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**ROGATE—TRINITY
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FOR THE PROPERS FOR ROGATE

THE HOLY GOSPEL St. John 16:23–30 (NKJV)

“Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”

His disciples said to Him, “See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.”

The COLLECT

O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

SATURDAY, JUNE 1: JOHN 9:24–41 FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

The presumptuous Pharisees have no doubt that they’ve got the mind of God all figured out; disagree with them, and they simply damn you: “They answered and said to him, ‘You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?’ And they cast him out.” This is what Pharisees do when you point out to them that their teachings have no basis in Scripture: they make up their own doctrines, and condemn those given by the Lord, and judge men according to the teachings of their own creation. Their false doctrine was a self-inflicted blindness to the truth.

Being marked and avoided by Pharisaical false teachers is no cause for fear; those who oppose Christ’s doctrine in every generation will seek to drive out those who teach the truth. But the Lord does not leave nor forsake those who believe, and we are comforted as we see the way in which Jesus speaks consolation to His saints: “Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.’ Then he said, ‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him. And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.’” Our eyes have been opened to His saving Light manifested in His Word, and though we have not beheld Him with the eyes of the flesh, we behold Him and believe.

It is not uncommon to find people trying to press their own agenda onto God. This is what was at work when the disciples tried to get Jesus to choose between two false alternatives: “Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” The man had been born blind; the disciples reasoned that if God had blinded him in punishment for sin, it must either have been because of his parents’ sin, or because the Lord was punishing him in advance for a sin which he would later commit. The disciples gather around Jesus with the mentality of Job’s friends: ‘Something bad has happened; let’s figure out who is to blame.’

But *no one* was to blame; just as in the case of Job, the man’s affliction served to the glory of the Lord. “Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’”

All mankind—apart from the Christ—is born in sin and deserve death and condemnation; therefore, no suffering is inherently “unfair.” But, contrary to the suspicions of guilty consciences, not every case of suffering is on account of a particular sin. *All* suffering is a call for repentance, and all suffering is an occasion for us to rejoice in the mercy of the Lord, who has atoned for all sin, and who, in His mercy, calls us through His Word to faith in the Light of the world.

We are loved by God, but we are also poor, miserable sinners. It is not a matter of “one or the other,” even though that is what Satan constantly preaches at us. God loves us in spite of our sins; He wants us to know the truth of His Law and the reality of His forgiveness.

The immoral mouthpieces of this evil age babble about how love is tolerant and accepting, even if that which is tolerated is damaging to the individuals and society involved. These false prophets ignore the idea that God seeks our good when He gives us holy commands and correction, rather than permitting our wicked indulgence. But the Satanic anti-gospel says, “Do what you want! God loves you anyway!”

God desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). But the truth means there is an important difference between being embraced by Him and wallowing in, and eating, the impure things of the godless. Our Heavenly Father rushes to meet us in Jesus Christ, but we must first be made to realize by the blessings of His Law and His Spirit that our sins are truly a filthy, deadly situation. Once we are brought to humble repentance for squandering God’s blessing for us and killing ourselves with our sins, then there is much rejoicing in Heaven. And our Father declares that we are alive, and restored to our place as sons and daughters of His Kingdom by our redemption in Christ Jesus!

TUESDAY, MAY 7: ST. LUKE 16:1-18

ROGATE

Our life in Jesus Christ is the most precious thing we have, but we often treat it as an afterthought. It is no small thing that God became man and was executed as a criminal to atone for our sins. Yet the amount of resources we waste on things that distract us from, rather than help us focus on, God's holy Word is frightening.

Every blessing we have in this life should point us toward the Gospel of Christ crucified, not replace it. Dr. Luther's Small Catechism teaches us that our Father gives us "clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and homestead, wife and children, fields, cattle" and all our goods (from the meaning of the first article of the Creed). Our dress should reflect the chastity, and dignity, that we have as sons and daughters of our holy God. Our daily bread should remind us of the Bread of Life that is given to us in Jesus for our salvation. Our homes should remind us of the life of the world to come, where we will abide in the glory of our Lord forever. Our families should remind us of the Church, the Bride and Body of Christ. And our vocations, and all our goods, should serve for the benefit of others, for whom Jesus also shed His precious Blood.

The point of Jesus' parable is that, if a crooked steward can use such things to make his earthly life better, how much more should we who are made righteous in Christ be able to use temporal things to benefit the spiritual life of ourselves and those around us!

THURSDAY, MAY 30: JOHN 8:39-59 FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

As we read yesterday, spiritually-speaking, those who boasted of their physical descent from Abraham were 'born of Hagar'; they were in no position to be throwing around slanderous accusations such as, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God." Their sneering dismissal of the virgin birth demonstrates that their hearts were far from the Lord, and they rejected the promise of such a birth which had been proclaimed since the Garden of Eden.

But Jesus tells them that *they* were the offspring of such spiritual fornication, because although they *ought* to have been of the faith of Abraham, a different parentage was at work in them: "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

There is no 'middle ground' and no 'neutrality'; one is either a child of the Triune God by faith, or a child of the devil through unbelief. God in flesh says to them: "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM," and their response demonstrates their parentage: "Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by." Thus they did the works of their father—proving Jesus' word concerning them. Thanks be to God that Jesus perfectly fulfilled His Father's will for us!

The words of Jesus dispel all of the nonsense which is common these days regarding ‘Israel.’ The first century Jews were quick to claim they had a privileged position based on their physical descent from Abraham: “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free?’” But they were *not* free—they were slaves of sin, and Jesus had already told them: “You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”

They did not believe in the Christ, therefore they were not of the faith of Abraham; they are not “of Isaac,” but “of Ishmael”—spiritually-speaking. St. Paul wrote to the Galatians that those Jews who did not believe in the Christ were not of the heavenly Jerusalem: “For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the [a] two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.” (Gal. 4:22–26)

Jesus declared to those proud physical descendants of Abraham: “And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” Freedom was not to be found in the flesh, but in the faith, of Abraham.

Today’s reading illustrates the fact that the outward situation of a person is not always the same as his spiritual condition. Lazarus seemed to be without any blessing from God, whereas the rich man seemed quite well off. But Lazarus had faith in the promises of the Lord, and the rich man had, at best, a superficial regard for his own identity as a son of faithful Abraham.

The power and importance of faith in the Word of God is also illustrated. It could only be by the grace of God in the power of His Holy Spirit that a man in such a pathetic state as Lazarus could keep the faith. Continuing to fear, love and trust in God throughout such suffering and destitution is unthinkable to human will. In contrast, the faithlessness of the rich man and his brothers is so thorough that miracles would not help their unbelief. It is a wonder to think that one could be raised from the dead and sent to preach the Gospel to someone, and that person would still ignore the message!

Jesus was giving the Jews, and all who would ignore His Words, a crucial warning. Christ Himself would be that One Who is raised from the dead to preach the Word of holy prophecies fulfilled, yet the obstinate pride and self-worship of the faithless can ignore even the resurrected Son of God.

May God keep us steadfast in His Word and the one true faith in Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Lord, from whom all true blessings and comfort come. Amen.

“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’” If our Lord would have us say this after we have been obedient, how much more humble we should be when we act unfaithfully!

Much of what our Lord commands us is simply to be humble. He wants us to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things (see Dr. Luther’s Small Catechism). He wants us to understand that He is a powerful and righteous God, Who made the world and has the right to judge it. But He is also a kind and merciful God, Who loves the world enough to lay down His life for us all in Jesus Christ. And He wants us to understand that He alone is God, and all things are properly ordered according to His holy wisdom and power.

Jesus gives example of this with the Samaritan leper who was cleansed. This man did not achieve some great work about which he could boast. He was healed by the work of Jesus, and he simply had the faithful good sense to praise God and thank Christ for this miracle.

We are not made well by the outward accomplishments of men and institutions. We cannot boast of being faithful or profitable to God’s kingdom because of such things either. Our health and our worth are found in the faithfulness that He creates in us, through the Word of Christ Jesus and the power of His Holy Spirit! Let us always remember that and glorify God!

The Pharisees were hardly scrupulous when it came to witnesses in matters of life and death when lies or misdirection served their purposes. They sought out the testimony of false witnesses when Jesus was accused before the Sanhedrin: “Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council *sought false testimony* against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, ‘This fellow said, “I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.”’” (Mat. 26:59–61) It is bad enough to be the victim of a lie—it is even worse to seek out lies.

As we heard in yesterday’s reading, the Jews had little interest in learning the truth about Jesus; there were many people who were quite content with lies or their own misconceptions. People have not changed. They would still rather listen to their own imaginations than listen to the Word of God.

The Pharisees hypocritically challenge Jesus’ words: “You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.” But Jesus answer testifies that the Father bears witness to His Word: “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. . . . It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.” Thus the Father’s testimony was heard on the day of Jesus’ baptism. And St. John affirms that the Holy Trinity bear witness concerning our hope of salvation in Christ: “For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.” (1 John 5:7)

Confusion reigned among the multitude and the Pharisees because they did not believe that which was proclaimed to them—hearing, they did not understand—and their ignorance led to division: “But some said, ‘Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?’ So there was a division among the people because of Him.” Their ignorance led them into error—they imagined they knew more about Jesus than they actually did. Even the smug Pharisees revealed their ignorance: “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.”

They heard Jesus speak of His coming Ascension and “Then the Jews said among themselves, ‘Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?’”

In a sense, the answer is “Yes”: the Lord’s apostles would bring His Word to the Dispersion (the Jews living in Gentile lands) and to the Greeks. Jesus sent forth His apostles to act in His stead; thus, In Acts 1, St. Luke speaks his Gospel having been an “account... of all that Jesus began both to do and teach” and records the Lord’s words to His apostles just prior to His Ascension: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” We are blessed to hear the apostolic doctrine proclaimed to us, and hearing, we believe.

“Remember Lot’s wife.” This is good advice for the many people today who ignore God’s teachings and place their own desires in life above faithfulness to the Word. Jesus says, “Beware the leaven of the Pharisees...” (Luke 12:1), yet many Christians are unwilling to flee the corruption of false teachers and hypocrites in their fellowship who pervert God’s Words and antagonize those who proclaim the truth. They make excuses as though God has no knowledge or concern for their temporal needs. But Christ assures us, “Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.”

The faith that our Lord blesses us with is the most valuable thing any of us can possess. But if we neglect that faith, or let it be poisoned and choked with the cares, wealth, or pleasures of this life (see St. Luke 8), then we are in grievous danger of losing that faith, and our life with it.

We are called to gather together around the Body of Christ crucified, not around the conveniences that fill buildings and institutions. Sometimes that Body is found in unlikely places, like on the cross of a criminal, surrounded by soldiers of a pagan government (some commentators suggest that the “eagles” gathered around a corpse in Jesus’ preaching is a reference to the Roman soldiers who would tend to His crucifixion). Our Lord gave up His life in order to preserve ours eternally; nothing in our temporal life can be so important that we should compromise this tremendous gift of salvation that He has given us.

Today's reading offers more illustrations of the connection between faith and humility. If a godless judge can help a widow due to exasperation with her pleas, will not our benevolent Father in Heaven help us even more, while the Scriptures teach us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17)? We need to pray constantly because we are in constant need of our Lord's help!

The prayers of the Pharisee and the tax collector is also a familiar story. The Pharisee offers up an impressive list of virtues that could be considered obedience to God's Law. But true obedience to God's commands serves to glorify God, not exalt the one doing them. This Pharisee considers himself a very profitable servant. Whereas, the tax collector resembles the babies who were brought to Jesus: without accomplishments, dependent, crawling, and crying.

These lessons are especially important when we consider the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Satan would have us believe that Holy Baptism properly belongs to those such as the Pharisee, who think they can stand before God and His congregation, and declare how faithful they are. But Jesus tells us that one does not enter the Kingdom of God as a braggart. Instead, we are brought to the Church by God Himself, working through His Word, His Spirit, and the members of His holy flock. Then we are blessed with the free gift of grace and faith that make us able to stand forgiven and justified in Christ Jesus.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Trinity Sunday

ARTICLE I.

Our Churches, with common consent, do teach, that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet that there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are co-eternal, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. And the term "person" they use as the fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

They condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article, as the Manichaeans who assumed two principles [gods], one Good, the other Evil; also the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all such. They condemn also the Samosatenes, old and new, who contending that there is but one Person, sophistically and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Ghost are not distinct Persons, but that "Word" signifies a spoken word, and "Spirit" [Ghost] signifies motion created in things.

—The Augsburg Confession

The selections from the Book of Concord for the Sundays of the Church Year are from H. E. Jacobs' translation of the Book of Concord, and are taken from the table of suggested lessons for Sundays and Festivals of the Church. (The table of appropriate lessons was originally found in Pipping's Christliches Concordienbuch [Leipzig, 1734].)

FOR THE PROPER FOR TRINITY

THE GOSPEL

ST. JOHN 3:1-15 (NKJV)

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

THE COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, who has given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, we beseech Thee that Thou would keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities; who lives and reigns, ever one God, world without end.

FOR THE PROPER FOR EXAUDI

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 15:26–16:4 (NKJV)

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

“These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.”

THE COLLECT

Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, every one God, world without end.

When the blind man calls Jesus the “Son of David,” it lets us know that he believes that Jesus is the promised Messiah. God had promised that one of David’s sons would sit on his throne forever. Our Jesus is that Davidic King. Oh, how our God loves for us to cry to Him for mercy. When others are telling the blind man to be quiet and not to disturb the parade, Jesus stops and asks that the man be brought to Him. Jesus wants to answer the blind man’s call for mercy. Jesus asks him what he wants so that he can bear witness to the crowd of his belief in Jesus’ power as the Son of God.

Zacchaeus is also a man who had come to believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah. However, he doesn’t think that Jesus would receive him. Those who complained about Jesus going to Zacchaeus’ house think that Jesus should not give out forgiveness freely to repentant sinners. They think forgiveness should be earned first. They don’t understand that the fruits of faith are not payments, but sacrifices of thanksgiving. Once the law has produced contrition, the good news of forgiveness is applied to create and strengthen faith. Out of thankfulness, the fruits of faith (returning stolen goods, etc.) will necessarily follow absolution.

“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Even the crucified and resurrected Christ chooses to be revealed in the words of Scripture. As Christ teaches the Emmaus disciples, all Scripture is about Christ’s person and work in one way or another. Far from being old Sunday School stories or irrelevant ramblings and genealogies, every page of Holy Scripture speaks to us of Christ’s salvation. Genesis to Malachi reveals Christ to sinners for the sake of their salvation. Christ could have just said to the Emmaus disciples, “Hey guys, it’s me!” and then shown with the same glory with which He shown at His transfiguration. But the Lord does not want to reveal Himself to sinners in such a way.

In this age of the world Christ wants to be revealed in the Scriptures, and especially through the preaching of the Word. The Emmaus disciples are similar to the Ethiopian eunuch in this regard. Both possess the Scriptures and both need someone to interpret, that is, to preach the Scriptures into their ears and hearts. When the pure doctrine of Christ is preached from the Scriptures, that Word is implanted into our hearts, causing faith to sprout. Faith then grows as we continue to hear the Word of God preached. This is why it is important to belong to a church which speaks the apostolic doctrine (Acts 2:42) in all its parts, as a whole. So that you can weekly hear of Christ from the Scriptures, and by that preaching have your faith established, fortified, and sustained.

“Into Your hands I commit My spirit.” Christ speaks the words of the prophet David in Psalm 31:5. These words are words of faith for Christ believes that His heavenly Father will raise Him from the death He now enters. These words are trust and confidence in the Lord’s salvation in the midst of great despair and suffering. David’s words continue in the Psalm, “You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. I have hated those who regard useless idols; But I trust in the Lord.” Christ knows no other place to put His trust in His suffering than His heavenly Father.

Since these words are Christ’s they are given to Christ’s Church as well, since we share His fate. As we find ourselves suffering for the sake of the Gospel and languishing for the sake of the truth, we are not to seek vengeance upon our naysayers, for vengeance belongs to the Lord. When we see false Christians and the false church attack the truth of the apostolic doctrine in their teaching and living we are not to mourn over our wretched state. We are to commit our spirits, indeed all that we have, unto the Lord. Just as He delivered our Lord Jesus Christ from suffering and death, so will the Church be delivered from her great enemies. As members of Christ we are able to pray this prayer for ourselves, for our loved ones, for our pastors, and for our Bishop. In confidence we are to pray as Dr. Luther taught, “Into your hands I commend myself, my body and soul and all things.”

Jesus was getting very close to the capital city, Jerusalem. There had been quite a bit of talk about the coming kingdom of God. The sons of Zebedee had already tried to get the choice places in what they thought would be this new world order. In order to dispel these notions of an immediate kingdom, Jesus tells the parable of the ten minas. The parable includes not only citizens who hate the promised King, but also those within the kingdom who are “wicked” servants.

The Kingdom of God is the holy Christian Church. Jesus is the nobleman Who came to our world to receive this Kingdom. He did not do it by force, but by his suffering, death and merit. The Jews, by and large, did not want Him to be their king and they rejected Him. Even within the Church there will be hypocrites, who will hang out with believers for a time, but in the end will be removed for lack of faith in Jesus Christ.

There are times in which the struggles, trials, and temptations of the Church in this world make us long for Heaven. That is good, as long as we don’t try to avoid God’s order. The Church will be treated just as Jesus was. We live lives of confession and forgiveness. We take up our cross daily and follow Jesus. We cling to His forgiveness and we know that the Church is found gathered around the purely-preached Word and rightly-administered Sacraments.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem because it was missing that which was necessary for its salvation—the inhabitants did not know the peace which comes from believing in Jesus Christ. When Jesus' disciples began to praise His coming into Jerusalem, some of the Pharisees tried to get Jesus to stop them. Jesus refused. Just as the gates of Hell cannot overcome the Church, so the praise of Christ's Church cannot be squelched. Upon arrival, Jesus cleansed the Temple of God, because it was not functioning as "a house of prayer." The Word of God creates faith which saves us. That faith then cries out to God in prayer. The intended purposes set by God for the city, the leaders, and the Temple had been undermined.

The Smalcald Articles (III, XII) say, "We do not concede to them that they are the Church, and [in truth] they are not [the Church]; nor will we listen to those things which, under the name of Church, they enjoin or forbid. For, thank God, [today] a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children pray thus: I believe in one holy [catholic or] Christian Church. This holiness does not consist in albs, tonsures, long gowns, and other of their ceremonies devised by them beyond Holy Scripture, but in the Word of God and true faith."

The Church is the assembly of believers in Jesus Christ gathered to hear the Word of God in true faith and trusting in Jesus Christ's purchased forgiveness. Those same believers cry out in thanksgiving and praise.

Pilate the pagan exonerates Jesus three times. Pilate tells the bloodthirsty crowds that he finds no fault in the Man because from a legal point of view Jesus had done nothing wrong. Pilate, who knows that Jesus is innocent and makes that claim three times, hands Jesus over to be crucified. The truth of Jesus innocence doesn't mean much to him. Pilate finds his truth in the polls of public opinion rather than in Christ.

Pilate has no idea how graciously he preaches the gospel to those with ears to hear. "I find no fault in this Man" (verse 4). "I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; no, neither did Herod," (verse 14-15). And again in verse 22, "I have found no reason for death in Him." Pilate proclaims Jesus' innocence to the crowd and the leaders, and that innocence will be guilt on their heads.

But to you who believe the Gospel, Pilate's words preach to you that Jesus' sacrifice is good for you. Jesus' death benefits you because He was completely innocent. Christ, the Innocent One, stands in the place not only of Barabbas, a great sinner, but of you and every sinner in order to atone for the sins of the whole world. Pilate proclaims Jesus as your stand-in, your substitute under God's wrath, so that now "there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Faith is what puts you "in Christ Jesus," and applies this great atonement to you. Pilate has preached this to you. This Man is innocent so that He may take the place of the guilty.

The betrayal of Judas is no worse than the betrayal of St. Peter. Judas willfully hands Jesus over to authorities. St. Peter denies even knowing Jesus. Both men betray their Lord. We could argue that Judas' sin was premeditated while St. Peter's was spur of the moment, but both are sin. So why does one kill himself while the other is absolved? Both are afflicted with sorrow and contrition over their sin. The difference is the way they sorrow over their sin.

Judas despairs of God's mercy. He believes that there is not a drop of mercy left in Jesus' heart for him. He believes that his sin is so heinous that Christ could not, or would not absolve it. In the bowels of that despair Judas hangs himself. His sorrow was a worldly sorrow that wallowed in self-pity.

St. Peter, on the other hand, went out and wept bitterly in godly sorrow because his sorrow was repentance that looked for salvation of Christ and believed that Christ could and would willingly absolve him. St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 7:10, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death."

In our sin, the Lord gives us sorrow over our sin—repentance—so that we might be sorry for our sin and learn to hate our sin. His desire is that this sorrow is a godly one that is not an end unto itself, like Judas' sorrow, but a sorrow that prepares the way of the Lord in our hearts, so that we look to Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for even the worst of our sins.

Jesus is not being difficult when he refuses to directly answer their question concerning His authority to "preach the gospel." They already knew that His answer would be "from Heaven," that is the heavenly Father sent Him. Their purpose for asking was to find ammunition with which they could have Him put to death.

The Old Testament is full of analogies about God's people being a vineyard. Isaiah 5:7: "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression." Jesus' story about the vineyard is a thinly-veiled way of telling these murderers that He knows exactly what their plans are. They are seeking to put Him to death. Furthermore, the Son of the Lord of the vineyard will destroy these religious leaders for their actions, "and give the vineyard to others."

Our once-rejected Jesus has become "the chief cornerstone." Our Savior Jesus has given authority in His Church to the Apostles and New Testament pastors (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-2). At His own direction, the heavenly Father desires that the Gospel of the free forgiveness of sins be preached. By divine authority, your pastor is sent to proclaim to you the Gospel: "Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

The emperor claimed to be a god, sponsored the idolatrous burning of incense (prayers) to him, and did many things which were immoral and sinful. The tax paid to Rome supported these things. This situation might cause a Jew to have some conscientious scruples concerning paying taxes. [Note: The chief priests and scribes were not troubled by their conscience; they only “pretended to be righteous,” in order to try to get Jesus to say something treasonable.]

The question is “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar OR not?” Jesus’ answer is not an OR, but an AND. He said, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, AND to God the things that are God’s.” In the Augsburg Confession, the Lutheran teachers, who were concerned about the mixing of governmental powers and churchly powers, acknowledged the duty of honoring both government AND Church. Augsburg Confession, Article XXVIII, “...Therefore our teachers, for the comforting of men’s consciences, were constrained to show the difference between the power of the Church and the power of the sword, and taught that both of them, because of God’s commandment, are to be held in reverence and honor, as the chief blessings of God on Earth.”

These two great gifts from God provide for different things. The government makes use of the rewards and punishments of the power of the sword to protect body and possessions. The Church makes use of the Word to teach and preach the Gospel of Jesus’ free forgiveness of sins for the salvation and protection of the soul. We teach that Jesus Christ, Who is David’s fleshly descendant, is also David’s God.

“I am among you as One Who serves.” With these words Christ strips all personal prerogative from our bones and flesh. How often do we live as though our own needs mattered most? How often do we chafe as the demands of our spouse, crying children, or folks at our job increase? We do not like a Lord Who is among us a One Who serves because that means we are to go and do likewise. We are called to forsake self, pick up the cross of our God-given vocations. Our cross is carried by daily giving ourselves in service to our spouse, to our children, to our employer, to our flocks, to those around us who need us. The flesh hates the cross of service to others and wants instead to claim exemption and privilege from such living for the sake of others. In this self-focus our neighbor suffers and we languish because it is sin.

Praise be to God that Christ is among us as One Who serves. He serves us as He dies to atone for our sins. He serves us by sending His gospel into the world through His preachers. He serves us by baptizing us and breathing faith into our hearts. He serves us with His true Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament to strengthen that confidence. His service is what forgives our selfish prerogative and sets us free from the bondage of self-fulfillment. He forgives us weekly in the Divine Service, His service, so that we may return to our vocations, pick them up as crosses, and carry them for the sake of our neighbors who need us.

It seems as if the false church dwells in, with, and under the true Church. False Christians sit next to the saints in the same wooden pews. Judas Iscariot, the turncoat treasurer, is number among the Twelve. Wicked Ham was numbered among the eight souls saved in Noah's ark. St. Paul teaches that false brethren inject their teaching into the Church (Galatians 2:4). In our time, many claim the mantle of Christ, but ignore His doctrine and sacraments. Many in Israel have fallen prey to false teachings, thereby inventing idols that look like themselves. Worse yet, the false church grows in number and seems destined for victory. Ham brings public shame upon his father Noah. Judas succeeds in betraying Jesus unto death. The false brothers infect the Church with unscriptural nonsense and unchristian novelty.

How does Christ deal with Judas and his seeming victory? He goes forward as it was determined for Him by God the Father. Christ willfully and knowingly endures the shame of betrayal of one numbered among the Twelve. His Church does the same. In spite of the Judases, the Hams, and the false brethren around us, the Church continues on the course Christ set for her. That course is the proclaiming of the pure Gospel and the right administration of His sacraments. The false church, the Judases and Hams of our time will not deter Christ's Church from going forward into eternity as Christ has determined. Just as Christ endured the scorn of the false church, so will His true saints endure unto the end by faith in Christ's promise that the gates of Hell shall not overcome.

We live in a post-modern world in which truth is not considered absolute, but relative. One person can say, "The Triune God is the only true God," while another can say, "There is no god." Both statements are to be considered equally valid and not in conflict. Postmodernism considers toleration to be the highest virtue. It is almost shocking when someone condemns another's opinion or belief.

Jesus' words in St. Luke 20:46, "Beware of the scribes..." and his description of their false pride and false teaching may initially surprise us. Nevertheless, Jesus' condemnatory words are truly good, right, and salutary. It is out of love that Jesus seeks to turn the scribes from their sin. Jesus speaks to the crowds, so that they will "not be deceived" into trusting in their works and thus lose their salvation. Falsehood does not save; only the truth that Jesus' suffering and death on our behalf will save.

You need a pastor who will not only conform all his teaching to the Word of God, but who will also reject and condemn all teachings that are opposed to the Christian faith. It may be uncomfortable for you to hear your pastor speak against the false teachings and practices which your friends and neighbors believe and practice. Nevertheless, these warnings serve a salutary purpose of protecting Christ's sheep from these falsehoods.

When Jesus spoke this way, they "sought to lay hands on him" (St. Luke 20:19). When the Apostles spoke this way, they persecuted them. It will be for you, too. Nevertheless, through the ever patient faith in Jesus' forgiveness and rejection of false trust, we shall be saved.

FOR THE PROPER FOR PENTECOST

THE GOSPEL

St. John 14:23–31 (NKJV)

Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.

“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.

“And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here.”

THE COLLECT

O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who with Thee and the Holy Ghost, lives and reigns, ever one God, world without end.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Pentecost Sunday

THE THIRD ARTICLE.

Of Sanctification.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body; and the Life everlasting. Amen.

What is meant by this Article?

Answer. I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me through the gospel, enlightened me by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith; in like manner as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the true faith; in which Christian Church He daily forgives abundantly all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and will raise up me and all the dead at the last day, and will grant everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.

—The Small Catechism, Part II

The selections from the Book of Concord for the Sundays of the Church Year are from H. E. Jacobs’ translation of the Book of Concord, and are taken from the table of suggested lessons for Sundays and Festivals of the Church. (The table of appropriate lessons was originally found in Pipping’s Christliches Concordienbuch [Leipzig, 1734].)