

THE ONE WHO BELIEVES: A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



FOREWORD

God's favor and peace be with you this day.

Our Discipleship Board has been hard at work for many months launching Grace's "Discipleship Pathway." The Discipleship Pathway is intended to help us as followers of Jesus to remember that we are always learning, growing, and becoming under the care of our Lord. What we Lutherans call "catechesis" is not a one-and-done process at a particular stage of life, but a way of living. Martin Luther himself declared that he read and reviewed the Catechism daily, for the core truths of the faith are needed like daily food and drink.

In support of our goal to be faithful disciples, our Lenten focus this year is on the Six Chief Parts of Luther's Small Catechism: The Ten Commandments, the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Holy Baptism, Confession & Absolution, and the Lord's Supper. This Lenten devotion goes alongside our Lenten worship series, and provides thoughtful reflection on each of the Catechism's topics as we visit them week by week. In this effort, we are indebted to the work of Steadfast Lutherans, an organization of LCMS pastors and laymen who work to publish materials for parishes in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The materials of this devotion are largely drawn from a series of Lenten devotions published by that organization from 2019 through 2023. Their copyright is gratefully acknowledged. Other sources for this devotion include the online resource BookofConcord.org and the book *The Hidden Discipline*, written by Dr. Martin Marty and published by Concordia Press.

This devotional will have its best effect if it is read alongside the Small Catechism as your Lenten journey progresses. A brief order for morning and/or evening prayer is also included in its pages as a suggestion for daily devotion.

May you be blessed as you connect again with the Small Catechism.
In Christ,
Pr. Dave Brooks

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AN ORDER FOR DAILY PRAYER, FROM LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM

Morning Prayer

In the morning, when you rise, you shall bless yourself with the holy cross and say:

In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may, in addition, say this little prayer:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee to keep me this day also from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Then go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest.

Evening Prayer

In the evening, when you go to bed, you shall bless yourself with the holy cross and say:

In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may, in addition, say this little prayer:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day, and I pray Thee to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

ASH WEDNESDAY - FEBRUARY 18

"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. — Joel 2:12-13

This is the Old Testament lesson you will likely be hearing today at church. Return to the Lord is a very Lenten theme. This text speaks of repentance, that is of godly sorrow over sins (contrition) and also faith in the Gospel that for Christ's sake those sins are forgiven. The Scriptural distinction between the Law and the Gospel is evident here in repentance.

In organizing the Small Catechism, Martin Luther began with confronting men and women with their true situation and need. Here, in the Commandments we have a clear statement of God's will. Here we have a proper mirror to show us our sins against God. Here we are confronted with our inability, our lack, our rebellion, our bondage.

Our return to the Ten Commandments is in itself a humble action. We do not have them mastered and can always stand to learn them again and consider them in our lives. In fact, that is the daily life appointed for us as Christians.

In the Preface to the Large Catechism, Dr. Luther points this fact out to us:

God Himself is not ashamed to teach these things daily. He knows nothing better to teach. He always keeps teaching the same thing and does not take up anything new or different. All the saints know nothing better or different to learn and cannot finish learning this. Are we not the finest of all fellows to imagine that if we have once read or heard the catechism, we know it all and have no further need to read and learn? Can we finish learning in one hour what God Himself cannot finish teaching? He is engaged in teaching this from the beginning to the end of the world. All prophets, together with all saints, have been busy learning it, have ever remained students, and must continue to be students. (LC Preface, par 16)

Prayer for the Day: Dear Jesus, help us to humbly return to You in true repentance during this season of Lent. Bless our study of Your Commandments. Amen.

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY - FEBRUARY 19

"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." — Romans 7:7-12

The Law convicts us of sin. In today's world, something that convicts us or makes us feel guilty is considered bad. This is not true in the case of God's Law. God's Law is not bad. Sin is bad. It's evil and reaps the wrath of God. The Law is from God and therefore it is by nature good.

St. Paul says that without the Law he would not have known sin. The law's chief function and use is to reveal sin. It shows us the actual sins of commission and omission in our lives and thus reveals the rotten fruit that the corruption of Original Sin produces. This is vital for us as Christians, for Christ came to save sinners. The Law does its good and godly work of revealing the evils we have done to our Creator.

It's time to realize the fact that guilt can be a very good thing if it comes by God's Law revealing our sins to us. If the Law convicts us of sin, then we are aware of our need for someone to rescue and deliver us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. No matter how poorly catechized the world around us gets, we as God's people should hold onto His Word of Truth, both Law and Gospel.

Prayer for the Day: Dear Jesus, help us to regard Your Law as holy and righteous and good. By Your Spirit, work in us through that same Law to show us our sin. By the Gospel of Your work of salvation for us, grant us to trust in You for the forgiveness of our sins. Amen.

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY - FEBRUARY 20

Again, the devil took [Jesus] to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, " 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' " Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. — Matthew 4:8-11

You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." But who or what is a god? In the Large Catechism, Martin Luther answers, "A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress. So, to have a God is nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart."

All people have a god, for all people have someone or something to which they look for blessing, help, and comfort. But it is not good enough to simply have a god. The First Commandment is not, "You shall have a god," but, "You shall have no other gods." In this commandment the one true God teaches that He alone is to be trusted and believed with all the heart.

Other gods may provide some measure of momentary help or comfort. Satan may very well have given Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. But whatever benefit comes from a false god is fleeting, and the one true God threatens to punish all who reject Him with the penalty of eternal wrath.

Our Lord Jesus, perfect Man, did not have another god. He did not fall down and worship Satan, despite his promise of earthly reward. Instead, Christ confessed, "You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve." By His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has revealed the one true God to us, who alone is our salvation.

Prayer for the Day: Lord God, give us Your Holy Spirit, that we would fear, love, and trust in You alone; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY - FEBRUARY 21

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.
— Hebrews 10:24-25

There is no distinct dividing line between the Second and Third Commandments. Both deal with God's name and His Word. Both speak of the individual's private and public confession. The Third Commandment, however, introduces something not really enunciated by the preceding commandments. It has a public and corporate character. Right worship must be private and public. The public exercise of religion consists in a pious concern for the maintenance of true religion, in going to church and hearing the Word (Acts 15:12), in public prayers (1 Timothy 2:1 f.), and in the use of the sacraments (1 Corinthians 11:18-19). Private worship consists in domestic discipline (Proverbs 1:8), the exercise of piety among children (Proverbs 22:6), in innocence of life (James 1:27), in household harmony (Romans 12:18).

How is this done? By reviewing the Word preached publicly, the study of the catechism, the searching of conscience, and by confirming our amendment of life.

Public and private worship must grow together, or they will wither apart. Public worship apart from private worship degenerates into externalism and religious hypocrisy. Private worship apart from public worship is schism, that is, a rending of the body of Christ. This isn't just "me and Jesus." If you are in Christ, you are connected to the rest of His body, that is, the Church. It is also a refusal to obey God's command and receive the gifts He gives in the public service of the Word and Sacraments.

Private worship is woven into public worship. This is why our Lord Jesus instituted the public preaching office, so that we might be baptized, taught God's Word, hear the absolution, and receive Jesus' body and blood under the bread and wine. May God draw us to the public service of the church, so that we might be fruitful in our private devotions as well.

Prayer for the Day: Heavenly Father, bring Your Kingdom among us through faithful ministers of the Word, so that we might believe and lead godly lives. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT - FEBRUARY 22

And they did not understand the saying that [Jesus] spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. — Luke 2:50-51

The Fourth Commandment says, "Honor your father and your mother." Jesus' mother has the great distinction and blessing of being the Mother of God. Joseph had the privilege of being the guardian of God's only-begotten Son. Luther writes in the Large Catechism: "To the position of fatherhood and motherhood God has given special distinction above all positions that are beneath it: He does not simply command us to love our parents, but to honor them...For it is a far higher thing to honor someone than to love someone, because honor includes not only love, but also modesty, humility, and submission to a majesty hidden in them" (LC I:105).

Jesus submits to Mary and Joseph. He does not despise or anger them even though He is God in the flesh. He honors them and submits to them. In every way Jesus puts Himself under the Law of God so that even at 12 years old, He submits to them. In Mary and Joseph and in every mother and father the majesty of God is hidden. He has placed mother and father alone to be the authority and caregivers of children, those to whom God has blessed their union with such a gift. All other authority in this world has its basis in the blessed estate of holy matrimony. Only in the union of man and woman as husband and wife does the rest of fallen creation have order. It is under the headship of the father to guide and teach his children the Word of God. As Luther heads each section of the Small Catechism, "As the house father should teach it in a simple way to his children."

Prayer for the Day: Heavenly Father, You give authority to fathers and mothers and hide Your divine majesty within them, honoring them. Give to each of us humility that we would always honor those whom You place over us, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT - FEBRUARY 23

The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, and you must rule over it. "Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" — Genesis 4:6-9

Commandments Five, Six and Seven direct how we should care for our neighbor in the intimacy and integrity of his or her body. Cain's murder of Abel illustrates the most horrific example, for murder is taking/stealing away the breath of life that God gives to each of us.

But St. John sharpens the issue further: Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer (1 John 3:15). It's not just the physical act of killing, but that murder arises from the idolatry and sin held in the human heart (Matthew 15:19). Any hatred of or physical harm to the neighbor is a sin against one whom God has created and for whom Christ has died. Life is what is protected by the Fifth Commandment, from conception until natural death. God would have us protect our neighbors' physical well-being before our own. We are indeed our brother's keeper.

The Sixth Commandment protects the gift of human sexuality and marriage so that we might "lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do and husband and wife love and honor one another" (Small Catechism). Again, sexual sins are direct harms against the neighbor's body. Even those who think they do well must be vigilant. The good gifts of marriage and sexuality are constantly undermined by forces outside and inside ourselves. Be it homosexuality, cohabitation, divorce, or any number of related things, whenever we stray from God's teaching we violate our Creator's design. Marriage and sexuality are God's to define and to give as he wills. He does so from the very beginning, at creation. That is where Jesus also directs our attention, for these things are good, good for the man, good for the woman, good for the family, and good for society. It is God who creates and makes these things. Where we have sinned in this

regard we are to repent, seek His forgiveness for Christ's sake, and strive to live chaste and decent lives in what we say and do and to love one another.

The Seventh Commandment directs us to remember that everything we have is a gift from our Father in heaven. Any and all possessions, however great or small, are to be received with thanksgiving and with the realization that you deserve nothing that you have been given. And in the same way that your money and goods are given to you as a gift, so are your neighbor's goods. We should not steal. We should not "take our neighbor's money or possessions or get them in any dishonest way." Yet even further, this commandment calls us to recognize that God has made us stewards of these possessions, and we can use them to give God glory. God has given us these things so that we might use them to serve our neighbor. We do not simply refrain from taking our neighbor's things but we also help him to keep and rightly use what God has given him.

Christ Himself, who gave Himself freely for us and has forgiven us when we break these commandments to care for our neighbor in his or her bodily needs, makes it possible for us to freely love and provide for all people, especially for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, for such is not our love, but the love of God which abides in us.

Prayer for the Day: O God, the Giver of all good things, grant that we recognize your mercies, give thanks for your abundant blessings, and help our neighbor in times of need, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

TUESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT - FEBRUARY 24

If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

— Romans 7:7-8

If Commandments 5-7 are concerned with those things that provide for the health and welfare of the neighbor in his bodily life, then Commandments 8-10 "expand the circle" to address the life of the neighbor in community.

A good name or reputation is at once both powerful and fragile; it can open doors and create possibilities, but it can be demolished in an instant, swept away by the clamor or the silence of others. As each of us has a name (a gift, like any other thing we possess), we should notice that God's authority and power moves both to protect a good name in the kingdom of the sword through the use of law and courts, but also in the kingdom of the Gospel where Jesus himself suffers on the cross, slandered as a blasphemer and rebel. Our neighbors need the blessing of our protection of their good names, for Christ's sake.

The Ninth and Tenth Commandments target our hidden heart, known only to ourselves and to our Lord. Even if we look acceptable and respectable on the outside, we can still be hypocrites inside, for both of these last commandments reveal our hearts. In our distrust of God, we do not believe that God provides or distributes possessions and people rightly. In our lack of love for our neighbors, we do not believe that they are entitled to what they possess—we *begrudge them having anything at all*. But to be in Christ is to look for ways that the neighbor can enjoy the things that God has provided him or her, and to delight in giving that aid.

Prayer for the Day: Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us. Cast us not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from us. Restore to us the joy of Your salvation, and uphold us with a willing spirit. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT- FEBRUARY 25

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light."... "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." — Genesis 1:1-3, 26-27

In the origin story of the cosmos, our Triune God already begins revealing Himself. Not only do you have the creation of all things begun by the Word, but you also get a clue in the Hebrew word used for God: *Elohim*. This is a strangely constructed Hebrew word which hints at a single God and yet plural. Almost like we teach our children rather illogically, three in one.

Here God's Word starts the revelation of the God we have – three persons, the Father (God), the Son (word/said), and the Spirit. Further in this first chapter God reveals an internal conversation between the persons of the Holy Trinity when considering the creation of man. "Us" and "our" are used. God's not talking to angels, but at the very start of the Scriptures God is revealing the mystery of the Trinity. And the actions God takes in creation teach us about Him as well as He creates, orders, and blesses.

Prayer for the Day: O blessed Holy Trinity, grant to us Your creatures the revelation of rightly understanding Your Word. Amen.

THURSDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT - FEBRUARY 26

"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host." —Psalm 33:6

This verse is a beautiful confession of the Holy Trinity. The Psalms are filled with confessions of doctrine, as the teachings of the Christian Church always find their way into songs. The Holy Spirit confirms that here. Now, how does this verse teach the Holy Trinity?

The three persons are there in the text. The Father is confessed by "LORD". The Son is confessed by "word". The Holy Spirit is confessed by the "breath of His mouth". The picture of course paints the creation of heaven and the heavenly host as a glorious working of our Triune God.

How is the Father confessed by "LORD"? The capital letters in our Bibles want us to recall that this is "Yahweh". This name certainly applies to all three, but when we consider "word of the LORD" we see that the LORD is in this case the Father of the only begotten Son.

How is the Son confessed by "word"? John 1 teaches about how Christ Jesus is the "Word". In Genesis chapter 1 we see that God speaks and things are created out of nothing. This is a glorious comfort when we consider how we have our lives by God's Word. When His Word speaks, we can trust not only what it says, but that it is doing what it says. Baptism is not just plain water. Absolution becomes just as valid in heaven as on earth. The Body and Blood of Jesus become present with the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper.

How is the Spirit confessed by "breath"? In both Hebrew and Greek, the languages of the Old and New Testaments, the translated word used here can mean either *Spirit* or *breath*. This linguistic trait is used in Scripture to remind us of the Holy Spirit being the Lord and Giver of Life. In the extended account of the creation of man on the sixth day in Genesis 2 we see this trait in action. Also, our Lord Jesus Christ breathes on His disciples in John 20 and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit.

Prayer for the Day: Heavenly Father bless us by the hearing of the Word of the Son by the power of Your Spirit. Amen.

FRIDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT - FEBRUARY 27

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

When we think of Trinity verses in Scripture it is natural to run to the institution of Holy Baptism in Matthew 28, but here in the account of the baptism of Jesus we see the Trinity already. In fact, a lot of places in Scripture where baptism is spoken of or taught there are descriptions of the Trinity. The Triune God is tied up with baptism, even here at the baptism of Jesus.

The beauty of this account is to see the plan of salvation working out. Christ Jesus, taking on the baptism of repentance is a confession of His vicarious satisfaction. He stands in that water in our place. John the Baptizer objected, but Christ had to fulfill all righteousness in our place for us. As this great work occurs, the Spirit is visibly given and the Father's voice sounds from heaven. Jesus is the beloved Son of the Father. More than that, as He begins His public ministry by taking on the baptism of repentance from John, He pleases the Father. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all in this picture of how God is at work for our salvation. The Son becomes our substitute. The Spirit comes to Him and the Father is pleased with Him. The Triune God not only was involved in Creation, but also in Redemption.

Remember, the Triune God's name was placed upon you at Baptism. As the Father was pleased with the Son's work for you, as a baptized child of God, the Father is pleased with you because of the Son.

Prayer for the Day: Heavenly Father, help us to live as Your baptized children, trusting solely in Your Son Jesus' for our salvation. Amen.

SATURDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT - FEBRUARY 28

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. — Psalm 139:13

Scripture reveals that mankind is God's special creation. God continues to knit each of us in the wombs of our mothers. Everything God created, He created for a purpose, and that includes mankind. In his explanation to the First Article of the Creed, Martin Luther highlights that purpose: "For all this, it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him."

Much of our modern culture rejects that there is anything special about human beings. Men and women of all ages—but especially younger generations—are being crushed by the awful philosophy that declares life is meaningless and without purpose. So, we see efforts to "create meaning" for oneself, to build an "identity" that is entirely self-referential, and to find purpose in destructive ideologies or endless consumer choices.

The Bible says: "You knitted me together in my mother's womb." That says a lot. It says that God made you, and He loves what He created. Even after the Fall into sin, God loves what He created and in divine love, gave us His Son for our salvation.

Contrary to the lie of the world, we are fearfully and wonderfully made by the hand of a wise and loving God. Out of divine love God made humanity; He made us to love Him, and to love Him by serving our neighbor. That's a wonderful purpose, and a purpose that gives our lives meaning and value.

Prayer for the Day: Heavenly Father, we thank You for giving us the gift of earthly life from our mother's womb, and for the new life You've given us in baptism. Use us and the gifts you've given to serve our neighbor and reflect Your love in this world. And where we have done wrong, forgive us and help us to do better, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT - MARCH 1

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

Jesus is God. He is the Second Person of the Trinity. Paul writes (Philippians 2:1-11) that Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Jesus did not have to strive for godhood; He was already equal to God because He is God. Jesus is God, but He didn't flaunt His deity. He didn't make a show of it.

Jesus is God and yet He humbled Himself to save us. The text says He emptied Himself. There are two phrases which describe what this means. First, Jesus took on the form of a slave. Jesus is Lord but He became a slave by not using His divine power and glory. He became not just God's servant, but our servant, since He came to serve.

Secondly, Jesus was born in the likeness of men. This doesn't mean that Jesus wasn't a man. He was a man. This means that Jesus presented Himself, not as the God Man, but as an ordinary man. With the exception of the Transfiguration, Jesus looked like an ordinary man to everyone, even to those closest to Him. The public regarded Jesus as a great prophet, but still just a man.

The climax of Christ's emptying is on the cross, where He became obedient to a slave's death upon the cross. Even though He did not deserve shame but praise and honor, Christ still willingly suffered to save us. St. Paul, in this text, points to Christ as an example. Even though He deserved every honor, He humbled Himself for the good of His neighbor.

Christians should also emulate the mind of Christ. Christians look after the interests of others because Christ looked after their interests first. We act, not from ambition, but from a humility which springs from the humility of our Lord.

Prayer for the Day: Lord, You emptied Yourself for our good. Empty us of all pride and vanity so that we might be more like You. Amen.

MONDAY, SECOND WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 2

"But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me." Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."— Hebrews 2:9-15

The only begotten Son of God took on flesh, and, for a time, laid aside His divine attributes. Fully God and fully man, He went the way of the Cross. There, He suffered the shame and the curse of sin and tasted death for everyone. Yet His suffering and death reframe our death. Death and the devil are now powerless over the brothers and sisters of Christ Jesus. Baptized into His holy Name, that is what He has made us: His brothers and sisters, by grace through faith. Because He has overthrown the dominion of death and the devil, we are no longer under their tyranny. We share in our Lord's victory -- the victory He announced to the devil in the depths of hell, the victory he proclaimed in rising from the tomb on Easter Sunday. Death has now become, for us, a portal leading to life everlasting; the devil's accusations against us are now empty. O thanks be to God!

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus Christ, you have won for us the victory over death and the devil. Continue to assure us of this victory through Your Word and Spirit. Amen.

TUESDAY, SECOND WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 3

He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” — John 16:14

Jesus has won the forgiveness of sins by His innocent suffering and death on the cross. Yet if we desire the forgiveness of sins, we do not go to the cross to get it. First, we cannot go to the crucifixion of Jesus; that was an event that happened two thousand years ago. Second, even if somehow we could return to Jesus' crucifixion, what could we expect to receive there? The Roman soldiers had Jesus' blood on them, but they were not thereby justified in the sight of God. Those who believed in Jesus were either present and mourning, or else running for their lives and going into hiding.

If you want the forgiveness of sins, you don't go to where it was won. You go to where it is delivered. We cannot go back in time to get the fruits of Jesus' cross. But the Holy Spirit takes what belongs to Jesus and He preaches it in a place where we can go: church. When the Holy Spirit proclaims the things of Jesus, He delivers them to us in the present, and that means it is far better to be in the pew on Sunday than on Mount Golgotha two millennia ago. Luther writes brilliantly on this point in the Large Catechism:

“For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, resurrection, etc. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us” (LC, III.38).

Prayer for the Day: O Jesus, give us a hunger and thirst for Your Word and Sacraments. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, SECOND WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 4

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." — Matthew 6:9

Why do we pray? There are ultimately two reasons. First, God commands us to pray. The Second Commandment (You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God) commands prayer, or the right use of God's name. It is not an option for the Christian. It is commanded. It is a sacred thing that God demands and will punish our lack of prayer. Let this then encourage you and also reveal your sins against this Commandment.

The second reason why we pray is that our Father has promised to hear and answer our prayers. Jesus Himself promises that what we ask will be given. This should encourage us to realize the great joy and pleasure it is to pray. Our Father has put His own reputation on the line by promising to hear and answer our prayers. His Word is certain.

Our prayers have weight and heft, for they are heard by God, who is ruling the whole universe! Our prayers shouldn't be thoughtless. They should be serious and faithful. This doesn't mean that we avoid repeating prayers like the Lord's Prayer. In fact, when Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer He commands it to be prayed. Our thoughtlessness is never the problem with the words but with our hearts, which fail to keep the Second Commandment or properly believe the promise of God concerning our prayers. Lord have mercy upon us.

Prayer for the Day: Dear Father, help us to pray as we ought, obeying Your Word and trusting Your promise. Amen.

THURSDAY, SECOND WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 5

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." — Matthew 4:1-4

God's name is certainly holy in itself, because God is certainly holy in Himself. We may profane the name of God among us by cursing, swearing, using satanic arts, lying, or deceiving by His name, but we cannot desecrate God's name in itself, no matter how profane our words and deeds may be. For God is perfect, and His perfection cannot be sullied by sin.

Satan learned that lesson long ago in the wilderness. There he arrogantly attempted to tempt the very Son of God to profane His Father's name by turning stones into loaves of bread to satisfy His hunger, putting the Lord His God to the test by throwing Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and gaining all the kingdoms of the world and their glory by falling down and worshiping Satan. But Jesus would not be deceived or misled. He answered each temptation with nothing but the true and pure Word of God. In word and deed, Jesus kept God's name holy, in order that He would go to the cross as the holy, perfect sacrificial offering for the world's sin.

Indeed, God's name is certainly holy in itself. Neither the devil, nor the world, nor the sinful flesh can change that. Jesus proved it in His temptation in the wilderness. But by the Word of God, God's name may be kept holy on earth among men also. When we follow the example of our Lord in teaching and learning God's Word in truth and purity and in living holy lives according to what is commanded in the Scriptures, God's name is kept holy among us. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven!

Prayer for the Day: Protect us from the devil's temptations, who would lead us to teach or live contrary to Your Word, heavenly Father! Amen.

FRIDAY, SECOND WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 6

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You have said that I am a king. For this purpose, I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world — to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." — John 18:36-37

The kingdoms of this world must always fight to stay in power. Pilate's Rome could only remain powerful, and Caesar could only remain on the throne of the empire, by being more powerful than their enemies. In this way, every kingdom of this world is won, ruled, and continued through violence and power. In this way also, every kingdom of this world that has risen to power, has or will fall. There will always be another, more powerful king and kingdom to come.

Jesus' kingdom is different and He is a different king. He does not win His kingdom by violence but by suffering violence. He wins His kingdom by being delivered over to the Jews and to Pilate, by being delivered to the cross for us. And there, by His death and resurrection He indeed won the victory, for He opened the kingdom of heaven to all who believe. And such a kingdom cannot fall, cannot be overthrown by force or violence.

And so, we pray that this kingdom may come to us as the Father gives us the Holy Spirit, that we believe the testimony of the truth from Jesus and the apostolic witness, and that as we believe so we live, both now and forevermore.

Prayer for the Day: Lord God, the kingdoms of this world rise and fall, but You have promised that your kingdom is not of this world and that it is eternal. Keep us in that kingdom by your grace, that we may all the more believe the truth of your Holy Word, be strengthened in our faith, and love and serve our neighbor, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

SATURDAY, SECOND WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 7

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

— Matthew 6:10

The fourth stanza of Martin Luther's catechetical hymn for the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father, Who from Heaven Above," is a word of comfort, for the end of the first line prays that God would bestow "obedience in our weal and woe and patience in all grief." A stark line is drawn here between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross. The theology of glory teaches its adherents to tease out God's will for their lives through perceived blessings of material wealth, physical health, so-called inner peace, and a variety of earthly means.

However, the biblical theology of the cross teaches that, regardless of the cares and worries of this life, in Christ's passion and death all of the promises of God are "yes!" and "Amen!" It is through the cross that we know God's will for our lives and are granted hope for life everlasting. We learn through the third petition of the Lord's Prayer and are reminded in the fourth stanza of "Our Father, Who from Heaven Above," that God's will

for our lives in this world isn't always for rainbows and roses. There are crosses to bear. Extraordinary patience from the Lord Himself is required in times of grief, want, and plenty. The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh do not want the Word of the Lord to have free course, so we pray that the will of God be done among us that this may be so.

Prayer for the Day: Dear Father in Heaven, throughout our days of pilgrimage in this life, grant us patience and peace through Your Word, and keep us in the true faith until we die. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT - MARCH 8

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

We normally do not consider how precarious our lives are. The devil desires to destroy us through war, hardship, plague, and pestilence. This evil foe desires to burn our homes and destroy our food, so that there isn't even a crumb left. This liar also seeks to corrupt our hearts even in the midst of God's good and abundant gifts.

And yet, our prayers are heard. God gives us daily bread. He gives us clothing. He feeds us. He gives us peace, not only spiritual peace, but also political peace.

Our God does all this for a number of reasons. First, Our God does this out of the same gratuitous goodness which secured our redemption. Second, God blesses us with physical gifts so that we might be open to spiritual mysteries. The Israelites could not believe Moses, because of Pharaoh's oppression (Exodus 6:9). Paul urges us to pray for the government so that we might dwell in peace and godliness (1 Timothy 2). Finally, Christ Jesus, the Prince of Peace, was born during the reign of Caesar Augustus, who ushered in a time of peace and prosperity in the Empire, so that Christ's Gospel might be spread to all nations.

As humans, we are both body and soul, creatures of earthly kingdoms and yet desired by God for the heavenly kingdom. Carnal peace is necessary for the Gospel to be spread. We require the necessities of this mortal life, so that we might better see the things of the world to come. Both fasting and feasting are important. The one reminds us that we do not live by bread alone. The other reminds us that all good gifts come from God, and that our feasting is a foreshadowing of the wedding feast of the Lamb. May God teach us to realize that He is the Giver of all good things, so that we may rejoice in these gifts with thanksgiving.

Prayer for the Day: Heavenly Father, at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. We thank You for our daily bread, and we ask that You, through carnal peace, would spread that peace which surpasses all understanding. Amen.

MONDAY, THIRD WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 9

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

— Matthew 6:12

This petition is given so that we might stand before God with a clean conscience. Luther puts this so eloquently in the Large Catechism:

"Therefore there is here again great need to call upon God and to pray: Dear Father, forgive us our trespasses. Not as though He did not forgive sin without and even before our prayer (for He has given us the Gospel, in which is pure forgiveness before we prayed or ever thought about it). But this is to the intent that we may recognize and accept such forgiveness. For since the flesh in which we daily live is of such a nature that it neither trusts nor believes God, and is ever active in evil lusts and devices, so that we sin daily in word and deed, by commission and omission, by which the conscience is thrown into unrest, so that it is afraid of the wrath and displeasure of God, and thus loses the comfort and confidence derived from the Gospel; therefore it is ceaselessly necessary that we run hither and obtain consolation to comfort the conscience again... And let no one think that as long as we live here he can reach such a position that he will not need such forgiveness. In short, if God does not forgive without ceasing, we are lost.

It is therefore the intent of this petition that God would not regard our sins and hold up to us what we daily deserve, but would deal graciously with us, and forgive, as He has promised, and thus grant us a joyful and confident conscience to stand before Him in prayer."

(Large Catechism, Lord's Prayer, 88–92)

Prayer for the Day: Dear Jesus, forgive us our sins, we implore, that they may trouble us no more. Amen.

TUESDAY, THIRD WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 10

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." -Matthew 6:13

What exactly are we asking in this petition? Is our heavenly Father the sort who would lead us into temptation? Perish the thought!

The Apostle James writes, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one" (James 1:13). With these verses in mind, Luther begins his explanation of the Sixth Petition in the Small Catechism, "God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us ..."

And yet Jesus could easily have taught us to pray, "Protect us from temptation." Why say, "And do not lead us into temptation"? The psalms are helpful in understanding this. In the psalms, the saints constantly beg the Lord not to do things that they know He would never do: "Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild beasts; do not forget the life of your poor forever" (Psalm 74:19). "Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation" (Psalm 27:9). "Do not lead me astray from your commandments" (Psalm 119:10).

The saints pray these things because even though we know who our God is, these things seem to happen. In view of our sins we must also acknowledge we deserve to be forgotten, forsaken, and led into temptation. Yet in praying these things we come to realize that no matter how things seem, God would never treat us this way. Our Father in heaven would not take up his dear children in His arms, carry them into temptation, and dump them there!

In the Sixth Petition Jesus teaches us to laugh at such a ridiculous image, and in so doing he strengthens our faith. He turns our attention away from how things seem toward who God is. Our God is a bulwark, a fortress, a refuge. Thus we do find ourselves praying in this petition that God would guard and keep us. And we pray it in faith, knowing the truth about our Father: what he would do, and what he would never do.

Prayer for the Day: O Lord, who for our great good gave us Your holy Law, do not lead us astray from Your commandments. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, THIRD WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 11

"Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross." (Col. 2:12-14)

You are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. This passage from St. Paul clearly teaches this. First, the death of Jesus. Paul reminds us that all our trespasses are forgiven by the cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This is the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ. His blood is shed to set aside the legal demands of the Law for us – because He Himself took upon those legal demands and the punishment for our transgression of them. This He set aside – nailing it to the cross. The death of Jesus Christ our Lord accomplishes our salvation.

The punishment due for us is fully poured out upon Him. He is our substitute and by His death He fully takes on the wrath of God.

You are baptized into Christ's death. You are buried with Him. You died with Him. Your sins are gone because Jesus died for you and by baptism you are connected to Him. Faith believes this promise and receives the benefit of Christ's work according to His promises.

The resurrection of Jesus is also here. You are baptized into that as well. You are raised with Him by faith in the powerful working of God. Trusting God's work in the death and resurrection of Jesus is what we do as baptized Christians. There is comfort from this and confidence as well. It doesn't depend on our work but God's. As you are in Christ's saving death, you are also in His new resurrected life. He is called the first fruits of the dead – He rose first. We see that in our lives as we live new lives now as the Spirit makes us able. We will see that fully on the Last Day at the Resurrection of the dead, where in our risen flesh we shall see God. Baptism puts you into Christ's death. It puts you into Christ's resurrection. You are in Him. Where He is you shall be. Baptism promises that and does it.

Prayer for the Day: Almighty God, by Christ's death you have saved us from our sins. By His resurrection you have given us new life both now and forever. Help to live as Your baptized people. Amen.

THURSDAY, THIRD WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 12

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." (Acts 2:38)

You were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, according to the express words of our Lord Jesus to His apostles, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). But throughout the book of Acts, which records the first Christian baptisms carried out by these same apostles, Christians are baptized "in the name of Jesus." Some have been puzzled by this. Others have thought they've found a contradiction. Did they baptize in the name of Jesus? Or in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?

Yes.

It's the same name. The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, they have one name, because they are one God. Jesus does not say to baptize in the "names" of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in their "name." And the Christians in Acts are baptized in this same name, which is the name of Jesus. In short, Jesus is Lord. That's His name (as it is the name of the Father and the Holy Spirit). This is the Christian message, as Dr. Luther reminds us in the Large Catechism:

Jesus is Lord. He is God and man, who by His blood has won me from sin and death and hell, has saved me from the tyranny of the devil, and has asserted Himself as Lord and God in His resurrection. This is why St. Paul will say, "...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:10-11).

The Christians in the book of Acts were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, just as we were. It's no contradiction, but a beautiful confession of who Jesus is, that this can be expressed so simply with the words, "baptized in the name of Jesus."

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus, keep us faithful to the name given us in our Baptism. Amen.

FRIDAY, THIRD WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 13

The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.
(Genesis 1:2)

The office of the Holy Spirit is to give life. In the beginning, the heavens and the earth were formless and void. There was no life, no order. Over these lifeless and formless waters, the Holy Spirit brooded. The Holy Spirit brooded like a hen. As a hen sits upon her eggs that she may hatch her young, so the Scriptures say the Holy Spirit brooded as it were on the waters. The Holy Spirit brooded so that He might infuse life into these elementary substances.

The office of the Holy Spirit is to give life. He not only brooded over the waters at the dawn of creation, but the Holy Spirit was involved in giving life to the animals and especially to man. Psalm 104, the basis of Luther's meal prayer, says: "These [living creatures] all wait for You...You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth" (Psalm 104: 27, 30). The Holy Spirit gives us life at conception, maintains that life by means of food, drink, home, government, good weather, and the like.

The office of the Holy Spirit is still to give life. The Holy Spirit doesn't just give earthly life. No, in the waters of Holy Baptism, a much greater miracle than creation occurs. In the beginning, the Holy Spirit brooded over a formless, churning, and watery void. But in Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit broods over a twisted and corrupted sinner who is by nature a child of wrath and an enemy of God. And yet, the Holy Spirit lovingly gathers this churning, hateful mess of a man under His wings like a hen. And through the waters of baptism, the Holy Spirit infuses a new spiritual life into this corrupted creature and makes him new.

The Holy Spirit gives life. In the beginning, He gave form to the water. Now, the Holy Spirit uses water as His way of killing a sinner and creating a saint.

Prayer for the Day: Father, help us to remember the Holy Spirit's brooding over us in baptism. Amen.

SATURDAY, THIRD WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 14

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

Matthew 28 is where our Lord institutes Holy Baptism. Our English texts say, "Go." But Jesus does not give us a command there. In Greek, the word is a participle. It should be translated as, "Having gone."

No, the one command that Jesus gives is "make disciples." This is what the church does. The church loves her Lord and wants others to love Him too. The church, like her Lord, desires all people to be saved. This command to make disciples or learners is not just for the Jews, the physical descendants of Abraham. No, this promise is for all of the nations. The kingdom of heaven is open to all people.

How does the church make disciples? Jesus uses two participles. We will speak of only one of these participles today. The church makes disciples by "baptizing." Disciples are made by baptizing them. To baptize means to wash. When a person, regardless of age or stage of life, are washed with water and the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," are spoken, that one is baptized.

This is how we make disciples. Baptism isn't something optional or inconsequential. Baptism is necessary. Baptism is necessary because Christ commands it. But baptism is also necessary in what it does for us. No one can be a disciple or learner of Christ without the Holy Spirit. The things of God are foolishness to the natural man.

Baptism is necessary because it makes us a learner of God. In baptism, God teaches us. In baptism, God gives us ears to hear and hearts to believe. Thanks be to God, for the water included in God's command and combined with God's Word!

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus, You commanded baptism for our good. Give us lips to proclaim the excellencies of Your baptism, so that all nations might be made into Your disciples. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT - MARCH 15

He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy... (Titus 3:5-8a)

Who does the saving? God our Savior! He does the whole job, 100%. Titus 3:5 is exceptionally clear. He saved us. And God our Savior (His title in verse 4) saved us NOT because of works done by us in righteousness. Holy Baptism is not the work of the person being baptized, nor the work of the baptizing pastor.

It is clearly and without doubt the work of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Titus 3 is a baptismal text even though it does not use the typical New Testament word that gives us the word “baptism” in English. Holy Baptism regenerates. It renews. The Lord, in Holy Baptism, richly pours out the Holy Spirit upon us. We are justified by His grace. We are His heirs. We have the hope of eternal life. Do not listen to those who deny what Holy Baptism is and the Gospel gifts it gives you. Hold to this trustworthy text, Titus 3!

Prayer for the Day: O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

MONDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 16

But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:20-24)

The Small Catechism teaches that we should daily drown the Old Adam with all sins and evil desires, and daily the New Man should emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. This righteousness is Christ's, which becomes ours by grace alone through faith alone, apart from works.

Yet as those declared to be righteous for the sake of Jesus Christ, we are called to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called. We must not continue in sensuality and impurity, as though sin is irrelevant because God daily and richly forgives our sins. Instead, we are to be renewed in the spirit of our minds and put on the new self.

This new self (called the New Man in the Small Catechism) is active in concrete works of love for the neighbor: speaking the truth, resisting sinful anger, doing honest work, building up others in speech, and, above all, being kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving one another. In such good works the New Man walks—not in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

We Christians find the motivation and strength to walk in these good works in the Gospel alone. We are kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving toward others, because God in Christ was first kind and tenderhearted toward us, forgiving us. Our Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again for us; thus in Him alone we daily die to sin and rise to newness of life.

Prayer for the Day: Gracious God, give us Your Holy Spirit, that we may daily put off our old self and put on the new self, loving our neighbors as You have first loved us. Amen.

TUESDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 17

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

One of the groups in Church History that has withheld Holy Baptism from infants are the Anabaptists. The word means, “one who baptizes again.” But as the Nicene Creed, rooted in Ephesians 4, leads us to confess, “And I believe in Baptism for the remission of sins,” baptizing someone more than once makes no sense. You don’t need a second baptism. God uses the water and the Word to bless you no matter what age you are in the first and true baptism, the one baptism taught in Holy Scripture. If you were misled into a second “baptism”, repent of trusting the false teaching and embrace once again the good gift of God.

Your true baptism brings the forgiveness of sins.

In the second half of Article IX of the Lutheran Apology to the Augsburg Confession, the Reformers share a very unique argument in favor of infant baptism: God approves of it and gives the Holy Spirit to those who are baptized:

“....It is necessary to baptize little children, that the promise of salvation may be applied to them, according to Christ’s command to baptize all nations (Matt. 28:19). Just as in this passage salvation is offered to all, so Baptism is offered to all, to men, women, children, infants. It clearly follows, therefore, that infants are to be baptized, because salvation is offered with Baptism. Second, it is clear that God approves of the Baptism of little children. Therefore, the Anabaptists, who condemn the Baptism of little children, believe wickedly. God’s approval of the Baptism of little children is shown by this: He gives the Holy Spirit to those baptized [Acts 2:38–39]. For if this Baptism would be empty, the Holy Spirit would be given to no one. No one would be saved. And finally, there would be no Church. This reason, even by itself, can well enough establish good and godly minds against the godless and fanatical opinions of the Anabaptists.”

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus Christ, You called little children to Yourself that they would be blessed as part of Your kingdom. Protect us from all godless and fanatical opinions that would separate us from Your loving embrace and eternal protection. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 18

And when he saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:20-21)

"Only God can forgive sin." You've heard this sentiment expressed before. Many self-professing Christians say it. It was also the opinion of the Pharisees. When once our Lord Jesus absolved a paralytic whom he was about to heal, the Pharisees asked indignantly, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:21). That Jesus had the audacity to do this was outrageous to them.

It is true that God forgives sin, but it is equally true that it pleases God to give this authority to men. We see how our Lord Jesus made this promise to his disciples. Jesus said in Matthew 16, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

Jesus repeated this promise in Matthew 18, "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18). Finally he said to his disciples on the evening of his resurrection, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld" (John 20:22-23). Jesus' words couldn't be clearer. He has conferred the authority of binding and loosing, of forgiving and withholding forgiveness, on ordinary men.

This is how your pastor may stand before the entire Christian congregation and pronounce the absolution. Any objection to this because "only God can forgive sin" clearly contradicts the testimony of Scripture and the will of our Lord Jesus. We know today that there is nothing for the Christian to fear or find offense at in the absolution. For us it is a word which opens heaven, because behind it is the power of Jesus' resurrection.

Immature Christians may grumble about the absolution, but for us we treasure it as a gift from the hand of our Lord Jesus. When Jesus healed the paralytic, the crowd "glorified God, who had given such authority to men" (Matthew 9:8). Rather than chafe and bristle at this authority, God's people may not only embrace it, but they can marvel at it too.

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus, help us to reject false ideas not found in Your Holy Word. Thank you for the marvelous word of forgiveness. Amen.

THURSDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 19

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Psalm 32:5)

In the order of confession and absolution of the Common Service of 1888, also known as "page 15" in The Lutheran Hymnal and Divine Service 3 in Lutheran Service Book, we hear the pastor say the words of David: "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And we all respond, "And You forgave the iniquity of my sin."

"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." Verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 32 acknowledge the blessings of "absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven."

There is great comfort in absolution. Confession is done for the sake of absolution. Private Confession and Absolution should be taught and restored to practice where it has fallen into disuse. Ask your pastor for it and make a practice of using it.

"Our churches teach that private absolution should be retained in the churches, although listing all sins is not necessary for Confession. For, according to the Psalm, it is impossible. "Who can discern his errors?" (Psalm 19:12). (Augsburg Confession XI)

The last verses of Psalm 32, 10 and 11, reflect on the contrast between the wicked and the one who trusts in the Lord. Holding sins back from Christ leads only to sorrow. There is great joy in an absolved, clear, comforted conscience!

"Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"

Prayer for the Day: Almighty God, grant that we who deserve to be afflicted for our evil deeds may mercifully be relieved by the comfort of Your grace; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

FRIDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 20

Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:47-50)

To paraphrase, Jesus said, “The forgiveness of sins means something to one who has sins.”

“Peace + be with you” is what the newly baptized hear after they have received the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. “Depart + in peace” is the blessing you hear as you depart the Lord’s Table, having received the Body and Blood of your Lord for the forgiveness of your sins. At Divine Service, and a funeral, we sing or say “Lord, now You let Your servant go in peace...” “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and + give you peace.” “Peace” is the final word you hear proclaimed by the Lord’s servant before the final hymn.

When we are regarded according to our sinfulness, Christians are not better than non-Christians. That mindset would only make us hypocrites. We tend to think of some sins as greater than others. In this world, there may be fewer consequences for some sins rather than others, and before God there are also distinctions of sins. Even one single sin however is enough to deserve eternal punishment. The real difference between believers and non-believers is that we have faith in Christ, are forgiven by Him, and have been given the Holy Spirit. The forgiveness of sins means something to one who has sins. Forgiveness means peace with God in Christ.

Prayer for the Day: O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, give to us, Your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments and also that we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

SATURDAY, FOURTH WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 21

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

-Psalm 51:12-13

Christians should be taught to confess. In previous generations, a common practice was for members of a Lutheran congregation to meet with the pastor on a Saturday before partaking in Holy Communion on Sunday. Sadly, knowledge of this practice is often limited to the memories of the congregation's most elderly members.

We confess in prayer. Jesus teaches us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We confess to each other. James 5:16 reminds us to confess our sins to one another. We confess as a congregation. A common confession of sin is most familiar to us now at the beginning of Divine Service. Corporate Confession is not uncommon on Ash Wednesday.

In Augsburg Confession article XXV we hear, "Confession in the churches is not abolished among us. The body of the Lord is not usually given to those who have not been examined [1 Corinthians 11:27-28] and absolved. The people are very carefully taught about faith in the absolution. Before, there was profound silence about faith. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution as being God's voice and pronounced by God's command. The Power of the Keys [Matthew 16:19] is set forth in its beauty. They are reminded what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences and that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from heaven [e.g., John 12:28-30]. They are taught that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins."

Christians need to be taught to confess. It's not something that sinners, enemies of God, those dead in their trespasses and sins know how to do—or want to do. Those who have had the joy of salvation restored to them will teach other transgressors the Lord's ways and repentant sinners will seek the forgiveness of Christ.

Prayer for the Day: Almighty God, according to Your great mercy in Christ, forgive us our sins, grant power to become Your children, bestow upon us the Holy Spirit, and bring this good work of Yours in us to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT - MARCH 22

Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. (Psalm 19:12)

Article XI of the Augsburg Confession states, "Our churches teach that Private Absolution should be retained in the churches, although listing sins is not necessary for Confession. For, according to the Psalm, it is impossible. "Who can discern his errors?"" (Psalm 19:12).

It was a major reform in Luther's day. Absolution was not dependent on enumerating sins, that is listing them all. For us the words of Psalm 19 are most instructive. The corruption of our sinful nature runs so deep, we could not enumerate every sin if we tried.

For this reason, the Evangelical Lutheran Church retain the General Absolution, which our pastors routinely speak in our Divine Services today. Jesus himself pronounced general absolutions routinely, which were not preceded by enumeration of sins. We "stand in grace" as St. Paul makes clear in Romans 5. This is true whether we enumerate our sins or not.

But naming specific sins in confession is nothing to be despised. We think of the Old Testament Day of Atonement, and we know that Aaron confessed the specific sins of the people over the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:21). When people came to John the Baptist to receive his baptism, they came "confessing their sins" (Matthew 3:6). There was nothing vague about what they were doing. The people confessed real sins as John applied a real baptism for their forgiveness.

The same is true for us today. Sin isn't just an idea. We commit specific sins which are visible for the eye to see, and they hurt the conscience in specific ways. It is only fitting that we should also receive a specific word of forgiveness for the specific sins which we commit. When we think about surgery, the surgeon cuts into the body at a specific place. He goes where the ailment needs treatment. In the same way, confessing specific sins cuts to the very place where the conscience needs healing.

Naming sins in confession is an awesome spiritual exercise. In it we learn to humble ourselves and receive the most personally tailored care which Jesus has to offer. Sometimes these sins trouble us deeply, but it is good to learn to confess “smaller” sins too. Confession is not meant to be an occasional experience, but a practice which we grow into and learn to appreciate.

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus, thank You for the forgiveness of sins. Help us by Your Spirit to confess them in general and to grow in confessing them specifically that we may hear Your Word of forgiveness specifically as well. Amen.

MONDAY, FIFTH WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 23

Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" ...David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die." 2 Samuel 12:7a, 13

After David had sinned by taking to himself Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, the Lord sent a preacher to him named Nathan. And Nathan the preacher did what no other king or army or even giant could do: he brought David to his knees. And the weapon he used to do this was not a sword or spear but the Word of God alone—in particular, the stinging condemnation of God's Law. By this Word of God, the great King David was brought to true contrition for his sins against the Lord.

But contrition alone is not enough. Repentance, properly speaking, is more than feeling guilty because of your sin. It has two parts: sorrow over sin and faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, in true and godly repentance David did not despair despite the greatness of his sins; he also believed in his gracious and merciful Lord and trusted Him for forgiveness of all this trespasses. And this faith was not put to shame. When David confessed to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord," Nathan absolved David, saying, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die."

God has also sent pastors to us poor sinners, pastors who are sent by Him to rebuke us for our sins by the Law and to comfort us with Jesus' death and resurrection by the Gospel. It is true: the Law must do its harsh work of revealing the guilt of our sins. But when we know and feel sin's guilt in our hearts, we should not be afraid to go and confess our sins to that man whom God has given for the express purpose of proclaiming God's Word, forgiving our sins by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, and trusting that the forgiveness he speaks in Christ's place is none other than God's forgiveness.

Prayer for the Day: Almighty Father, thank You for the gift of pastors, who pronounce forgiveness upon us in order to fulfill Your will. Amen.

TUESDAY, FIFTH WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 24

Confess your sins to one another. (James 5:16)

As Christians, we confess our sins directly to God (Ephesians 2:18; 1 John 1:9). Even more, God has ordained pastors to hear our confession of sins and speak God's Word of forgiveness to us directly (John 20:23). In addition to this, God has added a third way: He has instructed us to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16). He does this because He has also given us the authority to forgive one another: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Again, Jesus teaches this in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Matthew 6:12). God wants us to be reconciled to one another; both the one against whom we've sinned against and the one who has sinned against us (Matthew 18:15). So, there is no place for simply sitting back and waiting for the other person to come to you. God places the responsibility of reconciliation on both Christians—the one who sinned and the one who was sinned against! He turns them to one another in repentance and forgiveness.

We do very well at remembering who has sinned against us. But we do an awful job at remembering how and against whom we've sinned against. You won't remember all you've done wrong (Psalm 19:12). That fact doesn't mean you shouldn't try. Begin with Dr. Luther's advice and consider your place in life: Husbands, have you loved your wife as Christ loved the church? Wives, have you submitted to your husband in all things? Fathers, have you proved your children to anger? Children, have you honored your father and mother? Christians, have you been patient and kind-hearted to each other? Confess your sins to one another and forgive one another as God forgave you.

Prayer for the Day: Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FIFTH WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 25

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

The Christians who were converted by the preaching of Peter and baptized at Pentecost devoted themselves to the things of the Church. This devotion is not just some weak will, but true steadfast devotion and dedication to the things of God.

The Apostles' teaching is doctrine. This is what the Apostles taught – what Jesus taught them (Matthew 28:20). Christians are devoted to the doctrine handed down from Christ to the Apostles. That includes the doctrine around the Lord's Supper. This is what we confess when we confess our faith in the "apostolic church" in the Nicene Creed. The "fellowship" is another word that is often used with the congregation gathering together, being knit together by the Holy Spirit as the Body of Christ. This being knit together is made most manifest in the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is our highest display of unity as Christians. This ties into the very next thing, the breaking of the bread, which as it turns out is the Holy Spirit through Luke's phrase for the Lord's Supper. Christians are devoted to each other and to the Supper of our Lord, which confesses our unity, knits us together, increases our faith in Jesus, and grows our love for each other as well.

Finally, the Christians devoted themselves to the prayers. This is a formal set of prayer often associated with the public worship of the Church. Gathered together (fellowship) to hear the Word (to be taught doctrine) and receive the supper (breaking of the bread), the Christians prayed in public worship (prayer of the Church).

We devote ourselves to things that are important. The Scriptures give us this example.

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus, by Your Holy Spirit make us devoted to Your teaching, the doctrine of the blessed Scriptures, to our congregations, to Your Supper, and to public worship and prayer. Amen.

THURSDAY, FIFTH WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 26

"And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10)

The whole question of the benefit of the Sacrament of the Altar is answered clearly in a few words: forgiveness, life, and salvation. Luther's Catechism makes this point very clear and without compromise. And nor should we. Much depends on holding fast to these truths about the Supper. Otherwise, the devil may tempt you to despise God's gifts, to steer you away from where God has said true life can be found and deceive you with so many other petty lies.

It would be as though the devil himself would lead you to find the Supper as a trifling thing because it is such a meager feast, how can God ever make such a simple bread and a modest wine ever something so special? That is why we must answer that in this Supper we have the testimony that there is no other sacrifice for our sins than the death of our savior Jesus Christ! In the Supper we have the forgiveness of sins that Christ had purchased for us through the payment of His body and blood. Now, we are given that redemption in bread and wine, body and blood.

We believe that this wonderful Supper was given to us so that we can use the Sacrament to remember all these benefits of forgiveness, life, and salvation which we receive through only Jesus Christ. To partake in the Supper is to receive Christ's sacrificial passion and death and to remember His benefits given to us.

Prayer for the Day: Gracious Father, preserve us by Your Holy Spirit in the faith that ever looks to Jesus Christ as the giver of forgiveness, life, and salvation in the Holy Supper. Keep us in this one true faith and kindle in us zeal for the benefits that Christ gives. Amen.

FRIDAY, FIFTH WEEK IN LENT - MARCH 27

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26)

If you don't take the medicine, it won't help you. You can fill the prescription but if you never take it, it won't help.

Likewise, you can hear the words of Jesus, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins...but if you don't believe them or do what they say, they're of no benefit to you.

Nobody likes to be told that they need help. Deny it all you want but you'll still be stuck on the roof until someone comes to help and hold the ladder. Deny it all you want but you'll still be stuck in the quagmire of sin and floundering away cursing into the wind.

You need help.

The word of Jesus and the eating and drinking are the main thing in the Sacrament. Jesus helps us through our hearing the Words, believing them, and then eating and drinking in the Sacrament. To eat and drink without faith in His Words is to drink judgment upon yourself. The Sacrament is meant to be a help for us because we need it.

You need help. Hear the words of Jesus, your great physician, believe them, and eat and drink the medicine He offers. The Augsburg Confession states: "Therefore, the Mass is to be used for administering the Sacrament to those that need consolation. [St.] Ambrose says, 'Because I always sin, I always need to take the medicine'" (AC XXIV:33).

And what help do you receive from eating His body and drinking His blood? Exactly what He says: forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness isn't some visceral or instinctive feeling that is left to the imagination. Jesus makes forgiveness something bodily, tangible, and external from you. Like a sinus infection is treated with medicine, something physical brings healing. Jesus gives you far greater, His body and blood for you to eat and drink given and shed for you. You hear that word and promise and believe it. You take the bread and eat it. You take the cup and drink it. You proclaim His death until He comes.

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus, help us, have mercy on us, and save us poor sinners. Amen.

SATURDAY, FIFTH WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 28

"So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." (John 6:53-56)

The Small Catechism teaches that bodily eating and drinking Jesus' Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper is the main thing in the Sacrament, along with the words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus commanded that we orally eat and drink the real bread and wine that He declares to be His true body and blood.

But this bodily eating is not the only kind of eating, and it alone does not make us worthy to receive the Sacrament rightly. In fact, without the other kind of eating, the Lord's Supper is not only not helpful, but is even harmful to us, as the Scripture testifies (1 Corinthians 11:27).

In order to eat and drink the Sacrament bodily for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, and not for judgment, one must also eat and drink Christ's flesh and blood spiritually, as Jesus told the Jews in John 6. This is nothing other than faith, which Jesus commanded when He said, "This do in remembrance of Me." When we believe the Word of the Lord, that His body and blood are truly given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins, and then in faith eat the bread that is His Body and drink the wine that is His Blood, then we can be certain that our sins are surely forgiven us and that we will live with Christ forever.

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus, Your Word is truth. Grant that we always might partake of Your holy Body and precious Blood spiritually through faith and bodily in the Lord's Supper. Amen.

PALM SUNDAY - MARCH 29

"They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"" (Matthew 21:7-9)

The book of 1 Kings begins with Adonijah presuming to be aged King David's successor. Nathan the prophet speaks to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon about the matter. They address David himself. By verse 32 in the first chapter, we hear: King David said, "Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada." So they came before the king. And the king said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel.

David established Solomon as king by having Solomon ride on David's own mule. The priest and prophet are there alongside the new king. In Matthew 21, Jesus Christ, our prophet, priest, and king, is recognized as the royal son of David.

The royal banners forward go;
The cross shows forth redemption's flow,
Where He, by whom our flesh was made,
Our ransom in His flesh has paid. (LSB 455:1)

The cross is Christ's throne where He is declared King of the Jews. There, fulfilling prophecy, Jesus shed His blood for you, "Himself the victim and Himself the priest" (LSB 637:1).

Prayer for the Day: Almighty and everlasting God, in Your tender love towards humanity You sent Your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take on Himself our flesh and to suffer death on the cross. Grant that we may follow the example of His patience and humility, and also be made partakers of His resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK - MARCH 30

"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." (John 10:9)

Lutherans teach the real, bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. But there are many Christians out there who still do not believe this. You may know some. And maybe you yourself struggle with Jesus' bodily presence. Maybe, you think to yourself, Jesus is simply using "is" as "represents." I mean, look at John 10. Jesus isn't really a door, right? So, maybe when Jesus says, "This is my body," He is saying this represents my body.

But this thinking falls flat. Let us take John 10:9. When Jesus says, "I am the Door," He is not saying that He signifies or represents a door. No, Jesus is really the Door. He is perhaps not a "regular" door, but He is the true, spiritual Door by which men enter into the kingdom of heaven. His words, "If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture," explain Jesus' meaning. Here, Jesus makes the word "Door" into a new word. He fills it with new, spiritual meaning.

Is means Is. Even where figurative language is used, is still means is. Otherwise, the Bible misspeaks when it says that Christ is the Lamb of God. If "is" means "represents," then Christ represents the Lamb of God and is less than the Lamb of God because He is merely a sign. How foolish! No, "Lamb" here is a new word. Christ really is the Lamb, the true and real sacrifice which is pleasing to God, who surpasses the paschal lamb.

If this is true of pictorial language, how truer it is for the Lord's Supper. There, Jesus is very clear. There's no, "The kingdom of heaven is like...." Jesus says that this bread is His body and that this cup is His blood. Don't be fooled. Much more, don't be one of those who say: "It depends on the meaning of 'is'." No, a seven-year-old child can tell you what "is" means.

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus, thank You for the confidence that "is" really means "is" in the Lord's Supper. Amen.

TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK - MARCH 31

"And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you..." (Matthew 26:27)

We read in the Words of Institution from Matthew's Gospel, "And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them saying, 'Drink of it, all of you.'" These are some of the clearest words in all the Scriptures. When Jesus established His Supper, He took a cup and instructed His disciples to drink from it. He wanted them to share. Not only did Jesus intend to give us communion with Himself in this Supper, but this is another example of how Jesus wants us to have communion with one another. The sharing of the one cup directly addresses the depth of our unity in Christ.

Sharing the cup is a good thing. It is how Jesus instituted this Supper. Luther said in his Large Catechism, "We must never think of the Sacrament as something harmful from which we had better flee, but as a pure, wholesome, comforting remedy that grants salvation and comfort...Why, then, do we act as if the Sacrament were a poison, the eating of which would bring death?" (LC V, 68).

Luther's words are instructive to us all. When we remember that this Supper is Jesus' gift, in no way can it be harmful to us. As God's people who have been united in His own family, why should we be afraid of one another?! When we come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, we should not lose sight of the celebration which is taking place. As we go to the altar repenting of our sin and seeking forgiveness, we also are participating in great celebration and joy with our fellow believers. There is no room for fear, and so sharing the cup is something we can do joyfully.

One cup isn't just a symbol of the unity we have in Christ. It helps establish unity as together we receive His forgiveness, celebrate His redemption for us, and go back into this world in peace and harmony with one another.

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus, grant us to receive Your blood faithfully alongside our fellow members in the joyous feast of Your Supper. Amen.

WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK - APRIL 1

"For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:27-30)

Jesus' words in Luke 22:30 anticipate His institution of the Sacrament of the Altar by prophesying about the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His kingdom that has no end.

Jesus serves us from the cross:

See, from His head, His hands, His feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown? (LSB 425/6: 3)

Jesus serves us in the Sacrament of the Altar. He gives us His own Body to eat along with "The bread that we break" and His own Blood to drink from "the cup of blessing that we bless" (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Jesus is among us as the One who serves. He is the Host and He is Himself the Meal.

Prayer for the Day: Almighty God, we are continually afflicted by our evil deeds. Free us by the Passion of Your only Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

MAUNDY THURSDAY - APRIL 2

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

Today is called Maundy Thursday. The word “maundy” comes from the Latin word mandatum, which means “commandment.” On this Thursday before His death, Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment.

At first glance this commandment may seem no different from the Second Table of the Law. The Second Table is summarized, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But now instead of “as yourself,” Jesus says, “as I have loved you.” His love for us not only causes a slight shift in wording. His love for us leads to a completely “new commandment,” as Jesus says. This new commandment is not a summary of the Law, but the fruit of the Gospel. It is new because it is based on Jesus’ sacrificial death. Jesus explains in John 15:12-13, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

Notice that Jesus does not present this new commandment as something we do in order to earn something with Him. He presents this new commandment as something He does, and therefore we do too. John highlights this in 1 John 4:10-11, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

It is significant that Jesus gave this new commandment when He instituted the Lord’s Supper. In the Lord’s Supper Jesus gives us His love. First, He shows it to us by forgiving our sins, and second, He imparts it to us to show to others. Thus, after we receive the Sacrament, we give thanks to Jesus “for this salutary gift,” and we ask that he would strengthen us through this same gift “in fervent love toward one another.”

Prayer for the Day: Dear Jesus, give us Your love, that we might love one another. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY - APRIL 3

And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” (Acts 5:32)

Throughout their writings the Apostles emphasize that they were eyewitnesses of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. Indeed, it was for this purpose that Christ called the apostles, that they should see and hear all that He did and go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel. Their testimony has gone forth into the world in the Word they wrote, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it has come to you. You believe because the Apostles wrote what they saw in order that you may believe.

In the same way, to pray the Lord’s Prayer is to participate in the witness of the first disciples, who were taught by the Lord to call God their Father. You now have a gracious Heavenly Father, who delights in you. As you pray, remember the good gifts God gives, especially the Holy Spirit.

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus, may the Gospel of Your crucifixion be preached throughout the world for the forgiveness of sins. Amen

HOLY SATURDAY - APRIL 4

"When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb." (Matthew 27:57-61)

On this day, Jesus kept the Sabbath rest and extended His time in the tomb to fulfill His words that He would rise on the third day. It was necessary that Jesus remain in the grave on Saturday. But if baptism has joined us to Jesus' death and resurrection, what does this day mean for us in terms of our baptism?

This day shows us the death of our corrupt flesh. The Old Adam is crucified even now by virtue of being tied to Jesus' death through baptism. But he struggles and resists and fights for dear life, as we experience daily. When our earthly life ends, being joined to Jesus' death is fulfilled, and the sinful nature dies forever, never to rise again.

When we die, our body is laid in the earth while our spirit departs to be with Christ. Since being joined to Jesus in baptism also means being joined to His resurrection, we have confidence that we will be raised with glorified bodies just as He was. Indeed, we will be raised with the very bodies we have right now, except that they will be sinless and perfect. The corruption of sin will be gone.

But we'll hear more about the resurrection tomorrow. For today, let us delight in the fact that baptism will bring about the full and complete death of the sinful nature. When that happens, the struggle of Spirit against flesh will be over, we will have the victory in Christ, and we can rest from our labors.

Prayer for the Day: Dear Jesus, drown our sinful nature, purge our corruption and give us confidence to rest in you. Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY - APRIL 5

And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." Mark 16:6-7

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Today we gather with our brothers and sisters in the faith, that is our closest family as eternity sees it, to rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus. Today we will also likely feast on sumptuous food and break the Lenten fast. Today is a great day for all Christians.

The angel says "just as He told you." Jesus said so, so He will make sure it happens just as He said. This is the same as when our Lord tells us anything in His Word, especially today as we hear of His resurrection (He said it would happen and it did). So also the Lord's words "This is my Body" and so forth in the Sacrament are words that come true, just as He says. As we believe that Jesus has been raised from the dead, we also grasp by faith that our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, really is present in His Body and Blood in, with, and under the bread and wine of the Supper.

How? He said so. By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made. By the Word of the Lord the Sacrament of the Altar is exactly what Jesus says. So much of our faith is simply hearing what Jesus says, believing it, and confessing it. At the Transfiguration the Father's voice called from heaven with the command "Listen to Him". Now the angels say "just as He told you." Blessed are those who can simply say "amen" to our Lord's words. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Prayer for the Day: Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks for earning our forgiveness, being raised from the dead to confirm Your victory, and for allowing simple words to be the reason we have the Sacrament of the Altar which delivers that forgiveness to us. May we always believe Your word of promise. Amen.