Lutheran Church talk a lot about what we've been given, which is great! We've been given forgiveness, faith, life, and countless blessings. These are certainly good things to remember and praise God for constantly. But the Christian life doesn't end with our receiving God's gifts. Rather, that is where it **begins**. We are called to share these blessings with our neighbors. The Christian life is about more than what we've been given. It's about what we can give, as well.

So, brothers and sisters, remember what Christ has done for you – taught you, helped you, cried with you, shared His life with you. Now go and do likewise for others.

Prayer: "Almighty God, You have called Your Church to witness that in Christ You have reconciled us to Yourself. Grant that by Your Holy Spirit we may proclaim the good news of Your salvation so that all who hear it may receive the gift of salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

- LSB, "Prayer for the mission of the Church," pg. 305.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, February 24, 2023

Read Acts 21:1-36

When God's Will is Hard

"Let the will of the Lord be done." We know that Paul's words in Acts 21:14 are the proper ones. We should want God's will to be done in every circumstance. Jesus even taught us to pray that way, "Thy will be done." We often refer to God's will as being "good and gracious," after all, God is good and gracious. So, His will must be these things also.

But at the same time God also tells us in Isaiah 55:8, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways." God sees the whole picture, but we do not. God's working and motives and thoughts are altogether righteous and holy, but ours are not. He is constantly working for our eternal good (and the good of others), but we can get hyper focused on the moment, and only how it affects us.

I was thinking about this in reading the exchange between Paul and Christians at Caesarea. Paul is told a little bit about his future (always a dangerous thing), namely that he will be bound and delivered to the Gentiles. He will be a prisoner. Notice that Luke (the writer of Acts) is one of the crowd in Acts 21:12 urging him not to go to Jerusalem where this arrest is being foretold. We can understand the impulse of Luke and the others. They don't want to see any harm come to Paul. He could just stay in Caesarea and be safe.

Yet Paul has been told by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:22) to go to Jerusalem. It is not optional to choose a different path. He knows the imprisonment (and potentially worse) is ahead for him, but to ignore God's Word would be worse. So, He goes and is soon imprisoned.

From a limited perspective this obviously seems like a bad choice. But while Paul is imprisoned, the Gospel is brought before a series of officials and the message expands. While Paul is imprisoned, he will have the opportunity to share the news of Jesus' forgiveness with many people in Rome. While Paul is imprisoned, he would write Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon – meaning that God's people across the world and throughout time would be strengthened in the hope of Christ. Paul could not see any of this at the time. Paul's friends could not see any of this either. But our God could. God's good and gracious will to see many more hear the good news of Jesus was being accomplished even with Paul in prison.

We don't always get to see the larger ways in which God is at work. But stories like this one remind us that while God's ways and purposes are not always clear to us, He does indeed, "work all things together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28)."

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to follow Your Word, even when it's hard, even when I can't see the bigger picture of your will. Comfort me in what You have shown me through Your death and resurrection for me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, February 25, 2023

Read [Acts 21:37-22:29](#)

“Citizenship”

Citizenship isn't something we often think about. Oh, it's come up in our national conversation, especially in recent years, as many people illegally enter our country. This situation has caused many to discuss what these people deserve – being here but not being citizens. We might think about it around election time, or if a Boy Scout you know gets his Citizenship merit badge. Generally, though, it's just there – way in the background.

In today's reading, though, Paul's citizenship saved his life. He'd been in Jerusalem around the time of Passover, and it seems that every single Jew from Asia Minor that he'd ever offended was there, too! And they all wanted to kill him for (they thought) desecrating the Temple. The mob was beating him to death when the Roman soldiers intervened, only to take Paul in for “thorough” interrogation (with whips). But his Roman citizenship meant the Tribune couldn't treat him that way.

As Americans, if we're unjustly arrested in a foreign country, the USA will fight to get us back. We have the right to vote, to get a driver's license, to buy land and make investments. We have the right to free speech, to exercise our religious beliefs, and to do countless other things. I often heard it said in the military, “You have to go to other countries to truly appreciate what we have here.”

I was in Syria 20-some years ago, where they (at the time, anyway) were proud of their “freedom of religion”. As I learned more about this, though, I realized it really wasn't “freedom of religion”. Basically, you could believe any faith you wanted, but you couldn't share it with anyone else. At least for Christianity, that's not being fully Christian.

When Paul's guards learned of his protected status as a Roman citizen, what did he do? He continued to tell his tormentors about Jesus in the hope that some would hear. And he kept this up, until finally the violent mob drove the Romans to take him into custody for his own protection (but continued to boldly speak the next day).

As Americans, we enjoy an amazing God-given right to worship in peace and to be able to share this with others. As citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, though, we enjoy the protective custody of the King of the Universe and His armies of angels. But at the same time we, like Paul, are compelled by this Good News to share it with others. God has welcomed us into His kingdom, and wants us to bring Him more.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am forever grateful for having been given citizenship in Your Kingdom. Make me be like Paul, who just had to tell others about Jesus. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, February 27, 2023

Read Acts 22:30-23:35

The Lord Stood By Him

There are few feelings worse in the world than the sense that you are alone. The whole world can seem to gang up together, and there's just you. Such isolation is paralyzing and demoralizing.

It would be easy to see Paul as being in such a place. The Pharisees on one side. The Sadducees on the other side. They may not see eye to eye about much (which is evident as Paul gets them to argue with each other about the resurrection), but they do have one thing in common: they both want to get rid of Paul. The situation is bad enough that the Roman tribune responsible for Paul is worried that in fighting each other, "Paul (might) be torn to pieces." So for his protection, Paul is hauled away.

If anyone ever felt alone, this would be it. But "the following night the Lord stood by him and said, 'Take courage...' Christ will give Paul a specific promise that he may be imprisoned, but he will live to proclaim the truth of Jesus in Rome also. After the violence that almost literally tore Paul apart, this had to be comforting.

But I want to focus on the first part. There is something more comforting there, that is true also for you in your moments of solitude. "The Lord stood by him and said, 'Take courage.'" Here is a specific example of Christ keeping the promise that He made after His resurrection. "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20)." The "end of the age" means until He returns.

This is His promise to you. In moments of isolation, He stands beside you. In moments of trial and difficulty, He stands beside you. And as He does so, bear in mind these words of Jesus for you: "In this world you will have tribulation (mercifully often not so great as Paul's). But take heart; (take courage!) I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Prayer: Dear Jesus, in my moments of isolation, strengthen me in Your promise that You are with me until the end of the age. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

Read Acts 24

His Representatives

It is certain that there will be those who oppose the truth, who try to warp, distort, and just plain deny the truth. They find their joy in attacking those who love the truth and live in it. But that Jesus who has paid for my sin, who lives in and with me, He is the truth! When I stand in Him and on what He has said, then the lies about the truth, are frustrated.

But the world doesn't stop there. The world attacks those who hold to the truth. The world, those who love themselves and their own ideas, try to destroy the truth, then they attack those who hold to the truth. They attack with words, with various forms of theft, and then with physical attempts at murder. How they repeat this scene over and over again through the years. But our God protects us.

Comforting us with His presence, blinding His opponents to their own self-destructive behavior, sometimes He simply delivers His people from the world; other times He allows them to be His representatives as they suffer as did our Lord, even death.

Through all this, I know that am honored as wickedness in their very act of act proves that I am God's child. I don't need to defend myself against such, God will do it. How He does it is indeed to my benefit. God gives me the words I need, He gives me the confidence to stand, having done all, to stand!

Prayer: Thank you Jesus, my Lord, I thank you for the attempts of the devil to destroy me. It is hard to thank you, but I know that they are proof that I am living with You. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, February 22, 2023

Read Acts 25:1-12

Paul's Confession of Christ and Appeal to Caesar

"To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go."

Acts 25:12

Paul was still being held in Caesarea as a Roman citizen and on trial and being held for speaking of **"the resurrection of the dead"** (Acts 24:21; 23:6). Paul said "about faith in Christ" (Acts 24:24) to Felix and Porcius Festus then succeeded Felix, and Felix left Paul in prison. The Jews are continually plotting to kill Paul, and Felix wished to do a favor for the Jews.

Unsurprisingly, the Jewish council has been plotting against Paul and killing him since his arrest in Jerusalem for supposing Paul for bringing Greeks into the temple and teaching against the **"law"** (see Acts 21:27-31), and then speaking of Christ and the resurrection from the dead.

"Thus the unbelief, the hatred of Christ on the part of the Jews and the injustice on the part of the Roman governor combined in enabling Paul to preach the Gospel also in Rome, the capital of the world. Even today the wickedness and enmity of the world often serve to spread the kingdom of Christ on earth" (*Kretzmann Commentary, NT, Acts 9-12*).

Although we are not citizens of Rome and can appeal to Caesar like Paul, we should, as citizens of a country, support the government in its proper work punishing evil and rewarding/promoting good. However, here and now, and for the sake of Christ, we are forever citizens of the household of God in Christ and appeal to Christ the Risen King of all things in heaven and on earth in suffering and persecution for the Name and sake of Jesus and His Righteousness. And so Christ Jesus, the one crucified for our sins, and in His Resurrection from the dead, we have Peace and Hope in the face of the wickedness and suffering in the world here and now in Christ's victory over sin, death, and Satan.

Paul wrote to the saints in Ephesians, **"you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God"** (2:19).

Prayer – "Lord, before Your judgment seat, I deserve to die because of my sins. Thank You that, because Jesus took my punishment, You count me innocent," and forgiven for the sake of Christ. Amen. (*TLSB*).

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, March 2, 2023
Read Acts 25:13-26:32

The Courtroom Drama

Well, Paul was living in a courtroom drama. He was wrongfully accused and arrested and then tried by a biased judge who purposefully declared no verdict just to keep him in jail longer. Then, after spending two years in prison, Paul was tried again by a different judge. But this judge was also corrupt and tried to get Paul into a position where he could be found guilty without proper evidence. At this moment, everyone was against Paul. The entire court was against him. So in desperation, knowing that he was in dire straits, Paul invoked his right as a Roman citizen to be tried before Caesar in Rome. Hopefully there, he's finally receive an impartial trial away from the influence of the Jews who wanted to kill him.

But plot twist! Before he's sent to Rome, Agrippa the king of Judea unexpectedly arrives! Taking an interest in the rollercoaster of Paul's trial, Agrippa decides that he needs to hear the whole story from Paul himself. Hearing Paul's story, Agrippa has no doubt that Paul is an innocent man. But it was too late! Paul had already appealed to Caesar! There was no stopping it now! Agrippa looked on helplessly as an innocent man was thrown further and further down into Rome's corrupt court system. There was no justice for Paul. He was just an innocent man, locked in a cell and eventually killed for crimes he did not commit.

But at the end of Paul's conversation with Agrippa, he says a prayer. You see, Paul was so persuasive that Agrippa genuinely thought that he was trying to convert him to Christianity. After being confronted with this, Paul replied by praying, "I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am" that is, perfectly free in Christ. Even though Paul was living out a rigged courtroom drama, he still prayed that all might be brought to Christ and saved – this included the Jews trying to kill him, the corrupt judges trying to ruin him, and Agrippa, the helpless witness waiting for justice. He prayed for his enemies, that they might know Christ. Paul's prayer is one of selflessness and love.

May this be our prayer, as well. Naturally, we pray that our lives may not be quite as tense as Paul's – we'd like to avoid the courtroom drama as much as possible. But we also pray that we respond to our enemies with love. Because truly all need to know Christ, even those who attack us.

Prayer: "Almighty, everlasting God, through Your only Son, our blessed Lord, You commanded us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, and to pray for those who persecute us. Therefore, we earnestly implore You that by Your gracious working our enemies may be led to true repentance, may have the same love toward us as we have toward them, and may be of one accord and of one mind and heart with us and with Your whole Church; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen." *LSB, "Prayer for our enemies,"* pg. 306

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, March 3, 2023

Read Acts 27:1-12

Fair Havens

Some years ago, I had to make a long drive to visit a congregation member who was living in a nursing home near her daughter. The facility may not be open any longer, but the experience has stayed in my mind. Sunny Acres Nursing Home did not have much warmth or spaciousness as the name might seem to indicate. Many of residents lived on the first floor (AKA the basement) and had small rectangular windows that barely allowed the sun to shine in. The rooms were miniscule for two people to live in, so naturally three people were in many rooms. The name "Sunny Acres" was the essence of false advertising.

Fair Havens may have been much the same. Our text points out that this stopping point on Paul's journey to Rome was a "harbor...not suitable to spend the winter in." Anything but a "Fair Haven," this was not a place to find rest. Paul may or may not have known this, but he had a pretty good idea that disaster was ahead, if they pushed back out to sea from Fair Haven. Paul may not have been a master sailor, but he tells us in 2 Corinthians 11 that he had already seen three shipwrecks.

Unfortunately for the crew of Paul's ship, the centurion in charge of the prison transfer (and therefore the boat) did not listen to Paul. It might have been a rocky stay in Fair Haven, but as we will see in tomorrow's reading, it would have been wise to listen to Paul.

We have a place of fair haven in this world that we would be wise to tie our ships to – that is the Word of God. It may seem wise to many to push out into deep waters on our own. We may believe that our own collected knowledge or street smarts or experience is sufficient to make a go of it, but true wisdom is found in listening to Paul and the messengers of the Scripture that tell us our safe harbor is in God's Word. That doesn't mean that being tied to it will always be easy, but to push away from the shore of God's true word would leave us in open waters without the anchor of everlasting Hope in Christ. He is our Fair Haven, a place of safety in the rough waters of this life and the home of peace and tranquility for all eternity.

Prayer: Dear Holy Spirit, tie me to the Word of Scripture. Give me peace in the storms of life through Christ my Hope, my salvation, and my Fair Haven. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Saturday, March 4, 2023

Read [Acts 27:13-44](#)

[Map of Paul's Journey](#)

"Shipwrecked"

Alfred E. Neuman is the long-running mascot of Mad Magazine. He's known for his silly, careless, blissfully ignorant grin and famous motto, "What, Me Worry?" He's perfect for a magazine such as Mad, where irreverent, silly humor and commentary finds a home. But that motto seems to strangely fit Paul in today's reading.



Maybe not an expert sailor, nevertheless Paul has been around all kinds of danger. In his own words, **"Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."**

And now, in our reading, he's a prisoner on his way to stand before Caesar to defend himself against felonious accusations. He's being put on a boat at the time of year where the weather on the Mediterranean can take a turn for the worse with no warning. From his personal experience, he's warned the centurion in charge that it wouldn't go well with them to attempt this trip. This advice is ignored, though, in deference to the professional sailors, and they set out.

Quickly, a storm blows them out to sea, out of control for two weeks. As Paul predicted, they dump their cargo, their tackle, and are run aground on a reef. But Paul? "What, me worry?" He's had a vision from God that yes, a fourth shipwreck will be added to his record, but every person on board will survive.

But Paul is no Alfred E. Neuman. While the two of them may have the same motto, that's where the similarity ends. Paul has no worries, but not because he's blissfully ignorant. Not because he's just so silly as to laugh off every danger. Paul has no worries because he knows that he belongs to God, and that God has promised that he'll go to Rome, and has promised that every one of his shipmates will survive.

You and I may not have faith as strong as Paul's. But you and I are also no Alfred E. Neuman. We may not get personal messages from angels or Jesus like Paul did, but we have heard God's promises to us through His Word. Jesus has told us that He will be with us always, to the end of the age. He told His Church to pronounce His forgiveness of our sins to us because He paid for them. He provides for us, cares for us, and gives us everything we need. "What, me worry?"

Prayer: God to Whom I belong and Whom I worship, You give me all I need for life, health, and salvation. When life's worries come my way, turn me to Your Son, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, March 6, 2023

Read Acts 28:1-10

Unusual Kindness

Malta is an island with a fairly warm climate, but Paul and Luke arrived there in late November, and Luke remembers the cold and the rain. Cold days are rarely mentioned in the Bible. But Paul had known what it was to be cold in his travels, either in the mountains of Asia Minor or while lost at sea. He said, "I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked" (2 Corinthians 11:27).

The people of Malta may have been difficult for Luke to understand. After all, the ESV Bible calls them "native people." Luke literally called them "babaroi" (where we get the English word "barbarians"). Yet on this stormy, cold and rainy winter morning, the Maltese islanders were unexpectedly kind. They built a fire, or more than one, so that the 276 castaways could get warm. These were not people who knew their Savior, but they acted with "unusual kindness," the same term used to describe the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35).

Every instance of kindness, preaches the law to us, showing us the way our behavior should look when it is motivated by love for Christ. But this occasion also gave Paul the opportunity to show kindness in return and point to the true hope in Christ, as he later was used by God to heal a number of people on the island and certainly shared the Gospel.

Every instance of kindness also reminds us of the greater and eternal kindness that we have been shown by Christ. He is THE Good Samaritan who gives us to bind up our wounds of sin and death. He has shown us truly unusual kindness in going to the cross to welcome us into the warmth of His everlasting home.

May every kindness we are shown remind us of Christ, that our faith would be strengthened and we reply with the truly unusual kindness of hope and peace in Christ.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, Your unusual kindness has brought me forgiveness and salvation. When I receive kindness from others, lead me to respond in gratitude by sharing your greater kindness. And help me each day to reflect Your unusual kindness by leading me to generously care for others as the Maltese people cared for Paul. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

Read Acts 28:11-31

Temptation Turned to His Purposes

It is hard to live as a Christian. My own self is constantly trying to coerce me to sin, just a little bit. But I know that that is wrong, and so with God's help I refuse - and come to Him in repentance as I realize where I have done wrong anyway. But the world doesn't stop with tempting me, it uses the powers of the world to try to force me into its ways.

I don't find myself facing gross persecution yet. I face tempting looking vistas in the world: I find opportunities to get ahead by unethical means, or to engage in silent robbery, or to lean with anger on others to make things better for me. And even when I refuse the temptations, I find myself regretting the "loss" of what tempted me.

Yet God is in control. When I move away from wrong, when I see the world giving me what looks like failure and unhappiness, yet God is working to make things go better than I could have believed. The Apostle Paul wanted to preach in Rome, but he went to prison instead because He was faithful to God. Then God used his imprisonment in Rome to enable him to preach to many.

I find that when I refuse my opportunities to do wrong... When I feel like I have lost out on so much, then without my understanding how, my very "loss" becomes His entry into better for me. Even the world's force cannot help but do God's will.

Prayer: Thank You, God, for teaching me. But Lord, don't forget to keep reminding me. I want to do even what I don't want to do when it's for you. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad