

DAILY PRAYERS

The Word of God

Eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, grant us Thy Holy Spirit that He may write Thy Word upon our hearts, that we may receive and believe it, and that it may give us cheer and comfort into eternity. Glorify Thy Word in our hearts that by Thy holy inspiration we may think what is right and by Thy power perform the same, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Morning

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 that Thou wouldst keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend 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.

Evening

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day; and I pray Thee that Thou wouldst forgive me all my sins, wherever I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend 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.

Before Meals

The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them their meat in due season; Thou openest Thine hands and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

Lord God, Heavenly Father, bless us and these Thy gifts, which we receive from thy bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

After Meals

O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever.

We thank Thee, Lord God, Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, for all Thy benefits, who livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen.

CLC Daily Devotions



The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

John 6:63

Sept. 3, 2018 - Dec. 1, 2018

Devotions taken from a collection of brief meditations written by several pastors of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. You can subscribe to daily devotions via email at: <http://www.redeemerclc.info/ministries>

Monday, September 3, 2018

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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.

HE CHOSE YOU

"Jesus came and spoke to them." There is great encouragement and strength for us in those few simple words. It was Jesus who came to them! It was Jesus who sought them out! It was Jesus who came and spoke this assignment to them. And the same is true for every disciple of Jesus. This blessed task of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus is not a task of our choosing. We don't need to worry about whether or not this is something we should or should not be doing. The task was chosen for us and we were chosen for the task. Consider how this account echoes the words that Jesus spoke to His disciples recorded in the Gospel of John: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain..." (John 15:16a).

So all of this begs the question; how could Jesus choose a sinner like me to be His ambassador? The answer is found in the truths of Scripture made simple to understand through such passages as: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8–10).

It was by God's underserved love that we received the very faith through which we are saved. And now, having been redeemed, restored, forgiven, and declared righteous, we are prepared to proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of the darkness of unbelief. There is great strength and encouragement in these truths. When you feel like shrinking away from an opportunity to share the Gospel, remember that Jesus chose you for the task and prepared you by giving you a new heart that loves Him, His word, and others.

Saturday, December 1, 2018

Psalm 6:4 Return, O Lord, deliver me!

CHRIST *IS* COMING AGAIN

"I wish I could be rid of my sinful flesh once and for all! Then everything would be perfect!" Such thoughts are not foreign to believers. As the child of God looks about this world, he witnesses violence, drug abuse, hatred, and so many other sins. These things are not going on at a safe distance, half a world away. Often they are happening just down the street. As the believer witnesses, not only the sinfulness of others but the corruption of his own sinful flesh, he cries out to heaven with the psalmist: "My soul also is greatly troubled; But You, O Lord--how long? Return, O Lord, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake!" (Psalm 6:3b-4).

"Return, O Lord!" And return, He will! It is with the knowledge that Christ will return that we are able to observe all of the sinful things going on in this world and in ourselves without slipping into despair and cynicism. As we repent of our sins, look to Christ for forgiveness, and strive after a godly life, we wish, hope, and pray that everything will one day be perfect. And it shall be so!

When Christ returns the second time it will be that we shall be with Him bodily. There we will actually be perfect, without sin, resurrected unto eternal life-- sinless forever! Sin is not our eternal ruler. Christ is. We will not carry our earthly troubles with us to our eternal home. Christ Jesus, who is ruling in our hearts, who has conquered sin, death, and the devil, has given us His holy Word. He promises that our sins have been forgiven for His sake, and that He will return to take us to be with Him bodily forever. How long until that day? Only our heavenly Father knows.

But Christ is coming!

-- Adapted from the "Lutheran Spokesman"

Friday, November 30, 2018

John 17:1 And this is ETERNAL LIFE, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

WHOM YOU HAVE SENT

I had put off sending the gift package way too long. It was always on the back burner, but it didn't get done sooner when I hoped it would. I always had good intentions of sending it, but it just felt like a lower priority than everything else I was running around doing.

Isn't our faith sometimes like that? It's easy to put off for another time. But time is running out. We may have the best of intentions, know it needs to get done, but we find all kinds of excuses not to make it the priority it needs to be.

In Jesus' high priestly prayer He prays for ALL of His disciples then and now to focus on ETERNAL LIFE as the priority. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." That doesn't sound like a back burner task. Neither did Jesus think that way about you, when He took on our flesh to suffer hell's punishment for us. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost ... No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Luke 19:10; John 14:6b).

This is why Jesus, God's Son, came to this world. This is why He was sent by the Father ... for you! That YOU would know Him, the only true God. That you would know Him as your own dear Savior, and have eternal life. And that you would also see, through the work of God's Spirit in you, that you too have been sent by Jesus into this world to share this eternal life!

Life is racing by while we are running around with lesser priorities. To whom has Jesus sent you today? What gift have you and I put off sharing way too long? May our Savior's love fuel you to share His love today, because He was sent for you. And you were sent by Jesus for them!

Tuesday, September 4, 2018

Isaiah 55:3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live.

ARE YOU LISTENING?

The story's told of a nine-year-old boy who had a passion for eating apples. He even took a liking to the green apples growing on the tree in the backyard. One day his Mom offered him a piece of motherly advice: "Billy, I want you to be careful about eating too many green apples from the tree in our backyard. It could make you sick." "Okay, Mom," he said. A few days later Billy walked into the kitchen with a grimace on his face, rubbing his stomach: "Mom, I've got a bad tummy ache!" "Did you eat something spicy for lunch?" "No, I think I ate too many green apples from our tree." "How many did you eat?" "About ten." "Didn't we have a conversation about that the other day? Well I guess you heard what I said but you weren't listening."

Most parents can relate to this scenario. They know how their children are inclined to hear what they tell them with their ear drums but to tune them out with their hearts. It happens with grownups too. We hear what family members, our spouse, friends tell us but don't always allow it to strike home. How often do we hear words that Lord speaks to us at church in the Scripture lessons and the sermon but our minds wander off to another place. That's why Jesus, when teaching God's Word to the people (as, for example, to the crowd on the Lake Galilee shore) found it necessary to add those words: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 9:9). That is: I want you to inwardly digest the kingdom truths I have just laid on your hearts.

It's an admonition our heavenly Father gives us, His children, repeatedly throughout Scripture. Because He knows how prone we are to get distracted from the one thing needful and how short our attention spans are, He tells us: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7). "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28). "Listen carefully ... incline your ear and come to Me ... hear and your soul shall live" (Isaiah 55:2-3). May the Holy Spirit ever bless us with such hearing ears and attentive hearts!

Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and take them to heart that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday, September 5, 2018

Isaiah 55:1 Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat ...

DRINK WATER EVERY DAY

The imagery Isaiah was inspired by the Spirit to use in this text is that of a merchant who has put up his wares for sale at a marketplace. He pictures this merchant as calling out to passers by and urging them to purchase from Him the commodities he has on sale.

By the merchant the Lord is picturing Himself. He's the One who issues the gracious invitation to any and all to come and receive from Him the blessings of His Word.

Why did He use WATER to symbolize these blessings? The answer is obvious when you think about it. Just as our bodies need H₂O water to survive (try going without it for a few days!), so our souls need the water of His Word on an every-day basis. We need the refreshment that comes from the Gospel which tells how our Savior rescued us from the guilt of our sins and from the punishment of eternal death. He uses this "water" to reinvigorate our spirits as we make our way through the bone-dry desert of this sin-torn world. Simon Peter was "right on" when he told Jesus (in response to His question: "Do you also want to go away from Me as so many others are doing?"): "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Do you carry a water bottle with you as you go through your day and do you sip on it regularly? Are you following the advice of nutritionists who recommend that you drink at least eight eight-ounce cups of water every day? That's great. Keep it up. Your body needs it. Always remember, though, that what's even more important for life here and hereafter is the water Jesus offers you in His Word by which He reinvigorates and restores your soul.

See, the streams of living waters Springing from eternal love
Well supply God's sons and daughters And all fear of want remove.
Who can faint while such a river Ever flows their thirst t'assuage--
Grace, which, like the Lord, the Giver, Never fails from age to age?
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 469:2)

Thursday, November 29, 2018

John 17:1 And this is ETERNAL LIFE, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

TRUSTING TRUTH

"I'm telling the truth!" said my nine year old daughter when I questioned her with a raised eyebrow about why her younger brother was crying. You can trust a person, or in this case a child, maybe about as far as you can carry them. But why is trusting someone so difficult sometimes? Maybe it's because that trust has been weakened or even broken in the past. Maybe because the story that's been told seems so far-fetched and beyond what could ever possibly be true. Maybe, truth is so hard to believe because each one of us knows, with a guilty conscience, how lying can be so easy.

"What is truth?" That's what Pilate asked Jesus when he was interrogating Him in the early hours of the morning on Good Friday. Pilate had just asked Jesus, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly [correctly] that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Best construction aside for a moment, I find it hard to believe the word of an acquaintance who has shown to not be very truthful. We at times may have felt this way about God when our prayers aren't answered just the way we expect them to be. We think God is unloving, uncaring, untruthful in His promises to hear or answer us. And yet, when we read God's Word, we have no reason to believe God our Savior would be untruthful to us. Study and examine the Bible and how God kept every one of His promises. Proverbs 30:5 says it this way, "Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him." Jesus said, "And this is eternal life ..." This is the truth about how to get to heaven. That we would know our Lord who is the one and only TRUE God, Jesus Christ, who was sent to save us!

Isn't it comforting to know that in a world which questions what is true we can hear the voice of our Savior? We can trust that the God of the Bible is the only God that offers eternal life freely-- simply by believing that our debt of sin was paid in full on Calvary's cross through the perfect, sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the the way, the truth, and the life! This is the most precious and peaceful truth that can be found. Trust this truth about your Savior-- for this truth is eternal life!

Wednesday, November 28, 2018

John 17:1 And this is ETERNAL LIFE, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

KNOW-ING JESUS

Duke wrote the book on aneurysm removal, a manual doctors around the globe still consult nearly 20 years after its publication. The techniques he developed are regularly discussed at international neurosurgery conferences. He is the chair of the neurosurgery department at UT Southwestern Medical Center and performs most of his operations at the associated hospitals. Medical students come from all over the world to study under him. Highly accomplished doctors call him "the most calm, collected genius ever to step into an operating room" and "some sort of god, walking around among mere mortals."

Funny, isn't it? You've probably never heard of Dr. Duke Samson, one of the world's leading neurosurgeons from Texas-- unless you had an "inoperable" brain tumor that he removed. Many people throughout the world today will admit that they know who Jesus is from the Bible. But what do they mean by that? I now know who Duke Samson is, but I certainly don't know him personally. In fact, given his occupation, it's probably best I don't know him!

In Jesus' high priestly prayer He reveals the difference between knowing His name and knowing Him as the one and only true Son of God, your Lord and Savior. The difference between these two types of knowledge is eternal! That's why God recorded His manual on the history of the world, telling us about the cancer we inherited from our first parents, and how Jesus single-handedly saved us body and soul for all eternity. Jesus Christ, the Greatest Physician (Luke 4:23) of all has personally taken on our flesh, come into our world, suffered on the cross to pay for our entire debt of sin, destroyed the power of our enemy. He delivers us from death to immortality through this good news (2 Tim. 1:10). He did this out of His boundless love, for you!

Duke Samson doesn't know who you are, and before today you probably didn't know who he is. But knowing Duke, and needing Duke's surgical skills are two very different things.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you know us by name, that you have revealed to us Your Holy Word so that we may know You personally and what You have done for us so lovingly and sacrificially! We pray that You would lead us to seek You out daily to cut out the sin from our lives and provide healing for our souls that will last for eternity! Amen!

Thursday, September 6, 2018

Isaiah 55:1 ... Yes, come, buy wine and milk ...

JOY AND NOURISHMENT

Two more items the Lord uses to symbolize the blessings of His Word in this Isaiah passage are WINE and MILK. Truly apt pictures! How so? Think for a minute. At what kind of occasions is wine usually served? Merry occasions, right? Events like wedding receptions, New Year's parties, festive holiday gatherings in company with friends and family. And what usually happens when you enjoy a glass of wine with your meal? Doesn't it make you feel happy?

So, too, the wine of God's Word that we drink in fills us with spiritual happiness. It gladdens our hearts by assuring us that God is our dear Father and we are His dear children and nothing can separate us from His love, that even the trials we encounter along life's road are being used by our Father for our good. Haven't we experienced the truth the psalmist expressed: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the [word] of the Lord, and on his [word] he meditates day and night." "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" (Ps. 1:1-2; 19:11).

And how does milk serve as an apt picture for the blessings God furnishes us through His Word? Milk provides nourishment to newborns for their growth and development. It supplies the nutrients which their bodies need. You may recall the "Got milk?" advertising campaign created back the early 1990s encouraging everyone to drink more milk because it is good for you.

Even so, the milk of the Word is good for us in the highest sense. It's what God uses to fortify us in a world where our Christian faith is under constant attack by the world, the devil, and our flesh. No wonder Peter offers us this counsel: "Like newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:2). We may sing joyfully with the hymn writer:

Oh, what blessing to be near You And to listen to Your voice;
Let me ever love and hear You, Let Your Word be now my choice!
Many hardened sinners, Lord, Flee in terror at Your Word;
But to all who feel sin's burden You give words of peace and pardon.
(Lutheran Service Book, 589:2)

Friday, September 7, 2018

Isaiah 55:1 ... And you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

ALL THIS ... AND FOR FREE!

A feature that stands out prominently in Isaiah's picture (namely, of the consumers invited to purchase from the merchant the items he has on sale: water, wine, and milk) is that they're invited to do this even if they are penniless. The truth the Lord presents to us here is that the blessings He offers us in His Word (refreshment for our souls, joy in His forgiveness, nourishment for our faith) He gives to us FREE! This is important for two reasons:

First, we can't contribute anything towards our spiritual well-being. All the money in the world couldn't obtain forgiveness for a single sin. No good works of our own, be they ever so numerous, would qualify us for entry into heaven to live with our holy God. As Isaiah writes in another place: "We're all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isaiah 64:6).

Second, if we were to attempt the impossible, to acquire the blessings of God's love by our works, it would provide us with no true happiness. It would lead only to sadness, despair, and spiritual exhaustion. A real-life example: when I lived in Texas, there was a UPS driver came to the door one day with a delivery (I had gotten to know him over the months). He knew I was a pastor and we got into a religious discussion. Along the way he shared with me how he was feeling emotionally burned-out. "Why?" I asked. "Because of what my church is teaching me," he said. "For me to get right with God I need to obey His commandments. Jesus did His part. Now you've gotta do yours." It left him feeling mentally drained.

It's because our heavenly Father loves us and wants us to know that we needn't feel that way, that He sent His Son to do what we couldn't get done. He had Jesus take our load of sin on Himself on the cross and atone for it there by pouring out His lifeblood, the Innocent for the guilty. He then raised Him from the grave to prove that this is true. Now He simply invites us to feast our ears on this Good News and to believe it in our hearts.

Tuesday, November 27, 2018

John 17:1 And this is ETERNAL LIFE, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

I DON'T HAVE TIME TODAY

You know the feeling. The list of "to do's" for the day is more than you can possibly handle or accomplish. You're just too busy for anything extra! But what happened on those days when your grandmother or father, spouse, child, or best friend lay on that hospital bed and you knew every moment with that loved one was precious-- or, more than that, it was priceless, and would be one of your last? Everything slowed down in those moments. Life changed. Work and other daily routine activities quickly took a back seat to those fleeting minutes that seemed to pass through your hands as sand.

Like each of us in those moments, Jesus' disciples didn't fully understand the little bit of time they had left with Him before His crucifixion and death. At the end of John chapter sixteen Jesus told them plainly that the hour was coming when He would be separated from them. In fact, in fear and shame they would leave Jesus alone and scatter from Him when He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. So what does Jesus do in those last few moments before it all happened just as He said it would?

Jesus prays. He prays for His disciples to continue in His Word and believe in the work He was about to accomplish for their sins and the sins of the whole world, including yours and mine. Jesus could have said, "I don't have time to pray. I don't have time to walk with them or sit by them anymore. I have to finish My work." But Jesus took time to pray for them and for each one of us (John 17:20), because you and I are His work! It was you He thought of in the Garden, you He thought of on the cross. He still promises you, "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19). "This is eternal life..." Jesus says.

As you plan out your day tomorrow, or even the rest of the day today, think for a moment of what really matters most in this infinitely short life in comparison to eternity. Think about the time you take for Jesus-- in devotions, in Bible study, in God's house, in serving Jesus instead of self, or in prayer for others and loved ones. Think of your Lord Jesus and put all your work and daily activities on hold just like you have done for that loved one on their death bed. Because Jesus did this for you! Because Jesus is still alive! And because you and I for now, right now, really do have the time.

Monday, November 26, 2018

Acts 1:8 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.

YOU ARE MY WITNESSES

The first chapter of Acts records our Savior's promise of the Holy Spirit, His Ascension, an encouragement to His disciples as His witnesses to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and the selection of Matthias as the replacement for Judas.

Just as He was about to ascend to the right hand of God, Jesus again reminded His disciples about the privilege they would have as His witnesses. He said: "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" (Acts 1:8 NKJV).

We understand that while these words were spoken to a specific group of disciples, these words have application to each and every follower of Jesus. No, we were not eye witnesses to our Savior's life, death, and resurrection. No, we were not there on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon those first disciples in this dramatic way. But nonetheless, we are His witnesses. What those early disciples were privileged to see, we have been privileged to know, believe, and confess through the faith worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

There may be times when we feel like we are all alone in our attempts to be our Savior's witnesses. I am sure the same could be said of those early disciples. We get a glimpse of that on the day of His Ascension. We're told that they just stood there gazing up into heaven. The angel asked them "... why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10-11 NKJV).

With these words the disciples were sent on their way. There was no time for standing around wondering how they were to be His witnesses. They were His witnesses and Jesus had equipped them with everything needed. It was time to get to work, He had ascended and He was coming back.

And so likewise, there is no time for us to be standing around wondering. Jesus has ascended and He is coming back. He has equipped us with everything needed to be His witnesses. He has revealed Himself as our Lord and Savior in the pages of Scripture. What a privilege to be His witnesses!

Saturday, September 8, 2018

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

YOUR PASTOR IS A FRAGILE JAR OF CLAY

The Lutheran pastor is not a super-star that attracts people to the gospel. Your pastor adds nothing to the power of the gospel. If anyone in the ministry glories, let him glory in the Lord.

Your pastor has many weaknesses. He is, in fact, a sinful human being. But his weaknesses constantly focuses the attention of the people away from himself to Jesus and the power of His cross. It is a blessed comfort to realize that whatever good is accomplished in your pastor's ministry is accomplished by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This needs to be realized by every pastor and then communicated to those who hear the message they proclaim. The message of the gospel is more important than the messenger.

The paradox of the Gospel is that God has placed this glorious treasure of forgiveness and life in jars of clay -- in weak and sinful messengers. That is why the Apostle said: "We have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Corinthians 3:4-5).

This means that our hope for heaven is founded not in sinful human beings, but on the solid truth of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. To God alone the glory!

-- From "The Lutheran Spokesman"

Monday, September 10, 2018

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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.

***ALL* AUTHORITY ... IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH**

Authority matters, doesn't it? Imagine for a moment that you roll through a stop sign and suddenly you see in your rearview mirror a group of ten year old boys running after you yelling "Stop, stop, you're under arrest!" Would you immediately pull over, reach for your license and registration, and prepare yourself to give them respect as they write you a citation for failing to come to a complete stop? Of course not, and neither would anyone else. They simply don't have the authority to arrest you, even if you are guilty.

We probably don't need to spend much time with this silly scenario because it's likely not going to happen. But I think we can find an analogy here to evangelism. I think sometimes we may feel like those ten year old boys as we try to proclaim God's saving word. Perhaps we feel like no one will ever listen to us. And why should they? Who are we anyway? It's not like we have the authority to proclaim the forgiveness of sins!

But here's where the encouragement, comfort, and truth of God's word is so important. We do have the authority to proclaim the Good News of the forgiveness of sins to everyone. Jesus, the One who has "ALL authority ... in heaven and on earth," has specifically designated sinners like us to announce the forgiveness of sins to other repentant sinners and to announce God's wrath upon those who refuse to repent. This designation happened sometime after His resurrection and before His ascension. John records the account:

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:21–23). And so when Jesus commissioned His first disciples and now us to be His ambassadors, He first reminds us of His authority so that we can be sure and confident under whose authority we speak. We represent Jesus, the One who has all authority in heaven and on earth.

Saturday, November 24, 2018

John 10:10 I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

WHAT MONEY COULD NEVER BUY

Daily we are tempted to believe that our personal happiness is based on the amount of earthly possessions we own. "He who dies with the most toys wins!" is today's attitude. This is in sharp contrast to what Jesus says: "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

How can we tell if we've begun to be sold on the "buy it and you'll be happy" sales pitch of the world? We could look at our offerings to the Lord. Is a love for material things keeping us from giving the Lord our firstfruits? We could look at how much time we spend at work. Does a desire for more of this world's goods cause us to spend so much time working that it cuts into the amount of time we spend with God's Word? We could look at our decision to be a double-income family. Maybe both we and our spouse do need to work in order to make enough money to clothe, feed, and shelter the family. But maybe both spouses work because dad doesn't make enough to buy the things the world says we need to make us happy.

Only with the Lord can we evaluate these things as we ought. Only with Him can our hearts see that true satisfaction and contentment are the result of knowing His Son by faith.

Whether we always fully realize it or not, with Jesus we have what money could never buy!

- * We have forgiveness and peace for our guilt-tormented hearts.
- * We have the guarantee that God hears and answers all our prayers.
- * We have the assurance that all things in this sin-troubled world work for our good.
- * We have an escape from death and hell.
- * We have the resurrection of the body and eternal life.
- * We have the Word and Spirit to lift us above the worldly idea of what true happiness is all about, so that we can discover once again that happiness is all about knowing Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

-- Adapted from the "Lutheran Spokesman"

Friday, November 23, 2018

John 19:30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

BLACK FRIDAY ... GOOD FRIDAY

Black Friday, for many people in America, is the day after Thanksgiving when crowds of turkey-stuffed shoppers look to take advantage of the season's biggest holiday bargains. Why is it "Black Friday"? Well, there are those who claim that the sales on this one day of the year helps retail companies to finally "get into the black," that is to make a profit. As I understand it, the title "Black Friday" has been applied to other events in history, like the crash of the U. S. gold market on September 24, 1869.

Black Friday seems to be all about money-- either saving it, making it or losing it. We should be good stewards of the gifts that God gives us, but those gifts should never become more important than the One who gives those gifts or than the Greatest of His gifts, redemption through His Son.

On Good Friday the most priceless of gifts was given, not on Black Friday. "It is finished" were the words Jesus spoke to mark the culmination and completion of God's plan to save sinners. God sent His Son into the human race at Bethlehem to be our substitute, to live a sinless life in our place. God the Son was perfectly and actively obedient, keeping every commandment of God. He was declared to be the one in whom the Father was well pleased. Jesus was also passively obedient, perfectly subservient, submitting to suffering, shame, and death to make atonement for our sins.

Good Friday is all about atonement and the matchless price paid by our God. While Black Friday occurs every year, there is but one Good Friday. We celebrate it every year, but its offering and payment need never be made again. It is finished, our debt of sin is paid, our place in the Father's house is reserved.

The savings of Black Friday are truly empty and paltry when compared to the Saving that was accomplished on Good Friday.

Tuesday, September 11, 2018

John 12:37 But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him ...

WHEN GOD IS THE TEACHER ...

School is started again. Students are getting settled into their new grades and classes, facing new challenges. It's probably still a little early to determine the strengths and weaknesses of every student, but the day will come. Hopefully, when that day arrives, the teacher won't throw up his/her hands and exclaim: "They just don't get it!"

There is, sometimes, a simple reason for a lack of understanding in students. It's possible that they can't see well or can't hear well. It may be that the student is too timid or afraid to ask questions when he doesn't "get it." It may be that the teacher doesn't communicate well or his students simply don't listen or are distracted.

Why didn't more of the people of Jesus' day "get it"? Why didn't more people become His disciples, His students? Why didn't they see his miracles and hear His Word and believe Him to be the promised Savior and Son of God?

Well, I suppose that some of them could have been hard of hearing or blind (but Jesus often cured that problem). Maybe some of them were too timid or afraid to ask questions (but Jesus knew their thoughts and very often answered the important questions of their hearts (cf. Matthew 9:4; Luke 11:17). No doubt some didn't really listen and others were distracted (like Martha on one occasion, Luke 10:38-41).

We know for certain that it wasn't the fault of the teacher or the Word that He spoke. We can say for certain that it isn't that God didn't want them to "get it" and come to trust in Christ. In the case of those who don't believe in Christ, there may be a variety of influences, but the fault is theirs and not God's!

Today, thank God that He overcame your will and called you to faith and enlightened your heart so that you know the truth (though perhaps imperfectly) and trust in Christ (fully, without reservation), and have in Him eternal life.

Wednesday, September 12, 2018

Matthew 13:20-21 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

THE TRUTH ABOUT FAITH ... AND PERSEVERING IN IT

Why does the Light go out in some people? Why do some people fall away from faith in Christ?

In the Parable of the Sower and the Seed (the farmer planting his field), Jesus explained why some hear His Word, but do not believe or only believe in Him for a time. The Eternal Son of God, like only He can, explains it in this way (Matthew 13:20-21):

There are times when people hear the Good News of what Jesus has done for them, and gladly receive it and the light begins to shine. But as soon as trouble arises or people make fun of their faith, they decide to turn away. Persecution is difficult, especially when we try to overcome it ourselves, without seeking the help and strength of our LORD! And we should expect persecution to come our way as Christians, because the Word of the Lord tells us it will (cf. John 15:20, 2 Timothy 3:12).

Does the LORD want us to fall away? Nope. The Word of God tells us that the Lord (2 Peter 3:9): "... is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

Is it God's fault that some are turned away by persecution? It is not. Neither is it the only reason the Light goes out in some people.

Today, let us thank God for the freedoms we enjoy in this country. May God preserve our freedoms and strengthen us by His Word that we may endure persecution when it comes, and not for a moment forsake Him for fear of or because of persecution.

Thursday, November 22, 2018

Psalm 136:1 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

THANKSGIVING FUTURE

It's Thanksgiving Day! Which for many means things like parades, turkey and stuffing, pumpkin pie with whipped cream, cranberries, and maybe even some lefsa; football and movies, decorating for Christmas, shopping early sales, and preparing to do battle for Black Friday deals.

Oh, wait, am I forgetting something? Oh, uh, right-- thanksgiving. It's funny how traditions grow each year and seem to crowd out the central message of a holiday. If, that is, giving thanks to God ever was the central message of Thanksgiving.

Today is not the only day that deserves thanksgiving. We should give thanks every day that the Lord grants the strength and ability to rise and carry out our tasks, even the mundane ones, because the day may well come when we are unable to accomplish them. We should give thanks that the Lord blesses us with gifts, ability and good health. We should give thanks that the Lord provides faithful pastors and teachers to feed us with the manna that is God's Word.

Let us look even past today, and give thanks for future blessings. Instead of asking, "What have you done for me lately?" let us confidently look to the future, knowing that God's mercy in Christ has no shelf-life, it endures forever. Let's ask even now for the strength to endure whatever tests may come to our faith in the days and months and years to come. Why not thank Him now for all His future blessings?

Proper thanksgiving also means trusting the LORD to provide for every future need.

Wednesday, November 21, 2018

Proverbs 7:10 Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

THANKSGIVING PRESENT

"Oh, the good old days." In time we all reminisce about the past. The funny thing is, we seem only to remember the good and not the evil. We didn't live in the Garden of Eden in the past! The fact is, the good old days weren't all good. Sorry to burst your bubble.

"Well, things just aren't the same today." It's true, but did we really expect that this earthly life would always be the same? It's true that many things in our country and society have changed, and many of them for the worse because they are in direct opposition to God's word and will, but should we be surprised?

What's my point?

If we live in the past, we may well become thankless when it comes to God's present blessings! If you are reading this devotion, then you are still in your time of grace. God is still blessing you today, through both Word and Sacrament. God's covenant of peace, established through the blood of His Son is still in force, it hasn't changed, and it won't change.

Instead of complaining about how things have changed, remember that our God has not changed. While the Almighty might have cast us off and cast us aside, instead His mercy to us is new every morning. While we are often unfaithful, His faithfulness is constant. While our love changes, His love is the same, self-less and self-sacrificing.

Therefore, consider today all the ways that God still brings blessing to you. Look up from your phone, quit with Facebook, turn off the television-- and take a few moments to consider how God has blessed you and still does. He has granted you a faith which trusts not in self, but in Christ. He has given you house, home, family, children, freedom to worship, and even has brought good from evil. He given you strength and ability to work and to feed yourself and your family.

Proper thanksgiving also means recognizing and appreciating God's gifts to us today.

Thursday, September 13, 2018

Matthew 13:22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

BE CONTENT WITH GOD'S BLESSINGS ... GREED CAN DESTROY FAITH IN CHRIST

Why does the Light go out in some people? Why do some people fall away from faith in Christ?

The Lord Jesus, as only the Son of God can, adds another reason to the pressure of persecution. There are also times that people hear the Good News and receive it and the light begins to shine, but being dazzled by wealth and earthly goods they turn away from Jesus and make their possessions the most important thing, their god. The Holy Spirit warns through the Apostle Paul that the love of money is "a root of all kinds of evil." In other words, like a "gateway drug" leads to the use of other more potent and dangerous drugs, covetousness is a "gateway sin" which leads to other sin, which leads further away from contentedness and from the One who graciously gives us what we need. Take care and stay away from lust in all forms, including greed.

Is this what God wants to happen? Nope. The Bible tells us in no uncertain terms that God (1 Timothy 2:4): "... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Is this God's fault? It is not, neither is it the only reason the Light goes out in some people. The Lord warns us urgently beforehand so that we are not deceived (Hebrews 13:5-6):

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

God help us to be content with the things that He has given us. May we be joyful above all that He has granted us faith in Christ and has graciously kept us in that faith.

Friday, September 14, 2018

Matthew 13:19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

LIGHT FOR THE BLIND

Why does the Light never really shine in some people? The Lord Jesus began the Parable of the Sower and the Seed with the explanation above. There are times when people hear the Good News of what Jesus has done for them, but never quite get it, and before they can "get it," the Wicked One, Satan, like a bird swooping down to nab a seed, takes away the opportunity to believe. It's similar to what the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4):

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

We are here told that those who do not believe and who are as a result perishing, heading for eternal death, have been blinded, so that they don't see the Light. Why don't they see the Light? Is it because God doesn't want them to see and believe and be saved! Certainly Not! Their minds have been blinded from seeing Jesus' glory as Savior and God by one who is called "the god of this age" and the "ruler of this world."

Who is the "god of this age"? It is the Devil, that fallen angel who deceives the whole world (cf. Revelation 12:9-12, "Ruler of this world," John 12:31, 14:30, "Prince of the power of the air," Ephesians 2:2). We can see clearly then, that if someone does not believe, it is the fault of Satan.

Is it in any way God's fault? It is not. But the fact that many are blinded to the Light (the Good News of what Christ has done) by Satan, shows why our task, our message, is so vitally important. The Gospel message we proclaim has the power to change hearts, but only if we proclaim it -- and risk being laughed at and persecuted.

God grant us boldness to do so!

Tuesday, November 20, 2018

Psalms 77:11-13 I will remember the works of the Lord; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds. Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; Who is so great a God as our God?

THANKSGIVING REVIEW

Holidays are family time. Whether the holiday is Thanksgiving or Christmas, very often family members jump at the opportunity to gather with family and loved ones. But, each year we notice the changes, children grow up, are married, and begin their own families. It seems natural to look back and remember holidays now past.

Holidays can also be a time of sorrow. When a husband or wife passes through death to life, some of the joy of the holiday seems to depart. When grown up children begin their own families and being tugged in different directions are unable to come "home" we miss them.

We need to review God's Blessings to have a proper Thanksgiving. When tempted to grumble about how things have changed and are changing, may God grant us grace to look back on blessings past with thanksgiving.

Remember the works of the LORD and praise Him for your spouse and family. Praise Him for watching over your family through the years and giving your children godly spouses and children. Praise Him that He kept strong and Christ-centered the faith of your departed loved ones. When the house isn't full, especially when it's quiet, remember the Lord Jesus is always present with you and He has blessings prepared for you that surpass what you have, in the past, been given.

Proper thanksgiving begins by remembering God's mercy and love in time past. Surely these words speak first of God's greatest gifts, His creation and His redemption of humankind by His Son. Who is so great as our God?

Monday, November 19, 2018

Acts 4:12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

SALVATION IN NO ONE ELSE

For the next several weeks our "Mission Monday" devotions are going to take us through the Book of Acts as we consider one learning moment from each chapter. The Book of Acts serves as an excellent text as we prayerfully begin each week with our hearts and minds focused on the privilege each of us has been given to proclaim the Good News of God's saving word.

The Book of Acts is sometimes titled "The Acts of the Apostles" because it traces the comings and goings of several of the early followers of Jesus who were sent out with the message of sins forgiven, salvation, and an eternal home in Heaven through faith in Jesus Christ. But rather than put the focus on the Apostles themselves, it's better to think of this portion of God's word as "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." Like us, those early Apostles were simply the vessels through which God carried His saving word to the world. It was the Holy Spirit who gave them the words, the courage to go about this work.

It has been pointed out that the Book of Acts, in a way, is a record of how the promise and instruction of Jesus, recorded in Acts 1:8 was carried out: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (ESV).

And so, Luke's Holy Spirit inspired record of these events is both instructional and encouraging to the child of God as we go about the work of evangelism.

Each week we will consider one takeaway lesson from one chapter of this book of the Bible as the Lord strengthens our faith through His word, works appreciation in our hearts for what He has done for us, and motivates us with His love to share the precious message of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life through the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ!

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 ESV).

Saturday, September 15, 2018

Psalms 19:7 The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

ASPIRIN-SIZE WORDS

Customer: "I want to buy some acetylsalicylic acid."

Druggist: "Do you mean aspirin?"

Customer: "Yes I can never remember that word..."

Most people can remember and understand simple words more easily than "jaw breaker" terminology. In our Bible the Holy Spirit has presented mind-boggling truths in "aspirin-size" words.

For example: Scripture declares that Jesus is God and man in one Person. His divine and human natures did not remain aloof from each other like two kinds of wood glued together. Nor did they melt into just one nature making Christ not quite God yet super human.

Instead, the Son of God and the Son of man share the use of each others abilities just as powerful electricity and the wires in your toaster share their individual capabilities in order to make toast. In order to produce our glorious salvation the God and human parts in Christ worked together.

But see how the Bible presents these stupendous truths in "aspirin-size" words! Is our Savior both God and man? Answer: "Unto you is born ... the Lord" (Luke 2). "God was manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 1).

Did His two natures share the use of their abilities with each other? Answer: "Jesus went unto them walking on the sea" (Matthew 14). "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, [He said unto the sick of the palsy], 'I say unto thee arise and take up thy couch, and go into thine house'" (Luke 5).

Did God and man in Christ accomplish our salvation by working together? Answer: "We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son (Rom 5) The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1).

The Holy Spirit is an excellent Teacher. By using aspirin-size words He enables all Christians to search the Scriptures daily, and to have the Word of Christ dwell in them richly.

Monday, September 17, 2018

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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.

GO THEREFORE ...

Often times this part of the great commission is portrayed or thought of as an imperative, or as a command. I've seen Christian clip art trying to depict this passage with a drawing of Jesus standing in front of His disciples with an arm outstretched as if He was a commanding general ordering His disciples to GO! While Jesus does send us out into the world with this and other passages of Scripture, this is not the emphasis of these words in Matthew 28. Perhaps a better way to understand the words of Jesus when He says: "Go therefore..." is more like this: "As you are going..." You see, what Jesus has in mind for His ambassadors is that we simply proclaim the Good News as we make our way through life. That's not to say that we don't make specific plans to share the Gospel from time to time, but it also means that we share the Gospel even when we haven't made specific plans to do so. Or another way to look at it is that we look for opportunities to speak the truth of God's word at all times.

This too provides great comfort and encouragement for us as we do the work of evangelism. You see, effectiveness of Gospel does not depend on my great plans or evangelism projects. The power is always in the Word of God. I know that I have been discouraged at times because I've failed to "create" an evangelism opportunity. But sometimes I wonder if God's Kingdom wouldn't be better served if we spent as much time simply telling others about Jesus as we do worrying about evangelism programs and opportunities. To paraphrase this in a question: Do we spend more time talking about how to spread the Gospel than the time spent actually proclaiming the Gospel?

So, perhaps a better way to think of the great commission is this: As you are going ... make disciples of all nations, wherever and whenever the Lord opens a door of opportunity to share the Good News. Amen!

Saturday, November 17, 2018

Matthew 1:21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

GOD *CAN* FIX THIS!

Several years ago, after a mass shooting, a bold headline in the New York Daily News stated: "God isn't fixing this!" The paper went on to condemn those who offer prayers as substituting meaningless platitudes for concrete action. We know, of course, that God is almighty and can do anything, but how would you respond to the accusation that God isn't doing anything?

First of all, the headline really should have read: "God isn't fixing this the way we think He should." Sinful human nature is quick to tell God what and how He should run the world and our lives. The "fix" that many want to see is an end to all violence. Who wouldn't want that? God could simply say the word, and there would be no more violence anywhere.

But that would not solve the underlying problem. It would be like using a band-aid to treat an invasive cancer. The real source, not just of gun violence, but of everything wrong in the world is the sinful heart. "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19). No amount of education or legislation is going to fix the human heart. In fact, there is nothing mankind can do to eradicate sin. People who are born dead in trespasses and sin can't get rid of it. It's impossible.

But God can and did. God sent His own Son into our world as our Brother to fix everything we cannot. We can't live up to God's holy standards, but Jesus did for us. We can't make things right with God with resolutions and good intentions, but Jesus did by taking the world's sin upon Himself and suffering its punishment on the cross. With that message of God's perfect "fix" through Jesus, the Spirit works faith and gives the sinner a new heart, which becomes evident in love for God and neighbor.

That new heart moves us to pray; and yes, despite the criticism, prayer is powerful and effective. So let's keep on praying. Let's pray that the Lord will work through the Word to bring many more souls to repentance and faith in Jesus. Let's pray that the Spirit would produce the fruits of faith, such as love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control in ever-increasing amounts. Let's pray the Lord will soon come in glory to bring an end to all evil and usher His Church into her new home of uninterrupted peace and incredible joy. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).

Friday, November 16, 2018

Matthew 25:34 Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."

WHAT WILL HEAVEN BE LIKE?

For as long as we continue as pilgrims on earth it's beyond our ability to comprehend. Yet the Lord, for our spiritual encouragement in our walk of faith, affords us a glimpse into the beauty of what He has prepared for us in yonder world. In Revelation He pictures heaven as a magnificent city with streets of pure gold, transparent as glass, with gates made of pearls and walls decorated with precious gemstones. He speaks of heaven as having a river, clear as crystal, flowing through its center. It will be a place where there's no night-time ever and no need for a sun to give off light because the glory of the Lord will radiate everywhere. All that brings sorrow and tears to our lives in this sin-cursed world-- all pain, sadness, worry, trouble, stress-- will be non-existent. Nothing impure will enter this heavenly "city" nor anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful. Only those whose names have been written in the Lamb's book of life (read Revelation 21 and 22 for the full and thrilling picture).

And the best part? We'll see Jesus face to face. He'll serve as our beneficent care-taker. He will lead us as a shepherd to springs of living water. He will spread His tent over us, keeping us secure forever. We will be before His throne and serve Him continuously in joy indescribable.

Such is the precious inheritance the Lord will bestow on all believers on the Last Day for His mercy's sake. May the prospect of the happy future that awaits us afford us extra inspiration for fighting the good fight of faith, till we arrive at our heavenly destination.

Tuesday, September 18, 2018

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

IN-REACH FOR YOUR MISSION-MINDED MINISTRY!

Back in high school, we had about twelve players on our basketball team. More recently I played on a team that had only seven, and two of our members couldn't make it to some of the games. That made it really difficult for just the five of us to play offense and defense the whole game.

Typically, when we think of our mission efforts in our church's ministry and service to the Lord, we first think of our "outreach" efforts. However, in our society today there is a great deal of mission work that can be done within our own homes and congregations. This kind of ministry has been often called "IN-reach." The Apostle Paul wrote about this to the Christians in Galatia, reminding them to first respond to not only the physical needs, but more importantly the spiritual needs of your brothers and sisters in Christ in your own local church and congregation.

There's a reason for this "IN-reach" idea that is quite logical. As we "go along sharing the gospel" as Jesus teaches in His great commission, we remember that this begins with those closest to us. Like the basketball team with only five players, it is hard even to think about playing offense if you can't keep up with the defense. Likewise, our outreach efforts for our Savior will be multiplied if more of our church team members aren't just sitting the bench, but taking an active part in the hearing and sharing of their Savior!

So what kind of teammate are you for Jesus? Do I actively participate in helping and encouraging my fellow members in their walk with Christ? Do I spend a lot of time sitting the bench while watching others who are maybe "better at it than me"? Do I show up for practice when I can to train at Jesus' feet? Thankfully, Jesus forgives my spiritual laziness! And He perfectly defines the word "ministry" as service. Let's think of our "IN-reach" efforts to serve and build up our church team members for Jesus! As a team, we rejoice to share the gospel of our Lord, who "... did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

Wednesday, September 19, 2018

Acts 4:19a-20 But Peter and John said ... "For we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard."

OUT-REACH FOR YOUR MISSION-MINDED MINISTRY!

"Social media makes me sick!" That was the thought one friend shared about everyone speaking out against anything and everything online. But it shouldn't surprise us. Those who are convicted about their own opinions, whether it be about a mother's rights, gay rights, black rights, etc. want to convince everyone else that their opinion is right! So they speak OUT about it!

Wouldn't it be wonderful if Christians (all of us, including you and me) would behave more like Peter and John? Yes, they spoke out. But more importantly they reached out. They could not help sharing what they were convicted about in their hearts. Certainly everyone has the right to speak out. But the difference is that Peter and John were not speaking out their own opinions, but rather what they had seen and heard from God's Son, Jesus Christ! They spoke the Word of God.

In fact, that's how God teaches us we should look at OUT-reach. Our ministry and mission is not to make someone hear us or to force them to believe. OUT-reach is just as it sounds, reaching out to souls needing to hear the Word of our Savior. That involves speaking not just about the stain of our sins or others, but the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus to save us from our sins through His redemptive work on the cross -- a sacrifice that moves repentance for sin in our hearts because of His selfless love for us. Jesus used this OUT-reach effort with Zacchaeus when He said, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

When we share outreach ideas in our churches, our eyes are opened to the endless opportunities to live OUT-reach. Whether we use social media, banners, billboards, or face to face conversation, think of your Savior's example.

Don't simply SPEAK OUT against what you know is contrary to God's Word, REACH OUT to every soul who needs to know the meaning of sin and grace of Jesus Christ our Lord!

Thursday, November 15, 2018

Matthew 25:34-36 Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

GOOD WORKS DON'T MAKE THE CHRISTIAN; THE CHRISTIAN MAKES GOOD WORKS

When we read Scripture verses like those above we might wonder: Don't they teach that our entrance into heaven's glory will be based on the good things we do during our time on earth? A casual reading of these and similar verses (Matthew 16:27, Revelation 22:12, for example) do SEEM to teach: We are saved because of our good works. But no! That's not what the verses are saying! What the Lord is describing in passages like these is the PUBLIC judgment that will take place in the sight of others on the world's Final Day, a judgment based on things tangible. Jesus will recount the kind deeds and helpful works we performed-- as a fruit of our faith and as a reflection of our love for Him-- as the outward evidence of the genuineness of the faith which His Spirit planted in our hearts. Our works won't precede us into heaven and serve as the basis for our being received into glory. They'll follow us into heaven and serve to verify that we truly have anchored our heavenly hope on Jesus' redeeming work, on His blood and righteousness.

Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone And rests in Him unceasing;
And by its fruits true faith is known, With love and hope increasing.
For faith alone can justify,
Works serve our neighbor and supply The proof that faith is living.
(Lutheran Service Book, 555:9)

Wednesday, November 14, 2018

Matthew 25:31-35 When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

HE WILL SHEPHERD HIS SHEEP INTO HEAVEN

Among the events which the Scriptures foretell will transpire on the Last Day is the great division of believers and unbelievers. Every person who has ever lived shall be resurrected from their graves and made to stand before the Lord their Judge. He will then separate the mass of humanity into two groups. One group He will usher into heaven's glory, the other He will consign to the fiery pit of hell.

The criterion He will use to make this division is clearly spelled out in the Scriptures: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24).

God gave the Bible to us for this purpose so we might place our trust in Him as our deliverer from sin and death and hell, and live with Him in Paradise.

So on the Last Day, when you stand before your Savior and if He should ask you: "Why should I let you into heaven?" let this be your answer: "Because in love You lived and died for me, Lord, and You rose again to obtain for me the crown of life. All glory be to You!"

Nothing have I, Christ, to offer, You alone, my highest good.
Nothing have I, Lord, to proffer But Your crimson-colored blood.
Your death on the cross has death wholly defeated And thereby my
righteousness fully completed;
Salvation's white raiments I there did obtain, And in them in glory with You I
shall reign. (Lutheran Service Book, 536:3)

Thursday, September 20, 2018

Nehemiah 8:6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Psalms 141:2 Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

1 Timothy 2:8 Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.

UP-REACH FOR YOUR MISSION-MINDED MINISTRY!

Many Christians worship by lifting their hands during a service or song. There's nothing wrong with that. The people during Ezra's, David's, and Timothy's time did the same thing. But does that lifting of hands movement have a purpose, or is it like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable who raised his hands in prayer as a spectacle for all to behold? The lifting up of the hands in the passages above all had to do with very humble prayer. But what does that lifting up have to do with a mission-minded ministry in your life or congregation?

We may think of IN-REACH as a ministry of the Word of God to those in our "household of faith" (e. g. our congregation), and OUT-REACH as taking the Word of God to all as we go along with our daily lives. But what then is UP-REACH? Up-reach is a simple way of remembering to lift up our hands in prayer to the Lord (whether our hands are low or high) for His blessings on our ministry of His Word. Mission-minded ministry turns to the Lord, asking that all Christians might have a willing heart to share the gospel. It is prayer that the Lord blesses the efforts we do as a congregation or individually so that we trust "His Word will not return to Him void, but accomplish what He pleases" (cf. Isaiah 55:11).

As we have the heart from our Savior to speak about His dying love for all sinners, and His conquering of death for us all in His resurrection, let's not forget the power of prayer (James 5:16)! Humbled by the blood of our Savior's redemptive work, may the simple UP-REACH we do through prayer to our Lord and Savior Jesus be representative (Hands uplifted to receive God's answer to our prayer!) of our confidence He will be with us and bless us as we pray about keeping a mission-minded ministry among us!

Friday, September 21, 2018

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Acts 17:11b ... they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily ...

DOWN-REACH FOR YOUR MISSION-MINDED MINISTRY

The Apostle Peter was such an eager disciple for Jesus, wasn't he? Remember when he asked to come to Jesus on the water (Matthew 14:28-29)? It didn't take Peter long to sink, though, when he lost focus on Jesus. Peter had a lot left to learn. But so do we!

IN-REACH to our fellow church members, OUT-REACH to anyone in our daily life, and yes, even the UP-REACH of prayer really all are nothing without the DOWN-REACH of Jesus' blessing in Word and Sacrament. In other words, because we have so much to learn like Peter did (who walked on water!), we are not going to be ready to do any in-reach, out-reach, or up-reach until the Lord showers His wisdom, understanding, patience, and love down on us through the reading and hearing of His Word!

The early church in the passages above didn't have some clever new way to share the gospel. Both passages above showed that "they continued steadfastly" and "received the word ... daily" to learn and grow in their knowledge, appreciation, and application of Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil. They grew in the wisdom of Jesus' doctrine and teachings and that Godly wisdom was blessed in their ministry for Christ's kingdom!

Christ forgives us too for doubting like Peter did and sinking in our fears of failure and sinfulness. But Jesus continues to reach down to pick us up as He teaches us to rely on Him alone in whatever we do in word or deed. A mission-minded ministry is truly blessed as it begins with continuous learning from God's Holy Word and the faithfulness of Christ. He is faithful to fuel our prayer life for a ministry that reaches IN to the lives of our fellow Christians, and OUT to all the world with the Word of eternal life through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Tuesday, November 13, 2018

Matthew 25:31, Luke 21:28 When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory ... Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.

THE LAST DAY WILL BY OUR HAPPIEST DAY

It's a custom in the Lutheran Church, as the church year winds down to its close, to direct our thoughts to the topic of the End Times, to the Second Coming of Christ, and to the life of glory that awaits us in heaven.

The Bible has much to say to us on this subject for our spiritual encouragement. One of things it teaches is that, when Jesus appears on earth on the Last Day He will put His unsurpassed glory as the eternal Son of God on full display for all to behold. His coming then will be altogether different from His coming to earth the first time. When He came to earth two thousand years ago He came in quietness and gentleness. He was born lowly in a stable. He lived the life of a poor servant and died the shameful death of the cross that He might save us.

When He returns to earth on the Last Day He will come with the fullness of His divine majesty and holiness shining forth brilliantly from one end of the earth to the other. He'll be flanked by an angel-army comprised of thousands. Nor will it be a quiet event. "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

How this shall happen we cannot explain. We humbly accept what the Bible says and we look forward to it with joy. We say with John: "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

The Last Day will be our happiest day for it will be the day of our heavenly home-coming to be with the Lord forever.

Monday, November 12, 2018

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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.

EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE

I recently mentioned to my wife that I needed some new running shoes. She handed me a 30% off coupon along with \$20 in Kohl's Cash and another coupon for \$15 off any purchase. I was all set to save some money the next day. Then we looked a little closer and realized that the \$15 off coupon expired that night. It was already 10:00 pm and too late to go shopping. The word "expired" caused a bit of disappointment and cost me \$15.

Aren't you glad that the promises of our Savior do not have an expiration date? When Jesus sent His disciples out to all the nations to make disciples by teaching and baptizing, He also attached the promise of His abiding presence to give them courage and strength. And then, it's almost as if Jesus anticipated their concern that this promise might come with an expiration date. So He encouraged them, and us, by letting us know that He will be with us, every step of the way, "even to the end of the age."

There is an expiration date to the time of grace for every individual that lives on this earth. But the promise of our Savior's presence will not expire. As long as we live and breathe and this earth continues, our Savior will be with us. That's a promise from the One who has faithfully kept every promise He has ever made. Need proof? Look to the cross and the empty

Saturday, September 22, 2018

1 John 1:8-9 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

HE IS FAITHFUL

Martin Luther once said that something even as small as a penny can block our way to heaven if we let it. The smallest sin has that same possibility for us. If we do not face up to the truth about our sins, we erect a barrier between ourselves and our God which could become such that it destroys our faith in Him. The person who does this sets himself outside of God's grace. From this preserve us, heavenly Father.

Our Bible verse goes on to give us the other side of this coin. It says that if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Yes, if we face up to the truth about our sins, God will act according to His faithfulness and justice. He is indeed faithful because He holds true to His promises. He has said that because of Jesus' earthly life, suffering and death and empty tomb, He remembers our sins no more.

When we repent of our sins we experience His sweet grace which He gives us in His Word and sacraments. His grace blots out our record of sins against Him because His grace enables Him to make good His promise to forgive us. And He is also just to forgive us because Christ has paid for our sins, and we by faith lay claim to Christ's payment and His promise of forgiveness. Our sins are indeed covered by Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 376:1)

-- Abridged from "The Lutheran Spokesman"

Monday, September 24, 2018

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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."

MAKE DISCIPLES

Jesus says to go and make disciples. That's a pretty tall and daunting task. In fact it's so daunting that anyone who makes an honest introspective inventory of their gifts and abilities will have to admit, "I'm not up to the task." And isn't this exactly what Satan loves for us to do? Because when we stop looking to Jesus and focus on ourselves one of two things will always happen. We will either become like the Pharisees who thought too highly of their ability to please the Lord in and of themselves. Or we will be led to utter despair as we consider our sinful flesh and our inability to please the Lord in and of ourselves.

When it comes to making disciples, we look to Jesus not to ourselves. We look to the life-changing message of sins forgiven because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. That changes individuals from misled followers of the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh into followers of Jesus. It's the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, and enlightens every single disciple of Jesus. Sure, Jesus uses us to deliver Gospel in word and sacrament to accomplish the making of disciples, but the power is in the message, not in the one who delivers it. And praise be to God for the power of His Gospel because it takes the pressure off of the one who delivers that message and refreshes and encourages us for the privilege of being His ambassadors!

When Jesus says to go and make disciples, He's not giving us another law to keep or another work to be accomplished. He's simply giving us the privilege of announcing the Good News of everything that His work on the cross has already accomplished.

Saturday, November 10, 2018

Matthew 19: 5 For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

MARRIAGE MATH

According to the Bible, if marriage were a math equation it would look like this: $1 + 1 = 1$. What does God mean by that? Simply this--that it is His design, purpose, and will regarding marriage that husband and wife become one in many ways:

- * they are bonded together in life's most intimate union and relationship -- physically, emotionally, and (we pray) also spiritually;
- * they become part of each other so that nothing ever separates them until death;
- * they cherish and care for each other as Christ does the Church;
- * each other's needs, desires, and dreams become their own;
- * each willingly sacrifices self, and anything else, for the other;
- * they joyfully and faithfully carry out their complementary biblical roles as husband and wife.

All of this is God's description of marital love in Scripture--a permanent, heartfelt, unwavering, unselfish, sacrificial bond and commitment patterned after Christ's love-commitment to His beloved bride, the Church. And since God is the perfect Creator, Designer, and Implementer of Christian marriage, we do well to hear and heed His counsel as the ultimate authority on the subject.

While this ideal and intimate marital union meets daily opposition from both our society and our own sinful hearts, our hope in Christian marriage--as in life--always remains the forgiving love of our God and Savior. His great love is the true foundation for all earthly love, including marriage. He alone can fill our hearts with the kind of love for Him and for our spouses that it takes to make life and marriage work.

May God's wonderful marriage math equation ($1 + 1 = 1$) add up in our hearts and lives to a God-pleasing and blessed Christian marriage.

-- Adapted from the "Lutheran Spokesman"

Friday, November 9, 2018

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER IN LOVE BECAUSE . . .

"Don't egg him on."

Dad used to say that to us kids when we encouraged each other in something foolish or wrong. It's a failing we have as human beings. We're much more likely to encourage each other in what is harmful than in what is helpful. Deliberately pushing someone until they lose control in an outburst of temper is a classic example. And it's not just children that do this, is it?

By inspiration of the Spirit the writer to early Jewish Christians also urges us to encourage each other in things altogether different, namely, love and good deeds. Rather than looking for occasions to criticize or find fault with one another, let us instead be on the alert to encourage. Instead of provoking to anger, let us provoke to love and to acts of kindness.

Now if we are to consciously and deliberately spur others on in doing good, we ourselves will need to think on good goals to be pursued. For this we will need to turn to the Word of God. In the Bible, through the message of God's great love in Christ, the Spirit of God moves us to desire what is good in order to thank God for His great goodness to us. There is, after all, no more powerful example of love in action than the eternal Father's sending of His Son to lay down His perfectly loving life for us poor sinners.

And, speaking of the Savior, remember this same Jesus is returning. Could be today. Could be tomorrow. What a Day! What a Savior! Face to face! What a future! And what better reason to go about doing good and encouraging others to do the same, especially those you meet with regularly as you together await the Day.

Think about that as you think about the day ahead. Makes a big difference, doesn't it.

Tuesday, September 25, 2018

Acts 17:16-17 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ...

ALONE

Paul was alone. He had been smuggled out of Thessalonica, sent out of Berea for his own protection, and left alone in Athens. It is not hard to imagine that Paul might have been feeling low at a time like that, is it?

Times of discouragement certainly come to all of us. Even in our health and strength we may face times when we wonder... So how did the Lord give Paul strength to continue in faraway Athens, all alone? He was spurred on to continue serving his Savior when he looked around. He saw a center of culture for the world and a city full of idols! (Idolatry and superstition do not come from intellectual ignorance, but from spiritual ignorance.)

Paul saw people moving ever closer to meeting their Maker, but not knowing where they were going. The greatest need of these people was also his greatest need, and it was supplied by Jesus Christ and the resurrection from the dead. This is also what he began discussing every chance he got.

So it was not confidence in himself or his track record that kept him going, but confidence that Jesus Christ-- who on the cross paid what we owed to God-- would also supply ALL his needs. It was not that Paul was so great, but that Jesus Christ was so great! This was the knowledge that kept him going, and in this he was no different from you or me.

Wednesday, September 26, 2018

Acts 18:10 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid: keep on speaking, do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, for I have many people in this city."

NEVER ALONE

October, 1517: 33 year old Professor Luther wrote against the abuse of the Gospel and the Reformation was begun.

April, 1521: Luther was summoned to Worms, and tried before the emperor and princes of his world. Standing there in peril of his life, the lone monk refused to retract the Scripture truths which he had taught.

Nine years later, at Augsburg, a Lutheran Confession was presented to the same emperor, but this time Martin Luther was not even there. He was still declared outlaw, and could not attend. But by now the Lord had called to his side more and more people, including princes, dukes, and electors to open confession of Christ's saving work. The lone monk was alone no longer. Of course, the truth is: He never was alone.

After Paul left Athens, he came to Corinth, the political capital of southern Greece, a city teeming with both poverty-stricken and wealth-stricken people, a city so filled with immorality that to describe debauchery and corruption the saying was: "They live as they do at Corinth."

Here Paul proclaimed Jesus-- crucified, dead, buried, and risen again! And when the Jews opposed Paul, they became abusive. That was when the Lord spoke to him: "Do not be afraid." Paul afraid? Yes, Paul could also fear, just as you and I do. And why should he not fear? Two reasons: "I am with you; no one is going to attack and harm you," and "I have many people in this city." Never alone!

Thursday, November 8, 2018

Acts 1:11 Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.

MAYBE TODAY

There are some days on the Christian calendar that we celebrate for by looking in two directions: back and forward. Jesus' Resurrection is one. He was raised from death as He promised-- and we shall be too. Jesus' Ascension is another. We remember how He led His disciples out to the vicinity of Bethany, lifted up his hands and blessed them, and how while he was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven (Luke 24:50). We also remember the words of the angel at Jesus' Ascension and the promise of His visible Return in glory at the end of time.

Jesus' Return is a promise He will most assuredly keep. One proof of that is in the way in which He left-- with His arms upraised in blessing. When we remember the way Jesus ascended we know He wants us never to forget that, though unseen, He is continually blessing His disciples, His believers. And how long will Jesus keep on blessing His believing disciples? What did He Himself say?

"...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3).

These two promises seem to be contradictory. How can Jesus be with each of us here (though unseen), and at the same time be preparing an eternal place for each of us elsewhere? Instead of trying to answer that question, it is far better for us to focus on these two promises of our Lord: to be with us unseen ... until we see Him at His Return on the clouds.

Look again at the ascending Savior and see the ultimate proof that Jesus can and does keep His every promise. Look at His upraised arms. See His hands, and the print of the nails!

Wednesday, November 7, 2018

Psalm 19:9-10 The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold.

THE VALUE OF GOLD

Gold is valuable for many reasons beyond its beauty and the malleability which makes it so useful for jewelry. Gold is able to easily create alloys with countless other metals. It is a wonderful conductor of electricity and heat, Unlike many other metals, gold will not be affected by moisture, air or the almost all corrosive agents.

Unsurprisingly, gold is often used in the construction of computers and organs and other sophisticated electrical instruments. Few things are better for the contact points on electrical switches. God also used gold to "get a message across" in Old Testament times-- in the worship place He designed the Temple.

+ Gold covered the lampstands which portrayed the Christ to come as the Light of the world.

+ Gold covered the table on which loaves of bread were displayed daily, symbolizing the Savior promised as the Bread of Life.

+ The Altar of Incense, which pictured the continual rising of prayer from the hearts of those who trust in God's promises, was also covered in gold.

+ Most importantly, the central message of this worship center, as portrayed in the Ark of the Covenant, was a message conveyed in gold.

The Ark was a golden box, its lid a specially designed cover of beaten gold. On that lid two golden angels knelt, their gold wingtips touching above its midpoint: the Mercyseat of God.

Here the blood of bulls and goats was sprinkled on the Great Day of Atonement. This pictured in prophesy that Great Day when Jesus, the Lamb of God, would offer Himself in bloody Sacrifice to make atonement for the sins of all the people of the world.

When gold conveys this message, its value far exceeds any price named on a securities exchange.

Thursday, September 27, 2018

Acts 18:20-21 When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus.

GOD'S WILL

When the Jews in Ephesus wanted Paul to stay longer, he declined. He was on his way home to Jerusalem and Antioch. But he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will."

"If it is God's will." Not only is God well able to make it happen, but God's will is the best thing that can happen! This is not something that we know by instinct. To the world "an act of God" usually means "disaster." But because we have seen Him send His dear Son to die for us, we know that "if it is God's will," even disasters will serve a good purpose. If they take our life, there will be no more hunger, thirst, sorrow, tears or pain. And if they don't take our life, they can still serve for our good.

If it is God's will that things are kept from us or taken from us, then God has something better in mind for us. He will not give up His beloved Son for us and then fail to take care of our lesser needs. That includes a friend, a spouse, a child, a home, peace, health, education, honor, and all the other things we pray for as "daily bread." If it is God's will, it will be good.

In this confidence we can pray: "Thy will be done." Many are looking for a heaven on earth. Well, here it is. When God's will-- powerful and good-- which is done in heaven, is also done on earth, then heaven has come to earth.

Friday, September 28, 2018

Acts 19:21-24 After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer. About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen.

OUR LONG RANGE PLANS

The Lord would grant Paul's desire to go to Jerusalem, and also fulfill his determination to see Rome, though perhaps not quite in the way that Paul was thinking when he stated these objectives, for he would almost be torn apart in Jerusalem, spend years in prison, and then go in chains to Rome.

We too have long range goals, don't we? And when the day to day events aren't quite what we expected, the Lord may still grant our long-range desire. But He may have some training in mind that we do not anticipate. He may lead us through some difficult times so that we will be equipped to help someone down the road (and out of sight). He may give us patience by letting some tribulation come our way. So we should not be discouraged, but continue to seek strength and guidance from our Savior.

The opposition from the silversmiths did not stop the gospel in Ephesus, and the power of that gospel in Paul's life prevented the temptations of wealth from side-tracking him. He remembered how Jesus had left the riches of heaven for him, and had given up earth's greatest treasure (His own life) for him. May we always remember that this is also true for us.

Tuesday, November 6, 2018

John 5:24-25 Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

ALIVE!

The dead return to life and seek human victims. That was the premise of a 1968 black and white movie that became a cult classic: "Night of the Living Dead." Who would have thought that 50 years later the film itself would return to life as a popular TV show-- and claim thousands of victims. This type of movie is classified as a horror film. The Bible says that, in a sense, this is actually happening the world over-- and it is truly horrible.

The Bible tells us that there ARE thousands of people who appear to be alive. They walk and talk, eat and drink, wake and sleep, work and do business. And yet, they are dead, dead inside. These are the spiritually dead. They are dead to God in heart and life. Such people may even be looking to please God in the way they live, but since they invariably depend on their own works and actions to do this, they have no living relationship with the living God.

The dead, by definition, cannot hear or respond to verbal direction. But Jesus said (John 5:24-25) He spoke to spiritually dead people with life-giving results in the first century-- and still does today. This happens whenever and wherever people are told how He lived and died in their place to set them right with God, to give them life for death, now and forever. Confident trust in Christ and what He has done for us, that is faith and that is life. A miracle of God!

Monday, November 5, 2018

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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."

I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

Imagine yourself one of the disciples of Jesus on the day He gave the Great Commission. This is the same Jesus that you saw beaten, bloody, humiliated, and hanging on a cross not that long ago. He hung there because He dared to speak the truth of God's saving Word and because of that, the religious leaders of the day hated Him enough to have Him crucified. Those religious leaders were still leading. You remember that Jesus once told you that as they hated Him they would also hate you (John 15:18). And now He is telling you to go and make disciples by baptizing and teaching!

Let's make no mistake, Jesus was sending His disciples out on a very difficult and dangerous mission. So dangerous in fact, that most, if not all of them, would lose their lives for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

For the most part, we don't need to fear for our lives when we spread the Gospel. But it can still be intimidating. And we could all use a little extra comfort and encouragement as we go about the blessed privilege of proclaiming the Good News. And so, Jesus attaches a promise to this great commission. He tells His disciples then and He tells us now "I will be with you always!"

There is no place too dangerous or too difficult for Jesus to accompany us. He is there with us to strengthen and encourage us in the face of every trial. And this promise comes from the faithful Son of God who has kept every promise He has ever made. He promises to be with us always!

Saturday, September 29, 2018

John 6:63 "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."

WHY READ THE BIBLE?

There was a young student who, after returning to the seminary from his second tour of summer vicaring at a congregation, strolled into the classroom and announced to his fellow students: "I'm ready to go pastor a congregation right now! Why take another year of seminary?" But that student soon discovered, upon entering his first parish following graduation, that he had much learning to do. In fact, he often wished he could return to the seminary for another few years.

It is easy, when reading the Bible, to slip into a mindset that says, "Oh, I already know all of this!" And then to skip over it. Or, when pressed for time, to skip one's daily reading. After all, "I know what's in there." True, good Christian, you do know what's in there. That's why you are a Christian - the Spirit taught you from that God-breathed, without-error Word about your Savior. But how do we suppose that we shall continue to know what is in there? How do we expect to grow in the faith that leads to eternal life? How do we expect to "... always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you," (1 Peter 3:15) unless we continue to read that Word, study it, and learn it?

Why read the Bible? Because, as Jesus says: "The words that I speak, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). It is God's Word by which He would speak to us and by which the Holy Spirit would work and strengthen faith in God our Savior; that Word is life, spiritual life, the power for a God-pleasing life; and that Word is eternal life for us and for those with whom we share it.

-- Abridged from the "Lutheran Spokesman"

Monday, October 1, 2018

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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.

ALL THE NATIONS

What is the first thought that comes to mind when you hear a term like "all nations"? Your mind's eye may lead you to a mud-walled hut in an African jungle or some other primitive locale. And there is certainly much work to be done in spreading the Gospel in these distant lands. But isn't your next door neighbor or your co-worker or your own spouse or children or the stranger sitting next to you on the bus part of "all nations"?

While the great commission may seem overwhelmingly impossible when we think of billions of people on the earth today, it doesn't limit our opportunities to seemingly impossible-to-reach locations either. In fact, when you think about it, the phrase "all nations" serves to encourage the child of God to start sharing the good news with those around you right now, because they too are part of "all nations." We are sent to share the Gospel with all nations, with all people, wherever and whenever the Lord opens the door of opportunity-- across the table, across the hall, next door, across the street, across the county, the next town over, across the state, across the country, or maybe even on the other side of the world!

Saturday, November 3, 2018

Galatians 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?

THE GALATIANS AND LUTHER ON THE BRINK

The foolish Galatian Christians were on the brink of disaster. "Who has bewitched you?" Paul asked them. "Jesus Christ crucified was crucified before your very eyes." Yet they were trying to improve their standing with God by their observances: special ceremonies, etc., etc. Depending on one's own works leads a) to Pharisaic pride which fails to look upon the wayward heart within, or b) to despair upon seeing the truth.

Five centuries ago Martin Luther was struggling with the same danger. He had tried to stand before God with his outward observances, but knew the truth: that his heart was nowhere as happy with God as his ceremonies suggested. He was on the brink of destruction, despairing of any help to save him from the God who knew his heart.

Then it happened. God's Word held Christ before his eyes, crucified for all sins, rising to declare him innocent by reason of forgiveness, at peace with God. When the Spirit's Word persuaded him to believe this, it was as though heaven was opened up before him.

And having begun with the Spirit, Luther refused to go back again to relying on his Christian works for peace with God. He continued to proclaim that God's completed work in Christ on the cross was what reconciled the world to God, rather than God's work in us, which will not be finished until the resurrection.

Rejoice! Here is something rock solid to believe, not dependent in anyway upon ourselves.

Let me never, Lord, forsake Thee,
E'en tho' bitter pain and strife
On my way shall overtake me;
But may I thro' all my life
Walk in fervent love to Thee,
In all woes for comfort flee
To Thy birth, Thy death, and passion
Till I see Thy full salvation. Amen. TLH 401:2

-- Adapted from the "Lutheran Spokesman"

Friday, November 2, 2018

1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

MOTIVATION FOR THE DAY

Are you feeling motivated today, or maybe not so much? It makes a difference in your whole outlook. If you're motivated, you have a purpose and goal in mind. Chances are, you'll get a lot done. You'll make good use of your time. You'll see the day as worthwhile.

But where do you find that motivation? Money may motivate a person to put in 40 hours at the job. Fear of a fine might motivate a driver to stay within the speed limit on the freeway. A holiday trip could motivate us to catch up on household chores before the weekend. But what if those motivations lose their effectiveness? Have you ever found yourself asking, "So what? What difference does it make?" Many people at one time or another feel a profound lack of motivation, because they don't see any real meaning and significance to their time on earth.

When you need motivation to get out of bed and get going, think of what motivated Jesus. Why did He become man and live here on earth? Why did He put up with a very plain kind of life without all the luxuries we take for granted? Why did He endure the persecution of His enemies and finally even allow them to crucify Him, when He could have summoned legions of angels to defend Him? It wasn't money, possessions, prestige, power or any other personal advantage. His motive was pure love. "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:2).

Need motivation and purpose? Look to Christ's incredible love for you. By faith the Spirit has planted that love in your heart and given you the joy of forgiveness and the certainty of eternal life. Because of His love, you have a purpose and goal. "Live a life of love," Paul urges (Ephesians 5:2). "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Whether at work or school, enjoying a long weekend with friends, or just taking care of things at home, there will always be opportunities to put Jesus' love into practice in forgiveness, kindness, helpfulness, and patience. That makes every day worthwhile.

Tuesday, October 2, 2018

John 6:35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

FEED YOUR SOUL!

If a person wants to have a strong, healthy body, one of the most important things to do is feed the body good, substantial, nourishing food. In fact, without good, regular nourishment, the body will not only become unhealthy, it will waste away and die.

What is true of man's body is also true of his soul. Unless the soul gets good, substantial, wholesome, and soul-nourishing food, it cannot live, but will also suffer all the pains which precede a death of starvation, and will finally die. Which does not mean that it shall pass out of existence, but that it shall be damned. Anyone who is interested in finding out what pain and agony of a damned soul is like may read about it in Scripture where Christ describes the woe and misery of those souls. And anyone interested in becoming acquainted with the pains and agonies which precede the death of starvation may read about it in the early life history of Dr. Martin Luther. For his soul, although it did not die but was rescued, experienced all these starvation pains. Read the early life history of Luther, the life which he spent in the Roman Catholic Church, the life when he had to feed his soul on false teachings of man and see how his soul was wasting away because it could find no comfort, no peace, no way of silencing the attacks of conscience and Satan.

About the soul of man: Scripture says it is not a material thing created out of matter as the body was created out of the dust of the ground, but it is a spirit which man received from God Himself when He breathed the breath of life in the nostrils of man. Since the soul of man is not matter, but a spirit, therefore it cannot live by or on material things. Of course, there are people who claim that it can, but they're only fooling themselves. No, if the soul is a spirit then it can only live on spiritual food.

And what might that correct spiritual soul-diet be? The only One who can tell us is He who gave us our souls, God. In Scripture He answers this question-- first in a negative way and then in a positive way. His negative answer now is as follows-- in His own words: "In vain do they worship Me,

teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." So He says in Matthew 15:9. And again, in Psalm 108:12, He says, "For the help of man is useless." Hence His negative answer to our question would be: Man with his teachings or doctrines has nothing at all to offer to nourish the souls of men and women.

In a positive way now the Lord has this to answer to our question: "The Law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul." Thus we read in Psalm 19:7. "Hear [His Word] and your soul shall live!" Thus He says in Isaiah 55:3. "Man lives by every Word of God!" So He says in Luke 4:4. His answer to our question, therefore, is this: "Your soul shall live by the Word of God!" That is its food and its only food.

This life-giving food for your souls is dwelling richly among you, my friends. At home you have it in your Bible where you can partake of it by reading it. Every week it is preached in your midst, so that you may partake of it in an audible way. Your soul does not ever need to starve or experience any pains of starvation, for you always have the right soul-food on hand.

takes you into His confidence and assures you that no matter what, He will never leave you or forsake you. He will always answer your prayers in the best way at just the right time.

Thursday, November 1, 2018

1 Peter 3:12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.

WHERE IS JESUS?

There's a movie in which one character, a young teacher, at a time of great personal crisis, pours out her heart to her father saying, "Jesus seems a million miles away!" Just when she needed Him most, He seemed to be disinterested and out of reach.

Maybe you have felt the same way. The death of a loved one leaves you grief-stricken, and your prayers for the Lord to take away the hurt seem to fall on deaf ears. You ask Him to defuse growing tensions at work, but the stress keeps building. You ask Him for a Christian spouse, and nothing happens. You plead for a clear indication of how to deal with a problem in the family, and the matter just seems to get more complicated.

You're not alone. David felt that way too as he penned Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent."

It's terrifying to think that there could be times when Jesus is a "million miles away." What's more, there is no reason in us for Jesus to care. It is not that we are such faithful followers, that He can't help but reward us by coming to our aid. He doesn't owe us for what we have done for Him. We deserve to have Him turn His back and leave us to our rightful punishment.

Yet He doesn't do that. We know that by looking again at Psalm 22. The words sound so familiar, because they were not just spoken by David, but by Jesus as He hung dying on the cross. The Holy Spirit inspired David to foretell what Jesus would pray to His heavenly Father many centuries later.

In Jesus' plea we find reassurance that He is never far away and that He will never forsake us because of our sin. For there on the cross Jesus was forsaken by God in our place. The Father turned His back on His own Son because He laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Jesus paid the penalty in full and cried out in victory, "It is finished!"

So don't worry. In Jesus all is well between you and God. "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer" (1 Peter 3:12). With His word of forgiveness He wraps you tightly in His arms and says, "I love you." With every word about Himself and His plans He

Wednesday, October 3, 2018

Luke 11:28 But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

TREASURE THE WORD OF GOD!

There was a time when the souls of men yearned and longed for the Bread of Life, but were deprived of it. And that time is not so far removed from us, only five centuries ago. But how did it happen that people's souls didn't have this food? Not many centuries after the days of the Apostle Paul, selfish men, evil men, and seducers succeeded in gaining the upper hand in the Christian church. Then through scheming and by their trickery, they took away the Bible from people and put in its place the teachings and doctrines of men, which Christ says are absolutely no good for the soul.

For example, in place of the Bible doctrine which says that man is not justified by his works, but alone through the merits of Christ, they taught that man must, by his own works, work out his own justification and salvation. In other words, they simply turned the Word of God around (and the people, without access to the Word themselves, were easily deceived). The church did this not only with one teaching of God's Word, but with many.

But things are not so today, because God is gracious and let one of those men whose soul was starving gain access to Scripture. And that was Dr. Martin Luther. Because he was a priest in the Catholic Church he had access to the Bible, which was not accessible to the common people. Through study of God's Word, he saw the false doctrines of men and after his soul had been revived by the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, he translated the Bible out of the original into the language which all his countrymen could understand. He thus made it possible that people again had that wholesome soul food, and were revived-- knowing that Jesus had paid for their sins as well! Not only did he bring back this food for the soul, he also did what our text says: he kept it! That means that he guarded it and treasured it so that those men who tried to mix into it the doctrines of men were put to shame.

For example, when Ulrich Zwingli tried to teach that in the Lord's Supper the bread and wine were only a picture of Christ's body and blood, Luther said,

"That is not what Scripture says, but this is what Scripture says, 'This bread and wine is My body and blood!'" And what he did with Zwingli he did with many others, so that the true soul food, although it is adulterated by many today, is still being preached pure and simple to many millions.

And you are among those many millions. Therefore you are indeed fortunate and favored by God. Yes, you became as our text says, blessed by hearing the Word and keeping it, yes, by treasuring the Word of God!

can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

It's not just political candidates, we, too, fall short in keeping our word. We often lack the will and the strength to live up to our promises made to God and to those around us. But the Lord's faithfulness is perfect. His forgiveness is an accomplished fact. "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Let the promises of our loving Lord relieve your anxiety. Don't hesitate to get excited. Confidently plan for an eternal future with Him.

Wednesday, October 31, 2018

2 Corinthians 1:20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.

THE PROBLEM WITH PROMISES

In the coming years there will be good-paying jobs for everyone. A college education will be free. Our borders will be secure. Terrorism will be defeated. Healthcare will be affordable and available to all. We have heard all these promises and many more over and over again. So are you relieved and excited for the future? Already making plans for what you will do when all these promises become reality? Hardly. We know better. There is a problem with promises. No matter how grand and far-reaching, they're useless and misleading unless there is the will and strength to back them up. It's hard to get excited and count on things so unreliable and uncertain.

Some people treat God's promises the same way. They don't get excited. They don't think and live as though they are actually going to be fulfilled. But that's a mistake. God's promises are on a completely different plane from those of candidates for public office. God's promises are far greater and more reliable than those of any human being. He told our first parents that in spite of their sin, He would not abandon them and their descendants to eternal death. Instead, He promised the Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head. In the fullness of time He kept His word. He sent His only-begotten Son to be mankind's substitute under the law and to be the Lamb of God who would sacrifice Himself on the cross in payment for the sins of all. Jesus promises that He will come again to bring earth's history to a close and to raise all who believe in Him to eternal life in Paradise.

That's not all. In your daily Bible reading for the next week keep track of all the promises the Lord makes. He assures you that He will never leave you or forsake you. In an uncertain political climate His promise that He is always directing events for the benefit of His Church is priceless. His invitation to call upon Him in the day of trouble comes with an ironclad guarantee that He will deliver you. No matter what happens, hold on with all your might to His promise that nothing can separate you from His love. When it seems as though life's circumstances are just too hard to bear, remember what His Word says: "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you

Thursday, October 4, 2018

Philippians 2:16 ... Holding fast to the word of life ...

THE WORD OF EVERLASTING LIFE

Why are those who hear God's Word blessed? As far as your body is concerned, you can be blessed with only the most healthy food every day of your life, but in the end, no matter how healthy you eat, your body will eventually wear out and die. But the word of life does not have such limitations for body or for soul.

Think, for instance, when your soul is wanting comfort it finds comforting food there. For example, when Satan and conscience accuse you, saying you are a sinner and you can't be saved, the Word of God tells you that there is One who suffered and died for all sin, also yours, and has paid for every single one of them. Therefore you need not fear damnation, but can come to Jesus and there find full forgiveness.

And again, when your soul is cast down with cares and worries, that Word of God comes to you and tells you to cast all your cares on the Lord, for He cares for you-- even as He cares for the lilies and sparrows and even for each of the hairs on your head. Or again, when you are in a state of mind which trembles at the thought of death, the Word of God comes to you and says that Jesus will be your Companion through the valley of the shadow of death. He will comfort you with His rod and staff.

My friends, in all cases which may arise here in life you have, in the Word of God, nourishment for your soul which will supply you with whatever you need. Therefore, you are blessed, for by that Word of God your soul is strengthened and preserved unto life everlasting, where all misery shall be wiped away, body and soul.

Realizing what we have in the Word of God, let us during this 500th Reformation Anniversary thank God for His gifts and bow our hearts in prayer:

Abide our dear Redeemer
Among us with Thy Word
And thus now and hereafter
True peace and joy afford!

Friday, October 5, 2018

John 8:31-32 If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

MAN DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE

Why did Luther hold so stubbornly to Scripture? Why not give in a little on some of these things?

It's very simple. To call the plain words of Scripture into question is to call God's verdict into question. Had Luther given in on the works versus faith argument, we would still be trying to make up for our sins with our good works. Had Luther given in to Zwingli on the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper we would have been robbed of the assurance that the Sacraments bring: That our sins are forgiven.

We might say, "Of course we shouldn't give in on these big, important topics. But why not give in on some of the other, less important ones?" Because if we give up one part of God's Word, where does it stop? If some of it is not true, even a little bit of it, then all of it might not be true!

Who's going to decide which parts we don't need? Jesus Himself said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). God's Word is not ours to tamper with. Christ doesn't say, "If you abide in most of My Word, you are truly My disciples." If we depart from His Word we endanger the freedom that we have in Christ, for we will have departed from the foundation of our faith. If we abide or remain in Christ's Word, there can be no doubt about our eternal freedom, for God's verdict stands: "Not guilty through Christ!"

Tuesday, October 30, 2018

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast.

BY GRACE ALONE

As you are likely well aware, it was on this day 500 years ago that Martin Luther, Augustinian monk and Doctor of Theology posted an "Invitation to Debate" for the faculty of the University at Wittenberg, Germany. As was required, he nailed his 95 THESES (statements) to be debated to the university's public "bulletin board" -- namely, the door of the Castle Church. The subject was the abuse of the sale of indulgences. These certificates of forgiveness of sins promised those who purchased them that they thereby acquired credit for the good works of saints who had done more good things than were actually necessary to make up for their own sins.

Those who believe they can with gold or silver buy God's forgiveness may be few today, but the notion that forgiveness for sins of the past can be gained through good deeds in the future surely persists to the present. The fact is, the average "man-on-the-street" probably pins his hope of heaven (if he believes in such a place) on the fact that he/she has lived a "pretty good life" or at least has not "done anything really bad."

Furthermore, those who confess that it is Christ alone who has set us right with God and made us heirs of heaven are daily tempted to rely at least in part on our own works, promises or lifestyle. How easy it is to feel you are forgiven because you truly and sincerely repent your sin. Or because you sincerely promise not to repeat the sin involved. Or because you resolve in all seriousness to do the good things you have been neglecting. And isn't it easy to give yourself credit before God for things you are only able to do by His strength? Or even to act as though your faith was some kind of daily activity through which you made up for any sin you might have slipped into?

With the very first of his theses Luther turns us away from ANY reliance on ourselves and points us to Christ and His cross (that's repentance!): "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

So on this Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, let us each post these words in our heart-- and hold them fast every day: " For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast!"

Monday, October 29, 2018

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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.

TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU ...

Tomorrow is October 31st, Reformation Day! It seems rather fitting that we would be considering a passage of Scripture that refers to "ALL THINGS that I [God] has commanded you." Perhaps we think of Martin Luther as a reformer, and rightfully so. But do you think of him as an evangelist? If we don't, then perhaps we should! Martin Luther realized that much of what Scripture taught concerning the salvation of sinners had been corrupted by and eliminated from what was being taught. The false thoughts and ideas from the hearts and minds of corrupt mankind had replaced "all things that God had commanded." And so the message preached was no longer the truth of God's word, no longer the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, the message being preached was no longer the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes (cf. Romans 1:16).

Martin Luther sought to restore ALL the truth of God's saving word to the Church and thus to the world. We are sent forth as Christ's ambassadors to teach all that God has commanded in the pages of Holy Scripture. While this might seem like a burden, in fact, it is a relief for the child of God. It's a relief because we don't have to decide what it is important and what is not. All of God's word is important. Everything that God reveals to us in Scripture is important. Again, this is a relief for the ambassador of Christ because we don't need to spend time debating which teachings are important and which ones are not. We can boldly proclaim ALL that God has revealed to us in His Word and trust that His Word is effective and it will accomplish that for which He sent it (cf. Isaiah 55:10-11).

Saturday, October 6, 2018

Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

FAITH ALONE

IT'S BY FAITH ALONE! As the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts from degenerate to regenerate, faith alone is the gift by which the blessings of salvation are received. By faith alone, not by works, nor together with works, lest the Gospel be annulled and Christ be robbed of His full glory as our Savior.

The story is told of a converted American Indian who was asked to show what he understood by grace and faith alone. Placing a worm on the ground, he surrounded it with a circle of dry twigs and then lit the twigs. Watching the worm squirm and wiggle as it sought an impossible escape, the man then reached down and lifted the worm out. So sinful man with all his "squirming and wiggling" cannot escape the hell-fire which surrounds him. Only the Hand of God reaching down from heaven to pluck him from these fires can rescue him.

Salvation unto us has come
By God's free grace and favor;
Good works cannot avert our doom,
They help and save us never.
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone,
Who did for all the world atone;
He is our one Redeemer.

Monday, October 8, 2018

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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.

BAPTIZING THEM ...

Over the past few Monday devotions we've been reminded and encouraged from our Savior's great commission that all of this is really the Lord's work. Nothing better demonstrates this courage-giving truth than the sacrament of baptism. And this is exactly how Jesus says we are to make disciples: by baptizing them. And Scripture so clearly reveals that Baptism is something that God does for us, not something that we do for God. When the water and Word of holy baptism is applied as God commands, Scripture reveals that wonderful things happen. It was the Apostle Paul who describes it as "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" in his letter to Titus. Through Peter God reveals that "baptism...now saves us." And it was also Peter whose bold words on the first Pentecost make it so abundantly clear that Baptism offers so much to sinners like us when he proclaimed "Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

These same truths that offer so much comfort to the repentant sinner also offer much encouragement as we consider the work of evangelism. Conversion from a condemned sinner to a redeemed, restored, and forgiven child of God is not our work. It is the work that God accomplishes through the water and word of Baptism. We are simply God's instruments in carrying out that work. That truth encourages the child of God to view the work the evangelism not as a difficult task we must complete, but rather as the privilege it truly is!

Saturday, October 27, 2018

Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength.

ONE LITTLE WORD CAN FELL HIM

Martin Luther's classic Reformation hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," includes the line "Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us . . ."

There are no new tricks in the devil's arsenal. He stays with the tried and the true. "Has God said . . . ?" By that question he introduces false doctrine into the world and into the church. "You shall not surely die." By that bald-faced lie the devil creates indifference in sinful man who thinks that he shall live forever, or that he need not be responsible for his actions. "Your eyes shall be opened, and you will be like God . . ." So the devil creates conflict between man and God; man thinks that God is not treating him fairly, or that somehow he knows at least as much as God, if not more. The reaction of Adam and Eve to the presence of God? "I was afraid because I was naked . . ." "The woman whom you gave to be with me . . ." "The serpent deceived me . . ." It is not our fault!

Are we any different? "The problem in my family is not my fault . . . The problems in the church are not my fault. . . . I am certainly not responsible for any of the evil in the world." Look at yourself in the mirror. The face God shows you in His perfect Law is yours. The roaring lion you see behind you is not after another. He is after you!

Nevertheless, we are bold to sing: "He [Satan] can harm us none, He's judged; the deed is done; One little Word can fell him." The Word shows us the Savior who has taken our sin on Himself, giving us in its place forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. May God and His Word continue to be our Mighty Fortress and trusty shield unto life everlasting!

-- Adapted from the "Lutheran Spokesman"

Friday, October 26, 2018

Galatians 2:16 We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

JUSTIFIED THROUGH FAITH

"Justified" is a forensic verb that was, and still is used in legal proceedings and courtroom settings. It is a no-nonsense, clear declaration of innocence. Totally justified, declared not guilty of all your sins, this is how God almighty sees sinners who have received faith in Jesus Christ!

Three times in this verse the Apostle Paul tells his readers that a person can never be justified by "works of the law." Why so much emphasis? Because we need to hear it! As sinful Christians we are constantly battling that little voice in our heads that tells us that there must be something that we must do to be saved. Sinful humans desperately want to save themselves. We want the glory. We want the credit. We want to pat ourselves on the back every time we do some so-called good deed. That's why the Bible constantly tells us that we are NOT justified by works of the law! To remind us over and over again, to turn us again and again back to Christ!

Three times in this verse the Apostle Paul tells his readers that a person can only be justified by "by faith (believing) in Christ Jesus!" Why so much emphasis? Because we need to hear this too! Through the Gospel message of Christ crucified for sinners, the Holy Spirit works in your heart to create faith. A faith which does indeed justify you. You are declared completely guiltless because of God's incredible, unfathomable love which sent His Son to the cross to be the perfect sacrifice for all the world's sins. This is a message that never gets old!

As sinners, we are constantly tempted to sinfully trust in our own works. "But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" (Romans 5:20). No matter our failures in this life, God's grace more than makes up for them! You can go about your daily life, having full confidence that because of your God-given faith in Christ, you truly are innocent before God, justified of all your sins, and destined for eternal life in heaven with Him and all believers!

Luther: Therefore, we define a Christian as follows: A Christian is not someone who has no sin or feels no sin; he is someone to whom, because of his faith in Christ, God does not impute his sin. This doctrine brings firm consolation to troubled consciences amid genuine terrors.

Tuesday, October 9, 2018

John 8:31 Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

IN JESUS WE HAVE BEEN SET FREE (1)

The 16th century Lutheran Reformation was not just about cold doctrine and theological gobbledygook. No, as here, it was very practical. One of the Reformer's most significant tracts treats the subject of "Christian Liberty" in great detail (1520).

What is more precious than freedom? We Americans pride ourselves in the fact that we live "in the land of the free and the home of the brave." Wars have been fought in defense of our freedoms. Battles are fought in courts and voting booths to defend this or that civil right or freedom, including the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our conscience.

To the Jews who believed Him Jesus addresses the most important freedom of all. Since by nature we are "sold under sin," (Romans 7:14), "the servants of unrighteousness" (Romans 6:16f), "the children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3), we are under the bondage of sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Ah, but then along comes the gospel as our emancipation proclamation! It proclaims a gracious and merciful God who so desired that sinners be freed from sin's bondage and curse that He had His unique Son shed His innocent blood on the cross, thus purchasing forgiveness for all sins and our eternal freedom.

By the grace of God Luther learned to know that gospel as the truth which sets a poor sinner's soul free, truly free. By the same grace of God, you and I likewise know this glorious truth which sets us free--free indeed!

Lord, 'tis not that I did choose Thee; That, I know, could never be;
For this heart would still refuse Thee Had Thy grace not chosen me.
Thou hast from the sin that stained me Washed & cleansed & SET ME FREE,
And unto this end ordained me, That I ever live to Thee.

Praise the God of all creation; Praise the Father's boundless love.
Praise the Lamb, our Expiation, Priest and King enthroned above.
Praise the Spirit of salvation, Him by whom our spirits live.
Undivided adoration To the great Jehovah give.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 37:1, 3)

Wednesday, October 10, 2018

John 8:31 Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

IN JESUS WE HAVE BEEN SET FREE (2)

If our country has fought wars and lost lives to uphold political freedom, it is the "gospel of the truth that sets sinners free" which countless Christian believers over the centuries have fought for and even died for as martyrs.

Dr. Luther was putting his life on the line when he stood before Emperor and Pope at the Diet of Worms in 1521. He could not and would not go against his conscience after he had uncovered the scriptural truth of the freedom Jesus had won for him and all believers. The ten stanzas of the hymn "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" are the Reformer's spiritual autobiography. In its opening stanzas Luther describes the spiritual bondage he felt during his early years as a monk.

Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay; Death brooded darkly o'er me.
Sin was my torment night and day; In sin my mother bore me.
But daily deeper still I fell; My life became a living hell,
So firmly sin possessed me.

My own good works all came to naught, No grace or merit gaining.
Free will against God's judgment fought, Dead to all good remaining.
My fears increased till sheer despair Left only death to be my share;
The pangs of hell I suffered.

You see, before he knew the "gospel of the truth that sets one free," Luther busied himself with all the prescribed works of the Roman Church-- pilgrimages, masses, fastings, prayers, physical chastening, etc. None of it brought him peace and freedom from the curse and condemnation of the law of God-- until the Spirit opened his heart to the gospel truth:

But God had seen my wretched state Before the world's foundation.
And mindful of His mercies great, He planned for my salvation.
He turned to me a father's heart; He did not choose the easy part
But gave His dearest Treasure.

God said to His beloved Son: "It's time to have compassion.
Then go, bright jewel of My crown, And bring to all salvation.
From sin and sorrow SET THEM FREE;
Slay bitter death for them that they May live with You forever."

Thursday, October 25, 2018

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

GOD'S SUCCESS STORY

American humorist Arnold H. Glasow once said, "Success is simple. Do what's right, the right way, at the right time." That's easier said than done!

As Christians, we know that true success in this earthly life is learning to know Jesus as the Savior from sin, thereby gaining eternal life. On our own, we would be completely unsuccessful. As sinful human beings, we naturally do what is wrong, we never go the right way, and we have terrible timing.

In the face of our failures, how incredible is the success of God described in these two verses from Galatians chapter four! God's timing was perfect. The entire history of the world is one perfectly executed plan of God. In the Old Testament writing of the prophets, Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel, God told the specific plans for the fullness of time. How the relationships between Israel and the great powers of the world would develop. How in politics, language, communications, in social, religious, moral affairs, through economic advancement and moral bankruptcy the entire world was in the perfect condition for the Gospel to go out from Jerusalem to the entire world!

In the same way, God's timing was perfect when He sent the Holy Spirit working through the Word into the heart of Martin Luther 500 years ago, revealing to him the Gospel truths of grace alone, faith alone, and Scripture alone. In the same way, God's timing is perfect for you right where you are right now. Your story is already a success story because through faith Christ's success is credited to you.

The ultimate success story is the greatest story ever told: the story of Jesus. Jesus never did what was wrong and always did what was right. He kept the law in our place so that he could buy back the world from its sins. Jesus is the right way. He succeeded in the most important mission of all time, all so that we might be adopted as God's beloved children, heirs of the inheritance of eternal life. Jesus' success covers up all our failures. Jesus' success story is your success story! Thanks be to God!

Luther: Now since Christ has conquered the Law in His own Person, it necessarily follows that He is God by nature. For except for God no one, neither a man nor an angel, is above the Law. But Christ is above the Law, because He has conquered and strangled it.

Wednesday, October 24, 2018

Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

CLOTHED IN CHRIST

In American culture, it seems that social standards are always changing. We see it a lot in the clothing that people wear. It wasn't that long ago that blue jeans were not allowed to be worn at most schools. The unspoken dress code of many modern churches is not what it once was. However, one locale where almost everyone still dresses up in their best and most elegant attire is weddings. Go to almost any American wedding and you'll find men, women, and children wearing ties and dresses.

In Matt. 22:1-14, Jesus tells the parable of the wedding feast. He describes those people who would reject God's Gospel calling to come to the wedding feast (the Kingdom of Heaven). And he describes those chosen to receive the Gospel invitation and be gathered at the wedding feast. There was only one requirement, you must wear the wedding garment provided for you.

When we peer into the perfect mirror of God's holy law, we see ourselves for what we really are: dirty, destitute sinners. Isaiah 64:6: "And all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags." We're wearing the wrong garment. In our sin, the clothing that we're wearing is filthy and unacceptable. We need to change.

Through your baptism, the Holy Spirit has worked saving faith in your heart! You have personally received that call to God's eternal wedding feast. You were chosen before you were born. You were chosen from eternity to be God's beloved child. Not because of anything you have done or will do, but because Christ, through his sinless life and guiltless death, won you a wedding garment. You put on that gleaming white robe when you were baptized and it receives a fresh wash every time you hear about the sacrifice of Christ for all your sins. Isaiah 1:18: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." You are eternally clothed in Christ! Thanks be to God!

Luther: "In Baptism, then, Christ becomes our garment... He is the divine and inestimable gift that the Father has given to us to be our Justifier, Lifegiver, and Redeemer... Paul teaches that Baptism is not a sign but the garment of Christ, in fact, that Christ Himself is the garment. Hence Baptism is a very powerful and effective thing."

Thursday, October 11, 2018

John 8:31 Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

IN JESUS WE HAVE BEEN SET FREE (3)

The Savior says, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed ... "

Many today contend that it doesn't matter if one departs from the Bible in some things. In fact, they often criticize us who hold to Bible teaching, as though we're the ones who don't know what real freedom is. Well, in keeping with the Savior's exhortation to "abide in My word," St. Paul writes, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Galatians 5:9). Simply put, the "yeast" of doctrinal error can undermine and even destroy the gospel of the truth that sets one free.

A couple years ago a report came that "Pope John Paul II whipped himself with a belt, and slept on the floor as acts of penitence and to bring him closer to Christian perfection...." It's clear evidence that the church of the Pope still rejects the gospel that sets sinners free. Its faithful adherents remain in the bondage of sin and work-righteousness.

Also to the Galatians Paul wrote: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). To which Luther comments: "Our conscience is free and quiet because it no longer has to fear the wrath of God. This is real liberty, compared with which every other kind of liberty is not worth mentioning. Who can adequately express the boon that comes to a person when he has the heart-assurance that God will nevermore be angry with him, but will forever be merciful to him for Christ's sake...."

From that we can see why Luther dubbed the book of Galatians his "Katherine von Bora." It was his way of saying that its message of true Christian liberty was-- even as his wife-- worth everything to him.

We treasure the same gospel message! With Paul Speratus (1484-1551), who worked with Luther in producing the first Lutheran hymn-book, we joyfully sing:

Salvation unto us has come By God's free grace and favor;
Good works cannot avert our doom, They help and save us never.
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, Who did for all the world atone;
He is our one Redeemer. (The Lutheran Hymnal, 377:1)

Friday, October 12, 2018

John 8:32-36 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. 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...."

IN JESUS WE HAVE BEEN SET FREE (4)

In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus teaches one of the wrong ideas of freedom. Living at home the son felt his liberty was being restrained, so he decided to escape to a far country. How did that go? He only became enslaved, going farther and farther down the road of bondage to sin--until finally he had to acknowledge he was a broken man. By the grace of God, returning home with a penitent heart he found renewed freedom in a forgiving father.

Beware, dear Christians. Sin with its luring vices can so easily take one captive. Instead, by the grace of God and that alone, countless poor sinners, before Luther and after Luther, have discovered that real and true freedom comes from knowing the truth that sets one truly free-- free to live a life of service for the Savior.

As the Reformer put it in that paradoxical statement from his treatise on Christian liberty (1520): "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." Let us give thanks that God helped Luther stand fast and firm in the truth.

Lord Jesus, our Great Liberator, help us stand fast in the precious truth that "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"-- free to serve God now by faith, and then by His mercy and grace alone to live with You forever in heaven. Amen.

Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; Curb those who by deceit or sword Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son And bring to naught all He has done.

Lord Jesus Christ, Your pow'r make known, For You are Lord of lords alone; Defend Your holy Church that we May sing Your praise eternally.

O Comforter of priceless worth. Send peace and unity on earth; Support us in our final strife And lead us out of death to life. LSB 655

Tuesday, October 23, 2018

Galatians 1:3-5 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE

What's your usual greeting? Likely a simple "Hi" or "How are you?" You probably don't begin your casual interactions with "Grace to you and peace." In the Apostle Paul's day, the usual greeting was similar to our "Hello" or "Good day." And yet, the first word of greeting which Paul consistently uses in his letters is: "Grace."

When we greet one another in our daily interactions we are wishing the best for each other. We want the responses to our greeting to be similar or something like "Fine" or "I'm good," but in this sinful world, things don't always seem good. Sin has changed everything. In humankind's fallen state, things are far from good. And how do we become "good" with God?

There's one feature that is totally and completely unique to the Christian faith. It's the opposite of work-righteousness. It's Grace: God's Riches At Christ's Expense! Grace alone-- through which God gives undeserved love to poor sinners for Christ's sake-- can and does set everything right again. Therefore, the Apostle Paul begins his message with "Grace to you and Peace" -- as do many of our Lutheran pastors when they preach.

Since we were reconciled with God through Christ, the friction between us and God ends, and we have peace with God. In Word and Sacrament, God greets you with his grace and peace which really does make everything "all good" between you and God. This is the meaning of grace and peace which comes "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." According to the Father's will, Christ has graciously sacrificed Himself and delivered us from sin, death, and the devil, promising us eternal life with Him in heaven. Thanks be to God!

Luther: These two words, "grace" and "peace," contain a summary of all Christianity. Grace contains the forgiveness of sins, a joyful peace, and a quiet conscience. But peace is impossible unless sin has first been forgiven, for the Law accuses and terrifies the conscience on account of sin. Your bones and mine will know no rest until we hear the Word of grace and cling to it firmly and faithfully. So Christ says: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27).

Monday, October 22, 2018

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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.

... AND TEACHING THEM ...

There's a slogan that was going around a few years back among some churches and denominations in an attempt to highlight their desire to serve as our Savior desires. The slogan was this: "Deeds, not creeds." The idea was that the Christian should be more concerned with what we do rather than with what we teach or confess. Of course, we should be concerned about both! But the other thought behind this slogan has to do with the idea that we can somehow win souls for Christ by our actions and that words are not necessary. An expression like "actions speak louder than words" certainly has a place in the discussion of evangelism. Negative or hurtful actions can definitely detract from the message we are trying to proclaim. Jesus tells His disciples, He tells us that, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). But when He sends out His ambassadors, He tells us to go out "teaching them." And this echoes the simple words of the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter ten:

For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? ... So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:13-17).

What is it that we are to teach? The answer is found in the first chapter of Romans: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16).

What a privilege to be called and sent to proclaim the one message that has the power to call sinners out of the darkness of unbelief into the marvelous light of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ.

And what a confidence boost to know that we proclaim the Word of God, not the word of man!

Saturday, October 13, 2018

JESUS LOVES ME. THIS I KNOW, FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO

" ... I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

I have yet to find a more strikingly simple illustration of the principles of the Reformation and of the Christian faith than that simple verse of the children's song all of us learned and loved in our childhood: "Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so."

JESUS LOVES ME -- Isn't that grace alone? He loves me, undeserving sinner though I am, "having been justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

THIS I KNOW -- Isn't that faith alone, the confidence and certainty of Christ's love and my salvation in Him?

FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO -- Because my God has said so in His Word and I believe it. Isn't that Scripture alone?

May the lyrics of this children's Reformation song live in our hearts. For each Reformation offers us yet another opportunity to reaffirm our commitment, to write our own Formula of Concord.

The principles of the Reformation are not simply worth maintaining -- there are no other options or alternatives. They must be maintained. They must be reaffirmed by each generation anew, by each of our churches anew, by each of our families anew, by each of our hearts anew. They must be renewed by faithful use of Word and sacrament, Luther's source of strength and no less ours.

It is our privileged and honored calling to be Christ's witnesses, His messengers, His reformers for our day. May we go forward in His name and to His glory with courage, confidence, and commitment. "The Lord of hosts is [still] with us; the God of Jacob is [still] our refuge."

-- From the Lutheran Spokesman

Monday, October 15, 2018

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Every individual in the history of the world has made similar observations and come to similar conclusions. The observations include a world that is clearly a product of design and the fact that there is a universal code of conduct written on the hearts of all people. These two simple observations lead to the natural conclusion that there is a creator or a deity of some sort and this creator clearly has a list of right and wrong actions. We refer to these two conclusions as the "natural knowledge of God" and the "natural knowledge of the law." This then leads to another set of conclusions; namely that the creator/deity is powerful and we answer to this deity! These conclusions lead to a set of questions that form the basis for all religions in the world. The questions are these: 1) Who is this creator/deity?; 2) Is this deity pleased or angry with me?; and 3) how do I get on his/her/its good side? Every world religion tries to answer these questions based on human knowledge.

Thanks be to God that He has revealed Himself as the one true triune God in the pages of Scripture! God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit give us the answers that we would never come up with on our own. God the Father loved the world so much that He sent His only Son to die for our sins and the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of sinners to repent, believe, and rejoice in all that God has done for us and revealed to us in the Bible.

We do not proclaim the thoughts of man's imagination as answers to the deep questions of life. We proclaim the truth of God's saving word. The word of the one true and triune God as revealed to us! When we proclaim and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we do so with confidence of knowing by faith that we proclaim the one and only true way of salvation!

Saturday, October 20, 2018

Psalm 40:2-3 He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.

A NEW SONG

Martin Luther had tried hard to dance to the church's sorry old tune of salvation by works, going so far as to beat and starve himself in an effort to merit God's favor. But it was all to no avail. He would later write: "Life had become a living hell, so firmly sin possessed me."

But one day while reading his Bible, Luther came across a passage in Romans which read: "... the just shall live by his faith." The Spirit caused him to discover that salvation is a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ. Luther, like David before him, could now say: "He put a new song in my mouth!"

Luther was whistling a different melody, praising God for a free and unconditional grace in Christ.

It's true that the new song of the Gospel had been playing from the earliest moments of history, when God first promised the world a Savior to crush the power of Satan. Yet its amazing message was new to the ears of most people in the Middle Ages. Satan, through the antichrist Church of Rome, had managed to muffle its glad tidings, so that the pure Gospel was barely audible in the days prior to the Reformation.

But, as a pop hit from the sixties says, "The beat goes on!" Satan's handiwork is seen today in the "look inside yourself" doctrine of the self-esteem movement. We see it in churches which have abandoned Gospel truth for work-righteous based human psychology. It is shown in the TV evangelist who teaches his audience that they must cooperate with God in bringing about their salvation. "Have you made your decision for Christ?" In each case "the arrangement" might be slightly different, but it's the same old, faith-destroying song of self-salvation.

Today, as in every age, the sinner must be pointed entirely away from himself to Jesus' cross, where full satisfaction for all sin has been accomplished! What music to the soul -- a new song to give us God's peace now and forever!

Friday, October 19, 2018

Romans 3:28 ... Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Our Lord through Paul warns that even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what Christ sent the Apostle to preach, let him be accursed. If anyone tries to cast doubt or change ever so slightly our Lord's Word, let him be accursed! To be accursed is to be subject to God's wrath, the end of which is eternal death forever apart from God's grace! Luther himself had been caught up in this spiritual death trap, in the bitter slavery and futility of law-keeping that the Roman Catholic Church taught. They had long abandoned the Word of God in favor of deceiving spirits and the doctrines of demons. Rather than salvation by God's grace through Jesus, they taught that salvation could be and must be earned by one's own works. If a person kept the man-made teachings of the Roman Church, inflicted upon them by the papacy, they could be saved.

By God's grace Luther was brought to faith by the Spirit through the Gospel. When he read, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28) his eyes were opened to the truth! Luther understood that salvation is by grace alone! He became a faithful defender of God's infallible Word and the Christian faith. He spoke out against the selling of indulgences, the Pope, and any other church official who thought they had power over what happens to a person's soul. Luther believed and taught that anyone could read the Bible and learn of God's mercy and grace in Jesus. He knew it didn't take a special gift or ability as the church had claimed, but that the Spirit worked through the simple act of hearing or reading the Gospel to create and sustain faith! Through Luther's study of God's Word he was led by the Spirit to reject the veneration of saints, fasting, and everything the papacy taught contrary to the Scriptures! Through his studies he grew in faith and understanding, in strength and courage! By the Spirit's blessing so can we! It's a rather simple and painless matter-- simply read God's Word, for "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). May the Spirit enable us to faithfully read and hear the Word!

Tuesday, October 16, 2018

Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

REFORMATION: FESTIVAL OF THE WORD

For many, Reformation is celebrated as a "Fall Festival" or even a "Festival of Reconciliation" where various denominations gather with other church bodies to emphasize points of agreement, if any, while disregarding their soul destroying errors. Even Lutherans have gathered with Roman Catholics and others to downplay the insurmountable differences between the church bodies. This is the very opposite of why God brought about the Reformation. It's not surprising, the Spirit warns: "In latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1 NKJV). In our church body (the Church of the Lutheran Confession), we gather to celebrate the true meaning of the Reformation-- the gift of God's Word in its truth and purity given back to the church!

Luther, early on as an Augustinian Friar, did everything he could to try to earn salvation, even beating himself brutally. He was taught that Jesus was a terrible and fearful judge that could only be appeased by doing special acts of repentance and works to earn salvation. When the Holy Spirit brought Luther to faith, He led Luther to read: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28 NKJV). Then Luther understood-- salvation is by grace alone! He wrote in connection with the verse: "Suddenly I felt as if born anew, as if the gate to paradise had been opened." In time Luther became a faithful defender of God's infallible Word and the Christian faith. He spoke out against the selling of indulgences and against the Pope or any other church official who thought they had power over what happens to a person's soul.

Luther believed and taught that anyone could read the Bible and learn of God's mercy and grace in Jesus. He knew it didn't take a special gift or ability as the Roman Church claimed, but that the Spirit worked through the simple act of hearing or reading the Gospel to create faith! Luther also taught in accordance with God's Word that no ritual, belief, or practice apart from Scripture could "save" or give faith. Luther was God's chosen instrument to bring about the Reformation. The Spirit worked mightily through him to give us the precious Gift we celebrate at this time of the year: The Word of God in its truth and purity! That's why we celebrate the Reformation!

Thursday, October 18, 2018

Galatians 1:6 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

OUR BATTLE STANDARD

There is only one Gospel of forgiveness and salvation, but there are many substitutes-- "different gospels" which are not other gospels at all. They are offered in place of the divine truth! When Paul learned of the carnal legalists who were purposely trying to mislead the Galatian Christians into eternal death, he wrote these Words: "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ."

These words poured from a heart that burned for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul was greatly distressed at the Galatians' change of attitude. He knew the danger they faced. Luther faced a similar situation. His heart also burned for the Gospel of salvation. He knew the danger of the doctrines of demons being peddled by the Roman church. He knew that the "different gospel" meant condemnation for the souls of those trapped into anchoring their hope of eternal salvation in their own good works.

Any "different gospel" has but one purpose: To destroy blood-bought souls that Jesus died to win by insidiously and diabolically replacing the Gospel of forgiveness and salvation by grace with one of righteousness by works. Every substitute or "different gospel" offered by man is a Satan-devised mirage, the opposite of what Jesus teaches, designed for one purpose: To lead people away from their Savior into eternal death! These peddlers of death are still coming with their "different gospel" and they make it sound so inviting. Our Lord warns that those who teach a different gospel "do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:18).

By the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, God's Word continues to be preserved and taught among us in its truth and purity! But the battle to keep the truth continues to rage around us. May the Spirit enable us to carry forth the battle standard of the Reformation: Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone!

Wednesday, October 17, 2018

Ephesians 2:8 ... it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God ...

BY GRACE ALONE

Grace is what separates the Christian faith from all other religions. All of the world's religions are based on earning salvation. In no uncertain terms our Lord assures us that salvation is by grace alone-- that is, a gift of God. Our Savior speaks of our salvation by grace when He says: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). That's how foreign the thought of salvation by grace is to the unbelieving. Because of God's perfect love He sent Jesus to buy back or redeem mankind and assures us "by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 1:7).

Our salvation is a gift of God alone with no merit or worthiness in ourselves. This saving grace becomes ours personally by Spirit given faith! The only true and saving faith looks to and trusts in Jesus alone for forgiveness and salvation. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Faith is a precious gift. It can't be bought, earned, or chosen. It can only be given. Only the Holy Spirit can work this faith in our hearts. Only the Holy Spirit can lead us to understand and believe that we are justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Romans 3:28).

This saving faith is worked in us by the Spirit through the Gospel-- the power of God to salvation! Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). The Good News of Jesus' life, death, and physical resurrection as our substitute-- that precious Message had been lost in the teachings of the Roman church and in the Gospel's place was taught the work-righteous doctrines of demons. That's why the Reformation is so important. That's why we celebrate it each year. It's a celebration of God's saving Word given back to us through the Reformation. Luther was God's chosen instrument to bring about the Reformation but we need to understand that we are His chosen instruments to carry on the work started so long ago-- to ever hold to and share, by the Spirit's strength, the Word of God in its truth and purity!