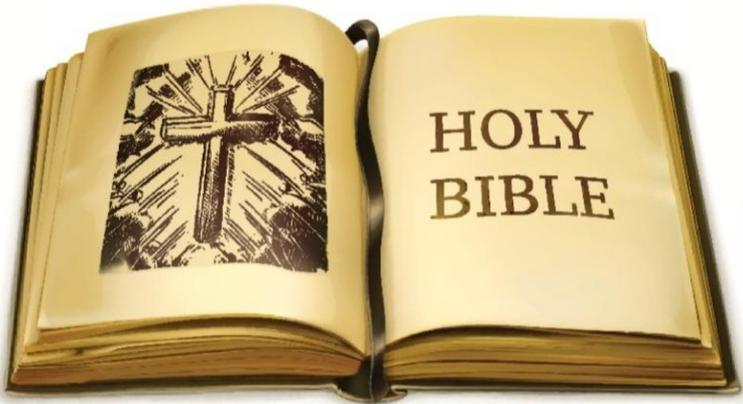


Each Day in the Word



March 1—April 4, 2026

FOREWORD

This booklet is compiled by the pastors of the Confessional Lutheran Ministerium for congregations and individuals not necessarily affiliated with any Lutheran denomination. Indeed, it is for anyone who finds it in their hands whether they are Lutheran or not. It is our prayer that God's people will be edified by this humble offering.

While it is tempting for everyone when reading daily devotional booklets to skip the Scripture lesson and read only the devotional material, it is highly recommended that the reader set their attention on the Scripture lesson before reading the devotion itself. The Holy Spirit tells us in Hebrews 4:12 that "the word of God is living and powerful." As the Scripture is the very Word of God, we ought to devote time and attention to it each day so that through it, God the Holy Spirit may strengthen our trust in His promises and kindle in our hearts love for God and our neighbor.

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Quotations from Martin Luther works are taken from Luther's Works, American Edition, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86), hereafter AE.

What a stunning vision was given to Peter, James and John! Is it any wonder that they wanted to stay within that glorious environment! But the Father's voice appropriately interrupts the 'glory-seeking' thoughts of man. How soon they had forgotten Jesus' words spoken to them just six days earlier. Peter had confessed Jesus as the Christ — Jesus revealed how His passion for the sake of man will play out — and then Jesus explained what the Christian life entails. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." In other words, it's not about 'glory' it's about suffering and 'dying.'

And so it goes again when the Transfiguration takes place. They get caught up in the 'glory' side of things, as this is the way of the flesh. But the way of the God is suffering and crosses. It's a theology of the cross that is revealed in God's Holy Scripture. The Transfiguration revealed what lies ahead — after a life of denying oneself — after a life of taking up ones cross and following the path of Christ — namely, losing one's life (dying, through baptismal remembrance), in order to find it (rising, through baptismal remembrance).

Dear Saints, follow Jesus first into God's favor, through faith, and then through self-denial, sacrifice, and through death itself, follow Him into the lasting Paradise. He's given you a brief vision of it today. This vision will help you die; but more importantly, it will help you to live through Christ Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life!

Let us pray: O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“What about sin in the world?” There was the murdered Galileans, or the Galileans on whom the tower fell. There was the fig tree not bearing fruit and the women suffering an infirmity for eighteen years. Did these things happen because these people were worse sinners than others? According to the One who is the Word made flesh the answer is, "No!" He says that when we see the effects of sin in the world, it should remind us of the sin in our own lives, and how we need to repent.

The season of Lent is a season of repentance. Christians aren't supposed to give something up during Lent in order to please God. We do it to remind ourselves of how sinful we are – how easily we worship the created things of the world as opposed to the Creator. By denying ourselves we can concentrate on the things of God and how He has taken care of us, both temporally and spiritually.

Sometimes evil happens to people because they sin and reap consequences thereof. But evil also happens simply because we live in a broken world and we cannot avoid the cascade of others' sins. God uses all these things for His greater good as He teaches us the most important thing: repentance and forgiveness in our Savior Jesus Christ.

Properly “remembering” the Sabbath day brings us to be focused upon and rest in God's promises assured to us through the fully atoning merits of Christ Jesus so that we may grow in His righteousness according to faith, and that we may help others in their sufferings. The sabbath was never meant to vanquish works of love, but centered on and through Christ, acts of love necessarily happen.

Let us pray: O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

There will always be those people who apply a literal understanding to Holy Scripture where Christ is utilizing a figurative language. And then, not surprisingly, those same people will apply a figurative understanding when Christ meant it literally. Let's be clear with this text. Christ is not commanding a literal hatred toward father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters and even to your own self. He is making the point that none of those – or anything, for that matter – must come before Him.

In faith we know that nothing should be allowed to keep us from following Him. You can't count on anyone else. Nor can you count on yourself. The world, your flesh and the devil will all dupe you into thinking that you can take care of you, or that you are all taken care of simply because you have a loving family and lots of friends. To be sure, they have their place, God works through them, and much love will come from them to you. But when it comes to spiritual matters – namely, salvation – neither they nor you can get you saved. Nothing should get in the way of Christ being the most important in your life. Once He gets replaced by some false god (idol) and your trust gets placed in it for your comfort and happiness rather than in Christ, you have lost Christ, which means you've lost salvation.

Thankfully Christ's fully atoning merits for the forgiveness of sins are the foundation upon which saving faith gets created and sustained through God's Word and Sacrament ministry! Christ is your foundation! Christ has already won the war! Thanks be to God that Christ is your salt!

Let us pray: O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In the 15th chapter of Luke, Jesus told three parables to the tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, and scribes. In the first one the point is that when the sheep that was lost is found, there is great rejoicing in Heaven. In the second one the same is true when the lost coin is found. There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

In the third one, the parable of the loving father (the assigned text for today), again there is great rejoicing at its conclusion. In this parable of the two sons, Jesus pictures the grace of God in a wonderful manner, as being ever ready to pardon the repentant sinner. It is as if God were constantly watching the road for the return of the repentant one.

Through the parable Jesus creates a picture of the pardoning grace of God so strongly because man's convicted conscience must not doubt that God really intends to forgive. That's what God-created faith does: it flees to Christ whose blood secured the forgiveness of sins. God sends out His pastors, His Word, and His Sacraments to call and win us lost sinners back to Himself through Christ.

As His Word has spoken and as Christ has fully demonstrated how so He has loved the world, nothing in God should cause hesitation to come to Him; it is only our own blindness which does that. In Christ we have been called into His Kingdom, the Church. In this Kingdom He cleanses and nourishes His believing children with the milk of the Word, He feeds us with His Body and Blood, and He keeps us unto eternal life. We certainly do have a loving Father.

Let us pray: O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus speaks about faithful and just stewards, about unfaithful and unjust stewards, and about serving only one master. He says we cannot serve both God and the ‘things’ of this world, or mammon. If we were honest with ourselves, we would have to admit that we usually serve the wrong master — we serve ourselves and our desires. But we are never honest with ourselves. Our flesh is fallen and deceitful. In fact, that’s why the first tenet of Christianity is that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Of ourselves we do not have it in us to be faithful to God; of ourselves we want to be our own master. “My will be done!” is ever the cry of man’s flesh.

As believing/baptized Christians, however, we have been brought to know that God Himself stepped in and did something about our lost state. Through His beloved Word of Law and Gospel He introduced us to the original master—the Holy Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! By His grace we now serve Him.

The battle between the flesh and the Spirit begins in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism through which God washes us from our sins and makes us His disciples. In Luther's explanation he asks: "What does such baptizing with water indicate?" He answers: "It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." Thank God that He brought us into His Kingdom, gave us a new master, and sustains us into eternity.

Let us pray: O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The apostles must have thought Jesus had laid a great weight of responsibility on them as He sent them about their work. First, He warned them to be very careful to not bring offense to anyone lest they face the milestone around the neck. And second, He said to always forgive a repentant brother! Notice He didn't say "always be forgiving." Forgiveness is always conditional upon repentance. How hard these commands must have seemed! Is it any wonder the apostles said, "Increase our faith"?

Then Jesus goes on to tell them that they don't need an increase of faith, because it isn't the size of one's faith, but what and who the foundation or object of one's faith is. In the verse just before our text, Jesus said, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."

All the faith that is necessary is given to us through the Word of God which is meant to be heard. Today this Word still goes out through faithful pastors; and by the power of the Holy Spirit, it still works forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation to those brought to repentant faith. Just as with the apostles, today through the Word and Sacrament He still calls, gathers, and enlightens His Church to do His work in the world.

Lutheran theology is such an absolute joy as it stays true to God's harsh word of Law and His beloved Gospel. The old man despises both because they bring him to die and prove that he will never be able to save himself. The New Man, however, rejoices in staying fixed upon Christ crucified, which brings about good works. And to God alone goes the glory!

Let us pray: O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus uses the parable of the judge and the widow as an example of God's faithfulness to His people. He proclaims: "...shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?" We can be assured that God will answer the prayers of His people, in His time and in His way.

In 2 Peter 3:8ff Peter interprets these verses for us. He says, "beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promises..., but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

This then prompts the question: If He is not willing that any should perish, what is the will of God? Well, in Luther's explanation to the 3rd Petition of the Lord's Prayer, he has us confess: "The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.... God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will."

We will never weary God, but He wills to weary us! He has us actually pray against ourselves, that He break and hinder us. As His crosses come and fix us on Christ's cross, this is how He keeps us from perishing, by keeping us repentant. How appropriate during Lent. Thanks be to God's faithful will!

Let us pray: O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

St. John describes heaven as the New Jerusalem where all tears will be wiped away and there will be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain. Those in this life who believe by God-given faith in Christ's atoning work of paying for their sins will inherit heaven. There our bodies, according to St. Paul (1 Corinthians 15), will be incorruptible, honorable, glorified, and spiritual; our bodies will no longer be ravaged and affected by or with sin. As John writes in Rev 21:4, the "former things" (the sinful nature and existence) "will pass away." What a glorious existence to look forward to! We will be forever with Christ in all His glory never again be affected by sin. We will be in the eternal presence not only of our Triune God, but also all those who have gone before us in the one true faith. Prior to this, our human and sinful bodies must die and will be changed by God into acceptable bodies in order to inhabit heaven.

On the contrary, this is what is in store for all those who do not believe in Christ's work for them: the "unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." What an utterly horrible eternal verdict! Lord, have mercy on all those who choose to deny Christ's offer of full forgiveness and pardon.

Dear Christian, by faith in Christ and His promises to you, you need not fear that second and eternal death, for Christ has put his name on you in Holy Baptism and enters into you with His very body and blood in His Supper to give you forgiveness of sins and strengthen your faith. These things will bolster and uphold you throughout this earthly life until He calls you to that glorious and sinless life of the world to come.

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

In the first part of today's reading Jesus teaches us that it is those who ultimately have a child-like faith who are part of His kingdom and reign – not that you have to be or become a child, but simply to believe by faith in Christ's work of atonement on the cross for you and all mankind.

The certain young ruler did not have child-like faith. He asked the wrong question of Jesus: "What shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?" He did not understand what it meant to inherit something. An heir is someone who, only by virtue of someone else's favor or family connection, receives what the other person wishes to give. The inheritance doesn't depend on anything the heir does; it depends strictly on the giver.

The rich young ruler trusted in his many possessions and his good behavior. He boasted that he had kept the commandments from his youth. But when Jesus challenged him to give up his possessions in which he had trusted, he "became very sorrowful." He was unable to let go of his idols of good works and self-sufficiency. Sadly, he couldn't understand his own desperate need for what Christ offered.

The devil, the world, and our own sinful nature always try to get us to focus on ourselves. These things turn us inward, and then we become navel-gazers: "Look at me! Look what I can do! I have life all figured out!"

But Christ bids us to look away from ourselves and onto Him and His work which has paid for our sins. We must never hold up our good works or our possessions as our ticket to heaven and eternal life. By God-given faith we look to Christ who has done the work of suffering, dying, and rising – all for us and in our place. By His grace alone we are received into His family and have full rights as heirs of His kingdom.

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

In this text, the faithless servant who did nothing with his master's mina allotted to him did not trust his master. The servant suspiciously presumed that his master would return his distrust and therefore give him only something of little or no value. At the very least this is a violation of the Eighth Commandment – not putting the best construction on everything and assuming the worst instead of the best. More unfortunately, the servant, by his callous attitude, lost whatever good he might have gained if he had only known what benefits his master's gifts could deliver.

It was simple unbelief on the part of the servant that caused him to lose the good he had coming to him. All he had to do was not turn down the gift and responsibility from his master, and he would have received all the benefit.

It is simple unbelief on our part also that causes us to lose the good we have coming to us, the spiritual and eternal blessings and benefits that God Himself delivers through His Word and sacraments. If we do not trust the Giver of these gifts, we cannot appreciate what God does for us through Word and Sacrament. Ultimately it is our sin which turns us against God.

But when the Holy Spirit brings us to repentance, then we turn to Christ who has not turned His back on us. Indeed, He is the one who “gave His back to the smiters” (Is 50:6) in His cruel suffering and death which He willingly and perfectly endured for us and in our place.

Thanks and praise be to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who has called us to the one true faith and keeps us in it.

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

The chief priests, scribes, and elders in this scene are truly skilled politicians. In trying to assess how to answer Jesus' question about John's baptism, they found themselves faced with a no-win situation. If they agreed that John's baptism was from God, they would stand accused of not believing him. If they agreed that John's baptism was from men, they would face the wrath of the people, for they were persuaded, rightly so, that John was a prophet. So, in order to save face by not admitting the truth about John's baptism, they said they knew not where it was from. They wanted none of the consequences of their convictions; they became fence-sitters and mugwumps.

How many times in your own life have you shied away from the truth about a certain situation for fear either of embarrassment or some sort of retribution? And have any of those times been when you were too scared to confess the one true faith about Christ?

If so, then repent, confess your sins, and seek God's mercy and forgiveness freely offered to you through Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. According to Ps 103:10-12, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." By faith alone receive Christ's forgiveness and be strengthened by Word and Sacrament to confess Christ boldly to all who might hear.

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

Jesus communicates this parable in order to teach a hard but clear lesson to those who reject Him. In His audience are those same chief priests, scribes, and elders from yesterday's reading from the first 8 verses of Luke 20; they are His main target.

The parable is simply describing how God continually sends His messengers to preach His Gospel, and how some people not only refuse to hear or receive it, but also inflict harm on those same messengers of God. The Gospel, of course, is the Good News of Christ's atoning sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, and that full forgiveness and pardon are offered to all who hear. Those who believe this Gospel have, by God-given faith, the forgiveness of their sins and the promise of eternal life with God in heaven. Those who, in their stubborn unbelief and pride reject Christ Who is the "chief cornerstone," have nothing but the horrors of eternal damnation awaiting them.

As it is with all of our Lord's parables, Jesus' words at the end tell us what the parable means. It's about Him and what will befall those who reject Him. He who is offended at the lowliness of Christ and therefore does not accept Him in faith shall be shattered into pieces and ground to powder. It is a terrible thing for unbelievers to fall into the hands of the living God. For he who rejects Christ as Savior robs himself of true peace and reconciliation with God through that same Christ and seals his own eternal doom and destruction.

But whoever believes in Christ has eternal life. "God so loved the world *in this way* – that He gave His only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (Jn 3:16)

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

As the narrative from yesterday's reading continues, the chief priests and scribes now want to seize Jesus but cannot because they fear the people. It is also clear that they understand that the previous parable was spoken against them.

This is quite sad, really. In terms that even a child could understand, Jesus had called these religious leaders to repentance. But instead of owning their sin and unrighteousness, instead of repenting of their unbelief and turning to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation, they dug in their heels all the more in stubborn defiance of the truth. This can only turn out badly for them, and it probably did in the long run. It is probably fair to assume that most, if not all of these men are in hell for their sins and unbelief. Their rejection of Jesus could only have earned for them eternal damnation.

It is most certainly difficult for anyone, including Christians, to admit and own their sins; we have a hard time admitting our wrongs. But here's the thing: confessing our sins not only angers the devil, but more importantly it glorifies God. For when we confess, we give God the glory by saying the same thing God says about our sins – that He is God, we are not, and He is right to punish us eternally. We simply but profoundly confess, "I have sinned; Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!" And then we hear the sweet Gospel that Christ has taken our sins upon Himself and died for them, that He alone suffered the Father's full wrath for the sins of all men, and now delivers the benefits of His death and resurrection in the Gospel preached and the Sacraments rightly administered.

So confess, repent, and cling to Christ's work for you.

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

It is nearly irresistible not to point out that the Sadducees were sad (you see) because they did not believe in the resurrection. It is terribly sad because, as St. Paul says in I Cor 15:13-19, “if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty, and your faith is also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. 16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” Denial of the resurrection is devastatingly sad because it is the denial of eternal life – a denial which brings absolutely no hope at all.

The Sadducees also did not know that in the resurrection our earthly relationships are not only not needed but will be unknown. In the resurrection there is no more marriage and, most importantly, no more death, because death is the result of sin and there is no sin in heaven.

You and I have a most gracious God who has called us to faith through the preaching of His Word, for “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom 10:17). Christ has risen from the grave to give you the certainty that you also will be raised on the Last Day to be with Him forever. Believe that by the God-created faith that He has given you, and you also will enjoy an eternal existence in the perfect and sinless presence of Christ.

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

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” We cannot, using our human reason, intellect, or will power, believe in Jesus or come to Him. The flesh cannot comprehend or believe the gospel. Faith must be worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. St. Paul states this same thing in Ephesians 2:8 when he writes that faith is “not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”

How does God draw men to Christ? Jesus explains, “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” (v. 45). God the Father teaches us through His Word. Christ Jesus, who is “from God” and “has seen God” (v. 46) reveals God’s will to us through His teaching. Through Christ’s doctrine – Christ’s teaching – God the Father draws people to Christ in faith, so that by believing in Him they may have everlasting life.

Many neglect hearing God’s Word altogether. Others hear God’s Word but judge it according to their worldly notions. The Jews in today’s reading murmured against Jesus’ claim to be the Bread which came down from heaven which gives everlasting life to those who eat His flesh. In their minds they knew Jesus’ parents, so He clearly wasn’t “from God.” Nor did they understand that to eat the bread of life is to feast on Christ’s Word by faith. Man, after all, does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. On the night in which Jesus was betrayed He will give His very body and blood to His disciples to eat and drink for their forgiveness, salvation, and newness of life, but here He teaches us how the Father draws men to Him through Christ’s Word.

Since the preached Word is how God the Father snatches the elect out of the jaws of Satan, we should hear it as often as we have opportunity and meditate on it throughout the day. That is how we eat of Bread which came down from heaven.

Let us pray: Keep us steadfast in Your Word, O Lord, and daily draw us to Christ in faith. Grant that we hear it gladly and daily read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it. Amen.

The cross of Christ predominates today's lesson. Roman soldiers enlist Simon of Cyrene to take up Jesus' cross and follow after Him. When they came to the place called Calvary, the soldiers crucified Him upon the cross. From the cross Jesus intercedes for those who crucify Him. He absolves the penitent criminal, opening paradise to him that very day. He dies, and is taken down from the cross, wrapped in linen, and buried.

The cross of Christ predominates the Christian Faith. By suffering and dying upon the cross, Christ made full satisfaction for the sins of the world and acquired forgiveness of sins for all mankind. Since the forgiveness He acquired must be applied to individuals, He intercedes for those who crucify Him, praying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." They acted in ignorance, "For had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8). By praying, "Father, forgive them," Jesus asks that the Father would bring those responsible for His death to repentance, so that they might receive the forgiveness He earned for them and they, too, might be with Him in paradise. The Father answers this prayer on Pentecost when Peter preaches to the Jews who crucified Jesus. Many ask what they should do, and Peter responds, "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" (Acts 2:37-28). The Father continues to answer Jesus' prayer as often as we repent and believe the gospel, since we, too, were responsible for Jesus' death. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Is 53:5).

The cross of Christ predominates the life of the Christian as well. Receiving the forgiveness of sins by faith and the promise of being received into paradise when we die, we take up our cross and follow after Jesus. We put to death the sinful flesh in us each day, reject temptations, and live as Christ lived—in self-sacrificing love for others.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, grant us repentance each day so that we enjoy the blessings Jesus earned on the cross for us and willingly take up our cross and follow after Him. Amen.

The woman who anointed Jesus' head with this costly perfume valued Jesus very highly. John 12:5 informs us this perfume was worth three hundred denarii. If a denarius is a day's wage, then this perfume was worth nearly a year's wages. Yet this woman pours it on Jesus' head out of love and devotion to Him. She believed His Word that He would die, so she wanted to anoint Him for His burial.

Judas, on the other hand, despises Jesus. Again, it is John who tells us that it was Judas who pointed out that this perfume could have been sold and the money given to help the poor. He indicts not only the woman but Jesus, who accepted the woman's costly worship. Jesus corrects Judas and those who agreed with him. She did a good work for Him in preparing Him for burial. Judas then goes to the chief priests and agrees to hand Jesus over to them in exchange for thirty pieces of silver, the price paid as a penalty if one's ox accidentally killed a slave (Exodus 21:32). Judas tried to serve two masters, God and money, and it happened just as Jesus had said in Matthew 6:24. Judas hated Christ and His teaching; that is, he despised and thought little of Jesus while he was loyal to his true master: money. By letting greed rule in his heart, he cast out his faith in Christ. Then he willfully betrayed Him.

The amounts of money aren't important. What seems like a little to one may seem like a lot to another. What is important is how the woman and Judas thought of money. The woman used money to worship Christ while she had the opportunity. Money was her servant. Judas set his heart on riches, no matter the amount, thinking that more money equals more security.

St. Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 7:30-31 that we are to use this world by not misusing it. Setting our hearts on money is one way we misuse of what God gives. This is the path of Judas. Using what God has given for the worship of Christ and for the sake of others, however, is a good work of the heart that finds its security in Christ and His promises.

Let us pray: Keep us from misusing the good things of this world, O Lord, so that we may set our hearts on You, trusting in Your promises and helping others as we are able. Amen.

“The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” We see this in all the disciples, but especially Peter. He is bold in spirit. On their way to Gethsemane, Peter tells Jesus, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” (v.35). Yet, he lacks the strength to watch even an hour with Christ. His spirit briefly revives when Judas arrives with an armed multitude to arrest Jesus; he drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear (see John 18:10). Yet when Jesus submits to arrest to fulfill the Scriptures, all the disciples—including Peter—forsook Him and fled. Instead of remaining with Jesus, “Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest’s courtyard and sat with the servants to see the end.” When a servant girl—not a soldier—confronts Peter, he denies his Lord. Sin begets more sin, so one denial cascades into three. Peter, whose spirit had been so eager, lapsed into more and more sin because he let his sinful flesh’s desires reign over him.

Like Peter, our spirit—the inward man of faith which the Holy Spirit creates in us—is eager. We say with St. Paul in Romans 7:22, “I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.” But like Peter, we live in the sinful flesh, so that we can say along with Paul, “I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom 7:23). Compared to the spirit God renews in us, our flesh is weak. But if we consent to the flesh’s desires, like Peter, we sin. And if we sin, we, too, should weep bitterly as Peter did, sorrowing over our sin, seeking forgiveness from God with the desire to amend our lives. Like Peter, we comfort ourselves with the gospel that if we truly confess our sins, God “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9). The gospel fortifies our spirits so that we may be eager and willing to confess Christ and live godly lives; it gives us the power to do so.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, strengthen us with might in the inner man through Your Holy Spirit, so that we may not consent to the desires of the flesh, but fulfill our spirit’s eager desire to live holy lives according to Your Word. Amen.

When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he confessed that he sinned by betraying innocent blood. When Pilate saw that the Jews would not be swayed from their rage, he washed his hands in front of them and said, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person.” The Jews, however, accepted blame for Jesus’ blood: “His blood be on us and on our children.”

Judas and Pilate both recognize Jesus’ innocence, but both attempted to distance themselves from it. Judas, consumed with sorrow, hung himself in despair over what he has done. Pilate, thinking to excuse his cowardice, distanced himself from Jesus by attempting to abdicate his responsibility. While both are correct that Jesus’ blood is innocent, neither understood that Jesus’ blood is God’s blood. If they had believed this, Judas would have fled to Jesus in godly sorrow, seeking forgiveness, and Pilate would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

It is necessary to believe that Jesus was innocent, but it is also necessary to believe the words of the apostle, “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Jesus’ blood—His innocent, bitter sufferings, and death—cleanses from sin because it is God’s blood. Jesus is not a mere man. He is the Word of God who became flesh (John 1:14), “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). Jesus, as God in human flesh, sheds His innocent blood to pay for the sins of the world, so that all who daily repent and believe His death is the atoning sacrifice for their sins are cleansed from their sins and are counted innocent with Jesus’ innocence in God’s sight.

In our daily fight against sin, if we succumb to temptation, we must not fall into despair as Judas did, thinking our sin is beyond forgiveness. We must also beware of falling to pride and self-justification as Pilate did. Each day we are to repent of our sins because we believe what Judas and Pilate did not, that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Let us pray: We give You thanks, dear Father, for the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Cleanse us from our sins and grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may persevere in repentance and faith, and joyfully live in the Christ’s innocence. Amen.

Jesus' death was accompanied by many signs, all of which teach us about the benefits of His death. The temple veil—which served as a divider between the holy place and the most holy place in the temple—is torn from top to bottom. This sign teaches us that the Levitical priesthood with its sacrifices and washings have ended because “with His own blood [Jesus] entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12).

Then the earth quaked as a sign of God's judgment against sin in the person of His Son Jesus. Jesus endured the wrath of God against sin because God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21). By enduring God's wrath for sin, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus by faith. Jesus opens the kingdom of heaven—a kingdom that cannot be shaken—to all who repent and trust in His atoning sacrifice for their sins. St. Paul encourages us, “Since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28).

Finally, “the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.” This resurrection of saints and their appearance to many testifies to the fact that not only will Christ rise from the dead, but on the Last Day He will call all people from their graves. Those who have not believed in Him will rise to everlasting punishment, while the saints—all who persevere in true faith unto death—will be raised to everlasting blessedness, righteousness, radiance, and glory.

Christ Jesus has obtained eternal redemption for all mankind. He forgives the sins of all who believe in Him and counts them righteous with His righteousness. There is, therefore, no condemnation for believers. He promises to raise them upon the Last Day even as He is risen from the dead.

Let us pray: We give You thanks, O Christ, for dying for our sins, enduring our deserved wrath, and for rising to life, to give us these benefits each day through faith. Amen.

On Sunday we read Jesus' words from John 6:51 in which He said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." In John 6, Jesus spoke of the "spiritual" eating and drinking of His flesh and blood, which is faith that hears God's Word, meditates upon it, applies it to oneself, and uses it to support oneself in temptations and afflictions. This eating and drinking of Christ is necessary for salvation since it is faith, and faith alone which justifies.

In the final reading for this week, we hear Jesus institute the Lord's Supper in which He gives Christians His very body to eat and His very blood to drink. "Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, 'This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.'" The bread He gives them to eat is simultaneously His true body. The wine He gives them in the chalice is simultaneously His very blood. St. Matthew adds the purpose of giving His body and blood. Jesus gives His body and blood "for the remission of sins" (Matt 26:28).

In churches that celebrate the Lord's Supper according to Christ's institution—including the public confession that Christ is bodily present in the bread and wine—those who believe these words receive the forgiveness of sins, new life strengthened by the Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal salvation. If one partakes without true repentance and faith in Christ's words—that is, without the spiritual eating of Christ's word—he "eats and drinks judgment to himself" (1 Cor 11:29).

Jesus invites us each day to feast on Him through faith in His Word, and He gives His church His Supper by which the faithful may receive not only His very body and blood, but with them all the benefits He earned in His suffering and death.

Let us pray: Grant, O Lord, that we may faithfully partake of You in Your Word each day and Your Supper as we have opportunity, for our forgiveness, salvation, and new life. Amen.

“If anyone has an ear to hear, let him hear” (9). This is a phrase found in prophetic writings. Jesus says it on five separate occasions in the Gospels and seven times in Revelation, once to each of the seven churches. It might sound a bit odd, but the meaning is clear: “Pay attention; this is important.”

And the thing that is important here—the statement that one shouldn’t miss—is the encouragement to the saints that comes in the next verse: “He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints” (10). In the face of tribulation, small or great, one thing remains the same: God is still in control, His plan is still moving forward, and His saints are still loved and cared for in Christ. The message to the saints in persecution here is the same message Jesus told His disciples in the upper room: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

“Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.” That is, by their patient endurance in tribulation, the saints give witness to their faith in Christ, that He is their Savior both from sin and ultimately from the evils of this world as well. Although things will happen to show that our physical safety is not secure, our eternal security remains firm in Christ our Lord, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” for us. Nothing can change that fact as we cling to Him in faith. And, because of that, our names are forever written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

“If anyone has an ear to hear, let him hear.”

Let us pray: O almighty God, mercifully look on Your people, and by Your great goodness govern us in body and preserve us in soul; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Years ago the Army recruiting slogan was this: “In the Army, we do more before 9AM than most people do all day.” Jesus is not most people. Before the rooster even crows twice (which is long before 9AM), Jesus is betrayed by Judas, arrested by an armed crowd, abandoned by His supporters, tried by the Sanhedrin, slandered by false witnesses, condemned wrongly as deserving of death, spat on, blindfolded, beaten, mocked, and denied by Peter. The day is still young, and this is only Mark chapter 14. We know what follows in chapter 15: Jesus’ trial before Pilate, His crucifixion, and His death. The recruiting slogan for Jesus’ army at this point could only be this: “Come suffer with us; Take up your cross and follow Me.”

From the betrayal by Judas to the Peter’s denial, we see clearly that even the very best of humanity—those specifically chosen by Jesus Himself for this very task—are woefully inadequate, unreliable, and untrustworthy. By contrast, Jesus proves Himself fully adequate for the task, fully reliable, and fully worthy. Despite all that is thrown at Him in opposition, He nevertheless continues His course to complete the task assigned by the Father—that Jesus fulfill all righteousness for us by keeping God’s holy law in complete and total perfection, and then by being the sacrifice paid for us, for all the sins, for all the times when we too proved to be woefully inadequate, unreliable, and untrustworthy.

Judas “goes his way” because he dies apart from faith in Christ, but Peter is later forgiven and restored as he receives that in faith. We, too, look to Christ who forgives and restores us any time that we fail Him, by our own types of denials. We come to Him in repentance, admitting our sins, and He is quick to forgive, fully and completely, which we receive in faith.

Let us pray: O almighty God, mercifully look on Your people, and by Your great goodness govern us in body and preserve us in soul; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Morning has arrived, and the whole Jewish council—the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes—have condemned Jesus, bound Him, led Him away, and handed Him over to Pilate. Among other things, Pilate then asks three questions: “Are you the King of the Jews?”; “Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?”; and, “What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?” Answers: Yes, Jesus is the King of the Jews; the crowd asks for Barabbas to be released instead of their King; and then they demand that Jesus, their King, be crucified.

Then Jesus the King is scourged, struck on the head, spat upon, and mocked as a King: clothed in a purple robe and crown of thorns, mockingly bowed to and worshiped, and saluted with “Hail, King of the Jews!” All in all, it’s a very rough day to be the King of the Jews, and the day is not over. It only gets worse for this particular King.

Fortunately, we know that for this King, His kingdom is not of this world. Good thing too, because with subjects like this, who needs enemies! But then, that’s the point, isn’t it? We who should rightly receive Jesus as King have been born into the same sinful world that despises Him and lives in rebellion against Him. All of fallen humanity would continue in this rebellion against the rightful King if nothing had been done. So Jesus, our gracious Sovereign, did what needed to be done for His subjects—He took on human flesh Himself, subjected Himself to God’s holy Law, fulfilled it for us, and then paid the penalty for breaking that Kingly Law with His own life... for us! The King takes the penalty for the rebellion of His own subjects; where else in this world does such a thing happen? It does not. In faith we proclaim, “Hail, King of God’s Kingdom!”

Let us pray: O almighty God, mercifully look on Your people, and by Your great goodness govern us in body and preserve us in soul; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In our Bible reading today, as the Apostles' Creed says, Jesus "was crucified, died, and was buried." As we look at Jesus on the cross, we know that He is not dying for His own sins, because He did not have any. We who did sin are the ones who deserve to be punished. Instead, Jesus dies in our place.

As we come to Him confessing our sins and clinging to Him in faith, something wonderful happens! Luther called it the "blessed exchange": Jesus exchanges His righteous and holy life for our sin and death. He goes to the cross to pay for our sin, and we get His righteous and holy life—a forgiven life, a restored life, an eternal life! That is not a particularly good deal for Jesus, but an incredibly great deal for us! Therefore, as Christians we keep our life's focus on that cross. Remember that the cross signifies that blessed exchange with Jesus which includes His atonement for your sin and its spiritual consequences. All this is exchanged at the cross and received in faith.

That is what Jesus did for you! That is what the Gospel means! Christ Crucified for you means that your sins are forgiven, that you have a holy life now, and an eternal life with Christ in heaven forever! That is what Jesus means when, on the cross, He says, "It is finished!" (Jn 19:30). His work of salvation for us is now accomplished. We receive that work in faith, and we are saved, forgiven, justified with God, and now live in peace with God. "Truly this Man IS the Son of God!"

Let us pray: O almighty God, mercifully look on Your people, and by Your great goodness govern us in body and preserve us in soul; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

This reading today might give you a bit of literary whiplash. All of a sudden, now we are back to Sunday of Holy Week, Palm Sunday, and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. However, this gives us a chance to see the close connection: Jesus is hailed as King on Palm Sunday, and then the notice above Jesus' head on Good Friday is this: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

Of course, that's the real irony. That's the real kicker of Holy Week, and we ride along like we're in on an inside joke. Everyone keeps calling Jesus the King, and we know that He really is! He comes in on Palm Sunday to proclamations of being king, He parades around the town all week as though He IS king, then He is arrested, and the Pharisees charge Him with blasphemy because He says He is the Son of God. And we snicker to ourselves again because we know that He really IS the Son of God as well!

And then Jesus is handed over to the Romans where the soldiers mock Him as king. And again we grimace at what is being done to our Lord, but we also know how the story ends so we also have something of a snicker because we know the secret that they obviously don't know—namely that Jesus really IS king.

Then, they crucify Him... and what is the sign above His head? It says, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

Oh, the irony. We know the secret. Sure, we grimace at what Jesus has to go through, and we know the price He is paying for our sin, and we are in no way cavalier about that. Our entire salvation is based on this fact that Jesus died in our place there on that cross. But oh, the irony! "Behold, your king is coming." Yes, we receive Him in faith—our King, indeed.

Let us pray: O almighty God, mercifully look on Your people, and by Your great goodness govern us in body and preserve us in soul; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

John records for us what certain Greeks said: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” That is something to be posted inside every pulpit in the world, addressed to the pastors: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” That is a nice reminder to us all that Jesus is what it’s all about. Next, in the lesson, Jesus teaches us what it’s all about: “Unless a grain of wheat dies it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (24).

Jesus is in the death-and-resurrection business. Meanwhile we keep trying various fixer-upper programs on ourselves. What we fail to realize is that, in and of ourselves, we are spiritually dead. So, we keep trying to make ourselves look alive to God. “Works righteousness!”—That is what Luther calls all these attempts to make ourselves acceptable to God.

The truth is that we are dead as doornails before God in our feeble attempts to make our ourselves and our religion appear “meet, right, and salutary.” We are dead as doornails before God in our feeble attempts at parroting a particular set of confessions or rituals, and equating that with true belief and following of Christ.

Jesus had no time and truly little patience for sightseers, tire-kickers, and window shoppers. Instead, He calls us to follow Him into death and a new transformed life. The message of His Gospel is that we come before God with empty hands. We come before God and confess freely that we are dead as doornails by ourselves and by any of our outward showings of religiosity. Jesus calls us to His unique death-and-resurrection transforming power so that we are remade from the inside out. Then, and only then, that grain of wheat that died, can “produce much grain” in Him.

Let us pray: O almighty God, mercifully look on Your people, and by Your great goodness govern us in body and preserve us in soul; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (34). Jesus said this to His disciples in the upper room on the night when He was betrayed. This is Jesus’ “new command.” The Latin for command is *mandatum*. From this we get the word “maundy,” as in Maundy Thursday. Lots of things happened on that evening in holy week—the foot washing, the institution of the Lord’s Supper, the upper room discourse, the prayer in the garden, the betrayal and arrest. So rather than focus on this one command, a better name might be “Holy Thursday.”

Be that as it may, what’s “new” about this commandment to love one another? First, the kind of love that Jesus is talking about is not according to the standard for love in this fallen world, which is the simple standard of tolerating all behavior and accepting everyone just as they are. Jesus’ love is an even higher standard than that, not a lower one.

Second, Leviticus 19:18 says, “love your neighbor as yourself.” Thus, the command to love one another is not the new thing here. No, what’s new is the standard to measure against: Leviticus 19:18 tells us to love our neighbor to the same degree (equal) that we love ourselves, whereas Jesus says to love each other as He has loved us. Again, Jesus’ love for us is an even higher standard, especially since Jesus is about to show the full extent of that love by dying on the cross.

Obviously, we cannot love to that same extent, but we can show a sacrificial love for each other which goes beyond mere tolerance and acceptance, and even beyond demands for equality and justice. “Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (16-17). Jesus’ love, for us and through us!

Let us pray: O almighty God, mercifully look on Your people, and by Your great goodness govern us in body and preserve us in soul; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Revelation's vision of the heavenly throne room now introduces people to God, who is the Creator. The scene pictures a rightly ordered universe in which God is at the center. Around the throne are four living creatures, who represent the created order (although, in all honesty, it is always hard to understand exactly what is being represented, being that they aren't normal things to our human insights).

Although Revelation is usually seen as a book of destruction, God's fundamental identity is that of Creator. This scene anticipates the outcome of the book, where God's purposes culminate in new creation. The words "holy, holy, holy" and the images of casting down crowns by heaven's glassy sea have inspired many of the hymns that are used in worship. A few examples are:

- ~ The Liturgy's Proper Preface
- ~ Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty (*TLH* 246; *LSB* 507)
- ~ Isaiah, mighty seer in days of old (*TLH* 249; *LSB* 960)
- ~ Heavenly Hosts in Ceaseless Worship (*LSB* 949)

How blessed are we that through our confessional Lutheran worship practices we are to be able to join in with what is always taking place in the heavenly realms. God's Divine Service continues to be heaven on earth as Christ continues to come to us through His Word & Sacraments creating and sustaining the faith that gets us in!

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

As Jesus' human nature succumbs to the reality of the weight of the world's sins about to be fully paid for by Him, He is crushed and beaten down. His humanity's only constant? His Father and prayer (which He will faithfully offer). Jesus takes the same three disciples who saw His glorious transfiguration, but now they witness how He is exceedingly sorrowful.

In the setting of such sorrow His disciples, rather than watching and praying, fall asleep, therefore, not lending any nearby comfort to Jesus. But the battle that Jesus fights in this hour He must of necessity fight alone. He alone must now will "to lay down His life" (Jn. 10:17-18), "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28), to be made sin and a curse for us (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13).

Yet, again, Jesus reveals what is impossible for man on his own, namely, trust in the Father's will no matter what the outcome. With man, the flesh is always right there to resist or think that it can bend God toward man's will. But Jesus faithfully submits to His Father's will for us! The disciples' falling asleep reveals the weakness of man's flesh. The two-natures of a Christian (Spirit & fallen flesh) will ever be at battle. The two-natures of Christ (God & perfect flesh) win the victory for us!

Think of it, Jesus knew exactly what the Old Testament said was going to happen to the Messiah. The beatings, the stripes, the disfigurement to the point of no recognition (see Isaiah 50:6 and Isaiah 53). Only the strength of God could press on through such a horrific, inescapable outcome. And yet, Christ was not forced to do any of it, but He did it in submission to his Father's will — and He did it for you!

Let us pray: Almighty God, grant that in the midst of our failures and weaknesses we may be restored through the passion and intercession of Your only-begotten Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, ‘Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!’ But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.” (vss 3-5)

The passivity of Jesus’ submission to His father’s will continues. Any man would be freaking out at such clear false accusations, but not the Son of Man. Why? Why does He say nothing? Well, as good Lutherans your answer should be “What does Holy Scripture say?” And this is what it says:

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet *He opened not His mouth*;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is *silent*,
So *He opened not His mouth*.”

(Isaiah 53:7, writer’s emphasis)

According to Isaiah, not only was the Messiah going to suffer cruel punishment on His way to the grave, but He also would do so without opening His mouth. The thought behind this phrase is that the Jesus would not speak in defense of Himself.

Whereas Jesus could have responded to His accusers with an open mouth and given a strong, lengthy defense of His innocence, He chose to restrain Himself before His accusers and tormentors. Rather than calling twelve legions of angels to fight this battle for Him (cf. Matthew 26:53), Jesus humbly, passively submitted to His enemies. And He did it for you!

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, grant us your grace so to pass through this holy time of our Lord’s passion that we may obtain the forgiveness of our sins; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The myrrh that was offered to Jesus (verse 23) could act as a narcotic, providing some numbness to His mind and body. This is exactly why Jesus refused to drink it. In other words, He was confirming that avoiding suffering is not the way of God, and He was fulfilling God's will to drink the whole cup (the dregs) of wrath (see Isaiah 51:17).

Jesus, who is the Messiah, the Christ who is to come, fulfills more prophecy at verse 24. What Scripture is that?

“They divide My garments among them,
And for My clothing they cast lots.”
(Psalm 22:18)

Verse 28 contains within it the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12, “And He was numbered with the transgressors.” So Jesus, being placed with two robbers, is yet another fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Then, at verses 29-32, when the mocking words of passerby's with the chief priests and scribes are spoken, it's, yet again, all fulfillment of prophecy:

“All those who see Me ridicule Me;
They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,
‘He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him;
Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!’”
(Psalm 22:7-8)

Fulfillment upon fulfillment! Unbelieving flesh desires not the suffering way of God; even calling for Jesus to avoid it. Now who could possibly be behind those salvation-changing mockings? Thanks be to God that Jesus remained the faithful, fulfilling, suffering servant. And He did it for you!

Let us pray: Merciful and everlasting God, You did not spare Your only Son but delivered Him up for us all to bear our sins on the cross. Grant that our hearts may be so fixed with steadfast faith in Him that we fear not the power of sin, death and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Yet, again, we are given a picture of heaven from the book of Revelation in which we get to see the parallel that this vision has to our confessional Lutheran worship. The next time you are in God's Divine Service (whether in a Sanctuary or in a home), when the singing takes place (be it a part of the Liturgy or a hymn), close your eyes and listen for just a few seconds. Now you get a sense of the vision to which the Apostle John was given. Multitudes in sound, being glad, rejoicing and giving God the glory.

At this time, the Church (the invisible body of believers worldwide) is the bride of Christ, and His Word and Sacraments are what create and sustain faith; feeding His bride with what keeps her ready; most specifically, a taste of the marriage supper as His bride. At that time, the bride becomes His wife and we will be partaking of that marriage supper for eternity.

Not surprising, it is God's Word and Sacraments which bring His saints to be arrayed in the righteousness of Christ; declared and imputed upon them through God-created faith in His fully atoning merits. Fine linen indeed!

"Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" What an appropriate reading for this Holy (Maundy) Thursday – the day celebrated for Christ's institution of His Holy Supper. By God's grace we are not brought to worship men, we have been brought to properly worship (that is, receive from) the One, true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And what does this Holy Trinity bring us to receive? Forgiveness, life and salvation. Blessed are we, indeed!

Let us pray: O Lord, in this wondrous Sacrament You have left us a remembrance of Your passion. Grant that we may so receive the sacred mystery of Your body and blood that the fruits of Your redemption may continually be manifest in us; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

There are four interpretations that have been applied to the tearing of the curtain: (1) It's a foreshadowing of the judgement that will befall Jerusalem in AD 70... (2) It's the opening of salvation to all through fully atoning merits of God's Son... (3) It's the ending of the ceremonial and ritual laws of the old covenant... and (4) It marks the replacement of the Old Testament Temple with the temple of the body of Christ Jesus. Now those all can certainly be offered as an explanation, for they hold to the analogy of faith. But since God so ordained not to reveal the exact meaning, we must not say that any of them are certain.

As you have read earlier this week, Jesus has fulfilled very many Old Testament prophecies throughout His Passion and crucifixion. Not surprisingly, that continues in the events of this text. Most specifically would be Jesus' final words from His cross.

“In You, O Lord, I put my trust; Let me never be
ashamed; Deliver me in Your righteousness... Pull me
out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, For
You are my strength. Into Your hand I commit my
spirit;

You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.”

(Psalm 31:1,4-5)

Psalm 31 is a psalm of trust. Such a cry reveals how, even in His death, Jesus was in control. He reemphasizes how His life was not taken from Him, but rather was trusting His Father's will and gave up His life. And He did it for you! It's really no wonder why it shouldn't be called anything other than Good Friday.

Let us pray: Almighty God, graciously behold this Your family for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and delivered into the hands of sinful men to suffer death upon the cross; though the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Even after death, Jesus fulfills this Old Testament prophesy:

“And they made His grave with the wicked—
But with the rich at His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was any deceit in His mouth.”

(Isaiah 53:9)

Normally, Jesus’ body would have been thrown into a mass grave with the two robbers. God, however, took care of His Son’s body through Joseph of Arimathea. Having finished all of the redemptive work to acquire man’s salvation, Jesus’ body is wrapped in fine linen and laid in an unused tomb.

Even as Jesus’ body most thoroughly observes a resting on the Sabbath – thus fulfilling the 3rd Commandment of God – He brought it to rest there for you! Not only did a transition take place from the Old Testament Temple to Jesus’ body as the temple that would be destroyed and He would raise it up again in three days, but He has now transitioned the Sabbath rest to be located within Himself.

What a blessed freedom Christ’s fully atoning merits have ushered in for His believers. As all of God’s Commandments bring conviction and point out how man’s sinful flesh will never fulfill them, so the relief of them being fully observed comes through Christ Jesus! Do you desire to not have any other gods? Then get in Christ Jesus! Do you desire to not misuse the name of the Lord your God? Then get in Christ Jesus! So it goes with keeping the Sabbath. Get in Him! Jesus is the Mercy Seat to which sinners flee in faith for refuge.

Let us pray: O God, creator of heaven and earth, grant that as the crucified body of Your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this Holy Sabbath, so we may await with Him the coming of the third day, and rise with Him to newness of life, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.