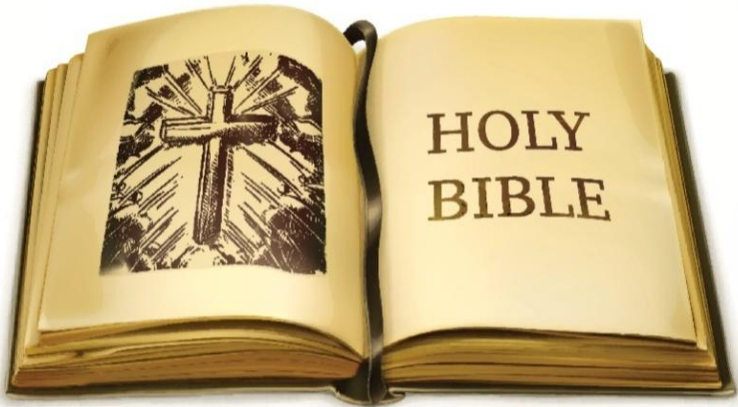


Each Day in the Word



April 5—May 2, 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.

Contributing authors:

Rev. Ernest Bernet

Rev. David Carver

Rev. Greg Schultz

Rev. Joshua Sullivan

Rev. Paul Rydecki

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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.

On this day when we celebrate the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus, we are reminded by the Apostle Paul about the change that must and will take place in our bodies, too.

From the moment we're born, we are dying. Part of the curse of sin is that our bodies decay and degenerate and eventually give out until death brings about the unnatural separation of our body and our soul. Even the far stronger bodies of Adam and Eve and their first children eventually gave out and returned to dust.

The sin that would have separated us from God for all eternity was atoned for by Christ's suffering and death. The grave that would have held our bodies and the hell that would have held our souls have now been conquered for us by our Lord Jesus in His resurrection from the dead. And the unbelief that would have still kept us out of His kingdom has been changed into faith by the Holy Spirit as He convinced us, through the Gospel promise, to look to Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

For the moment, although we have been reconciled with God through faith in Christ, we still have to endure the temporary separation of body and soul. But even that death is about to be swallowed up in the victory won by Christ when He comes again. And all the corruption and decay that now taint our bodies will be erased and replaced with a new kind of body which we can't even begin to imagine, one that won't age or degenerate, one that won't be susceptible to disease or decay or death, or sin. What our Lord has promised us is not only the resurrection of our bodies, but also the changing of our bodies into something unimaginably glorious, so that in all things we resemble Christ our Brother, whose victory over death we celebrate today.

Let us pray: O Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, we thank and praise You for willingly enduring the cross and its shame so that we might live with You forever. Be with us now and at the hour of our death, that we may ever rejoice in Your wondrous gift of life. Amen.

As they began their journey to Emmaus, Jesus' disciples viewed His crucifixion as a big mistake. They had believed in Jesus, but without understanding His purpose or how He would accomplish it. They had put all their hope in Him as the One who would redeem Israel by a glorious conquest of their enemies, so they didn't know what to do with His death. Even these faithful disciples stumbled over the cross.

The risen Lord Jesus mercifully came to them and raised them up, but He insisted on doing it through His Word, hiding Himself in the Scriptures, so that faith might always be tied to hearing and not to seeing. As He walked them through the Old Testament, He unfolded the story of redemption, a redemption that was to be first from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, a redemption that was to be made with the holy, precious blood of Christ. Only then, after suffering and dying, would the Christ "enter into His glory." Only then, after rising from the dead, would He send forth His Gospel to gather all nations into a spiritual Israel. And only then, after the spiritual Israel is fully gathered, would He usher in the final redemption for all His faithful people. But none of it could be accomplished apart from the cross.

Let us not stumble over the cross, but let us rejoice in God's ancient plan of redemption through the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Christ. And let us recognize and joyfully receive the body of the risen Christ in the greater breaking of bread: in the Sacrament by which we proclaim His death until He comes.

Let us pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, who revealed Your Son to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus: Enlighten our hearts also by Your word and Spirit, that we may become strong and established in the faith, hold fast to Your word, delight to speak of it, and diligently use it, so that although, according to the example of Christ, we must suffer much evil on earth, we nevertheless may have and retain a sure comfort in Your word, until, after this life, we shall be raised unto eternal life. Amen.

The account of Jesus' resurrection is told so simply: The faithful women go looking for their crucified Lord in His tomb, expecting to find His lifeless corpse, convinced that death has won yet another victory. But the stone is rolled away. The tomb is empty. And the angels are the first messengers to confirm the meaning of these signs: "He is not here, for He is risen, as He said." "As He said"—that makes Jesus' resurrection absolutely unique in all of history. He not only predicted His death; He foretold His resurrection from the dead. He said that He would suffer, be crucified, and rise from the dead (cf. Mark 8:31, etc.). He said that He would rebuild the temple of His body in three days after the Jews had destroyed it (cf. John 2:19). He said that He would lay down His life willingly and then take it up again by His own power (cf. John 10:17). As always, Jesus was true to His word.

The One who rose from the dead is the same One who died as the sacrifice for the world's sins. He is the same One who was born our Brother that He might redeem us, His brothers, who were once captive to sin and death. Now death has been overcome by our Brother who is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Now life is guaranteed to all who trust in Him and death has lost its iron grip, for He was delivered for our sins and raised again for our justification. "Do not be afraid," said the angel. "Do not be afraid," says the Lord. May His words ring in our ears at all times and comfort us in our final hour.

Let us pray: O risen Lord Christ, drive out all fear from our hearts as we contemplate Your glorious resurrection, and cheer us with Your promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation to all who trust in You. Amen.

On the night before He laid down His life, Jesus prayed, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5). How hollow those words must have rung in the ears of Jesus’ disciples as the events of Thursday and Friday unfolded. If ever a prayer seemed to have gone unanswered, this was it. Instead of glory, Jesus received shame, abuse, a cross, and a tomb.

Mary Magdalene, who had been such a faithful follower of Jesus, wept in despair, unconvinced even by the empty tomb. But then Jesus called her by name, and His word spoke faith into her heart as she beheld the glory of the Risen One in the reality that He who was crucified, dead, and buried now stood before her, alive and breathing. She beheld His glory in the truth of His life.

Seeing the empty tomb simply isn’t enough either for Mary or for us. Seeing the empty tomb wouldn’t cause us to believe in Christ. But He has given us His word, called us to faith, and called us by name in Holy Baptism, and so He has given us the right to be called children of God. Like Mary, we are not allowed to cling to His resurrected body, except in the one way He has given: in the Sacrament of His body and blood. There we are given a veiled glimpse of our ascended Lord in this life. And after this life, we have the promise of sharing in our Brother’s inheritance in our Father’s house forever, if we remain faithful until the end.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, comfort us, as You once comforted Mary Magdalene, by the assurance of Your glorious resurrection, and help us ever to cling to You in faith until we see You face to face. Amen.

Luke makes a play on words in his resurrection account. The Greek word for “tomb” is related to the word for “remember.” A tomb is a place of remembrance. But it was at that very place of remembrance that the faithful women forgot.

They didn’t forget everything. They remembered their beloved Teacher whom they had followed faithfully wherever He went. They remembered His agonizing death two days earlier which they beheld from a distance. They remembered seeing Him buried in the tomb and seeing the stone rolled in place.

What they didn’t remember was what Jesus had told them ahead of time about His tomb: that on the third day it would be empty! Even the sight of the stone rolled away and the empty tomb didn’t remind them. Only the word of the angels caused them to remember.

Now let’s remember why the Lord’s resurrection matters. He was put to death for our sins. Death is the punishment for sin. But if the punishment is removed, then that is evidence that atonement for the sins has also been made, and forgiveness is offered and guaranteed to all who believe. So remember Jesus’ words: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life” (John 3:36). “Because I live, you will live also” (John 14:19). “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead. Remember Him when you see the baptismal font. Remember Him in His holy Meal. Remember Him when you pass by the cemetery, or when you visit the grave of a loved one who fell asleep in Christ. Remember Him when death comes close to you. Remember, and rejoice!

Let us pray: O risen Lord, keep us always in remembrance of Your death and resurrection, and remember us always before Your Father in heaven, even in our final hour. Amen.

Even seeing the risen Christ wasn't enough to fully convince the disciples of His resurrection! It took signs: touching the nail prints, watching Him eat. More importantly, it took words. And not just any words, it took the words from the Old Testament that connected the dots between what the Christ would do and what Jesus had done.

As He had done for the Emmaus disciples, Jesus walked His apostles through the Old Testament. There was the promise made to Eve of her serpent-crushing Seed. There were the promises to Abraham, the sacrifice provided by the Lord in place of Isaac, the stairway shown to Jacob, the Passover Lamb, the Day of Atonement, the ark of the covenant, the sufferings and ultimate victories of David and of David's greater Son, the institution of the New Testament, etc. All of it pointed to Christ. And the apostles absolutely needed to see and understand, because they would be the witnesses of the resurrection by whose testimony the Holy Spirit would build the Christian Church until the end of time. Even that preaching of the Gospel was prophesied in the Old Testament, that "repentance and the remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Again, the word of God does everything. It convicts. It convinces. It absolves. And it strengthens. We don't have the benefit of seeing Jesus. But we do have the benefit of His word, which is more powerful than sight.

Let us pray: O Father, we praise Your name for fulfilling Your promises throughout the ages. Grant us Your Holy Spirit to have our hearts opened that we may understand Your holy word, live in daily repentance, and support the preaching of Your Gospel in all the world; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The disciples didn't believe Mary Magdalene's account of having seen Jesus. Nor did most of them believe the account of the two Emmaus disciples. In fact, it seems that, of all Jesus' disciples, not one believed that Jesus had risen from the dead based on the testimony of another. Each one had to see at least some piece of evidence for him or herself. And these were the believers! How would unbelievers ever be converted if even the believers were so slow to believe!

As always, the Word of God does everything. In His mercy God continued to send His Word to His doubting disciples, until finally the Lord Christ Himself appeared to them and rebuked them for their unbelief. They shouldn't only have believed their brothers and sisters because they knew them not to be liars. They should have believed them because their accounts of Jesus' resurrection were consistent with the Holy Scriptures and with Jesus' own prophecies about the third day—prophecies which the disciples, in their sadness, had driven from their minds.

Even the Christian heart is slow to believe God's promises, and we easily allow hardship and afflictions to drive out God's Word from our thoughts. For this reason we will never stop needing the Holy Spirit's help in this life, to enlighten us with His gifts and to sanctify us and keep us with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. The Lord showed great patience toward His disciples and finally confirmed them in the faith so that they were willing to endure all things, even death, rather than deny their risen Lord. Let us hold fast to His Word in every trial and hardship, that the Spirit of Christ may continually admonish, guide, and comfort us, until we see the risen Christ for ourselves.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we believe. Help our unbelief. Be patient with us in our weakness, and grant us Your Holy Spirit to keep our eyes firmly fixed on You, our risen Lord and Savior. Amen.

After His resurrection, Jesus no longer lived among His disciples as He had before. He didn't stay with them during those forty days between His resurrection and ascension. He appeared out of nowhere and then disappeared, having entered into His state of exaltation.

After all the remaining apostles – including Thomas – had seen the risen Lord and had their doubts and unbelief replaced with faith, they finally did what He had told them to do (cf. Matt. 28:10): They went to Galilee to meet the Lord. And since He hadn't told them where exactly to meet Him, they decided to go fishing, as many of them had done for a living until being called away from their nets by Jesus some three years earlier. And just like the last time they had gone fishing, they caught nothing all night long.

But then the risen Lord fulfilled His promise to meet them. He appeared on the seashore and gave them another miraculous catch of fish, just like the last time they had gone fishing. Not that He needed the fish they caught; He Himself provided fish and bread for them, just as He had multiplied the loaves and the fish twice before. But He added to the meal some of what they had caught and then ate breakfast with them—the last meal He would share with them this side of heaven.

These disciples had much work yet to do. They had much to suffer, and all of them except for John would meet a violent end. But they were willing to do the work and to suffer the cross for Christ because their Lord had worked and suffered for them first, and they knew He would continue to work with them and bless their preaching, even as He was the One who blessed their fishing again that day. They would be willing to give up their earthly lives because they had seen that death was not the end for Jesus, but the beginning of a new and glorious life—a life that He will live with those who follow Him here.

Let us pray: O risen Lord Jesus, make us bold to do whatever work You give us to do here on earth and to suffer whatever hardship You allow, knowing that You have truly risen from the dead, and that we will, too. Amen.

Five times Jesus appeared to His apostles as a group after He rose from the dead. In almost every instance, there was a “sending” that took place—Jesus sending out His apostles for the work of the ministry. The miraculous catch of fish was another reminder that He had called them all to the ministry of catching men.

Peter, too, was to have a part in that ministry, even though he had recently denied Jesus before men three times. So three times in today’s reading Jesus gave Peter the chance to confess his love for Jesus, and with each confession of love, Jesus commended His precious sheep and lambs to Peter’s care as their earthly shepherd, that is, as their “pastor.”

But it wasn’t to Peter alone or even to Peter primarily that Jesus entrusted the pastoral ministry. It was to all the apostles and to all who would later be appointed by the Holy Spirit through the call of the Church as pastors of the flock of Christ. St. Paul commanded the elders in Ephesus to “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). And St. Peter himself later commanded the same thing to the elders who received his first epistle: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you” (1 Pet. 5:2). Although the risen Christ is the Good Shepherd, He tends His sheep through the ministry of the undershepherds whom He has given to the Church.

For the pastors’ part, it must be love for Christ which drives and characterizes their ministry. For the sheep’s part, they must not imagine that they have no need of the pastors whom Christ has sent. Pastors faithfully preaching and administering the Sacrament, sheep gratefully being fed by their Shepherd through the ministry of His pastors—this is the good and gracious will of the risen Christ for His Church until He comes again.

Let us pray: O Lord Christ, we give You thanks for faithful pastors and for the faithful flocks who benefit from and support their ministry. In Your mercy, govern Your sheepfold so that none of Your sheep are left without the care of faithful and loving pastors. Amen.

The house of God, the temple in Jerusalem, was the one place on earth where God had promised to hear prayer and to accept sacrifices for sin. So Jesus, the faithful Shepherd, could not allow the house of God to be desecrated with profane buying and selling and with the din and filth of animals for sale. It was a distraction from the prayers which were to be offered there, and from the animals which the priests were sacrificing for the sins of the people. Zeal for His Father's house – and for the people who needed the service of that house – consumed Him.

The sign of His authority over that house was fulfilled on Easter Sunday. The Jews did, indeed, destroy the house of God, the body of Jesus, but He raised it up in three days.

The temple in Jerusalem was a temporary symbol pointing to Christ whose body is the true dwelling-place of God. God now dwells in the body of Jesus, sacrificed for sin once for all and now alive forever and ever. Where Jesus is – that's where God promises to hear prayer. Where Jesus is – that's where God continually views the once-for-all sacrifice made for sin and has promised to show mercy for His sake.

Where is Jesus? He is present for us where He has promised to be: in every assembly of believers throughout the world where His Gospel is rightly preached and His Sacraments are faithfully administered. The faithful pastor will be zealous for God's house and see to it that Christ is proclaimed purely, with no buying and selling of God's favor, and with no din of false doctrine or mundane distractions to obscure the Son of God.

Let us pray: Gracious Father, hear our prayers and be merciful to us as we approach You only through Jesus, trusting in His merits alone. Amen.

John the Baptist was a faithful shepherd. His faithfulness was shown in many ways, not the least of which was his humility. He wasn't a preacher because he craved followers or fame. He was a preacher because God had sent him to point people to Christ. He knew that Christ was the heavenly Bridegroom who came to sanctify and cleanse His Church with the washing of water by the Word, to shed His blood for her, to make her His bride. That meant that John – and every pastor after him – was not the Bridegroom, but only the friend of the Bridegroom. “He must increase, I must decrease.”

Still, what a privilege to be a friend of this Bridegroom! What an honor to be called to point sinners to Him for cleansing!

The faithful pastor does just that. He doesn't preach himself. He doesn't preach to get people to like him or to follow him. He preaches Christ Jesus and Him crucified. If his popularity wanes, it doesn't matter. What matters is that he fulfills whatever role, great or small, that the Lord has for him in directing people to the only One who can shelter them from God's wrath. The faithful pastor's chief desire is for Christ to increase, for Christ to be glorified, and for Christ to be known. The motivation of a faithful pastor is love for Christ and love for souls, for the wrath of God abides on all who don't believe in Christ, as John says. And as Paul says in Romans 10, “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”

Let us pray: O Lord Jesus, bless Your Church with humble pastors who are devoted to pointing sinners to You who loved us and gave Yourself for us to save us from wrath and punishment! Amen.

Jesus' encounter with the adulterous Samaritan woman at the well highlights the perpetual challenge faced by all preachers of the Gospel: What do you do when you know that the person standing in front of you is spiritually dead, and you have the very water of life that can raise that person from the dead? You have what they need, but you can't force them to drink it. How, then, do you pass it on?

What did Jesus do? He initiated a conversation which quickly led to a discussion of spiritual truth. He spoke of His ability and His willingness to give living water to whoever wants it. He exposed her adultery with a sign of His omniscience. He revealed her idolatry and the false worship in which she and the other Samaritans engaged. And then He revealed Himself as the Christ, as the One who had come to atone for sins and to reconcile sinners to God. In other words, He simply preached the Law and the Gospel, with genuine kindness and sincerity.

As we know, many times Jesus preached the Word, and His hearers didn't end up thirsting for the water of life that He offered. They stubbornly refused to believe the Gospel He spoke, turning down the very gift that would have saved them. But in this instance, the word He spoke brought the woman to faith.

The faithful pastor can do no better than to imitate Jesus, taking advantage of the opportunities that present themselves to speak the Law and the Gospel with unbelievers, some of whom will be led by the Holy Spirit to drink and live forever. And all of us can look for opportunities to have conversations like the one Jesus had at the well, even if it's as simple as inviting someone to church.

Let us pray: Merciful God, grant us opportunities to bring Your living water to others. And then grant us boldness to speak, and wisdom to know what to say. Amen.

The fields were white in Samaria as Jesus stood by the well with His disciples. All they had to do was look up and see the people streaming out of the city to come and listen to Jesus after they were told about Him by the woman who had met Him at the well. Jesus had sown the seed of the Word with the Samaritan woman.

But the Prophets of the Old Testament had also done their work. And the temple rituals in Jerusalem had done their work. And the faithful Jews who traveled through Samaria had done their work, simply by the witness of their faithfulness to the Jewish religion, which was the only true religion established by God. The Samaritans had been exposed to all these things over time; and now, finally, they were ready to listen. And Jesus' disciples would be there to gather in the fruit of the labors of others.

The fields aren't always white, though. People don't always come streaming out of the cities to hear the Gospel from a faithful pastor. In most places of the world, the seed was sown long ago, and others who have gone before us have labored long and hard in the ministry of the Word. There is always more sowing to do, and always more labor. But the harvest is not always plentiful. In some places the seed barely grows. From some places the passing rain shower of the Gospel, as Luther once called it, may have to pass on due to the hardness of men's hearts. And in other places there may yet be an abundant harvest to be reaped.

In every case, whatever the condition of the fields, the faithful pastor must labor while it is day. But he knows he doesn't labor alone. Others have labored before him, Christ continues to labor with him, and there is a reward that awaits him, if he doesn't lose heart.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, send laborers into Your fields, and sustain those whom You have sent. Amen.

Lutherans don't give personal testimonies in their services as some Evangelical churches do. But that doesn't mean there's no place for personal testimonies in a Christian's life. On the contrary, the woman of Samaria gave her own testimony to her friends and neighbors, and many people came to listen to Jesus as a result.

But what was that testimony about? Not anything she had done. Not anything she had felt. Not any change in her life or any description of what Jesus meant to her. Her testimony was about what Jesus had said to her. Her testimony simply passed on Jesus' words. And her testimony also had a purpose: to bring people to hear Jesus for themselves.

It worked. The Holy Spirit used her testimony to begin faith in the hearts of many who heard. Even in those who didn't at first believe, her testimony was effective at getting people to come hear Jesus for themselves. His preaching then confirmed their faith and became the true basis of it, so that after just two days with Him they could confess, "We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

The personal testimony of a Christian is good and beneficial, as long as it focuses on who Jesus is and what He has said and done, and as long as it seeks to bring people to the place where the Gospel of Christ is preached by faithful pastors, so that they may come to know the Good Shepherd through the teaching of His shepherds, and so come to confess that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.

Let us pray: O Christ, Savior of the world, bless the testimony of Your people, both pastors and laity, and extend the borders of Your Church, that Your name may be confessed in all the world. Amen.

This week our Bible texts come from John 5 and 6. Today's text (5:22-24) is actually a portion within Tuesday's text (5:18-30), so we will have to focus.

Today we focus on two phrases: 1) "the Father judges no one" and 2) "passed from death to life." We will let St. Augustine help us with both.

1) "The Father judges no one." Scripture certainly speaks of both the Father and the Son as judging, but here Jesus is making a distinction of which judgment. Augustine explains, "How can it be said, 'The Father judges no one'? ...It is as if it was said: No one will see the Father in the judgment of the living and the dead, but everyone will see the Son, because he is also the Son of man so that he can be seen even by the ungodly" (On the Trinity I.13.29, NPNF 1 3:34). Jesus is telling us here that God the Father has committed to Him the judgment of the living and the dead.

2) "Passed from death to life." Just as Scripture speaks of two deaths (the first death and the second death), it also speaks of two resurrections (Rev 20:6). Augustine explains, "Hence a resurrection does take place now, and men pass from a death to a life; from the death of infidelity to the life of faith... There is, therefore, that which is a resurrection of the dead... The Lord Jesus, then, was willing to make known to us a resurrection of the dead before the resurrection of the dead (Tractates on the Gospel of John 19:8-9, NPNF 1 7:125). Note here that there is a resurrection before the resurrection: the first resurrection is conversion (passing from spiritual death to spiritual life), and the second resurrection is glorification (passing from this world to the next). Praise to Christ because through faith in Him we have passed from death to life and look forward to heaven.

Let us pray: O God, by the humiliation of your Son you raised up the fallen world. Give your faithful people constant gladness, deliverance from the danger of eternal death, and make us partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

“Do you want to be made well?” This might seem like an odd question to ask someone who has had an infirmity for 38 years. The question is meant to draw the man’s attention to Jesus. The man’s answer shows that he is still thinking about the pool as the source of his possible healing rather than Jesus Himself. And what a hopeless situation: a lame man whose only hope is to be the first one to get into the healing waters at the first sign of their stirring. Being lame would most certainly mean that he would never be the first one there.

Enter Jesus, hope for the hopeless: “Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked” (8-9). Ah, but it was a Sabbath day, so enter also, the detractors: “It is not lawful for you to carry your bed.”

Overruled! The Lord of the Sabbath Himself says otherwise: “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” The purpose of the Sabbath was to rest – to cease from your normal work just long enough to have a chance to focus on God’s work for us. And, not just to rest, but to rest *in Him*; not just a Sabbath, but a Sabbath *unto the Lord*; not just keeping the Sabbath by not working, but keeping the Sabbath holy by devoting the time to holy things like hearing the Word of God, prayer, worship, and so forth.

God “rested” initially on the Sabbath to set that as the pattern for His people, but He certainly continued to sustain, uphold, and provide for His creation, even on Sabbath days, and maybe even especially on Sabbath days. It was on Sabbath days that the people of God were to focus on the work, words, and activity of God for them, rather than their work throughout the rest of the week. Thus, “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” So says “the Lord of the Sabbath.”

Let us pray: O God, by the humiliation of your Son you raised up the fallen world. Give your faithful people constant gladness, deliverance from the danger of eternal death, and make us partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

“As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself” (v26). Jesus, the Son, seeks to give life (v21); the Jewish opposition, seeks to kill Him. They seek to kill Him because He healed on the Sabbath (v16) and because He was “making Himself equal to God” (v18). One thing is certain here: Jesus is definitely claiming a unique relationship to God. He is not just claiming to be *a* son of God, as in one of many. No, Jesus is claiming to be *the* Son of God (v25). The Jewish leaders who hear those claims understand the implications correctly; they simply do not agree. But we do. The difference is faith. In faith we receive Him as the Son of God and our savior.

Faith makes the difference in our final destination as well. Jesus says, “The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (vv28-29). The Apology explains: “These passages and all others like them where works are praised in the Scriptures must be taken to mean not only outward works but also the faith of the heart.... By this rule, as we have said earlier, all passages on works can be interpreted. Therefore, when eternal life is granted to works, it is granted to the justified. None can do good works except the justified, who are led by the Spirit of Christ; nor can good works please God without the mediator Christ and faith, according to Heb. 11:6, ‘Without faith it is impossible to please God’” (AP IV 371-72).

Faith makes all the difference. Faith is our connection. Jesus says that He can do nothing of Himself (v19), showing His intimate connection to the Father; and that we can do nothing apart from Him (Jn 15:5), showing the necessity of our connection with Him, through faith.

Let us pray: O God, by the humiliation of your Son you raised up the fallen world. Give your faithful people constant gladness, deliverance from the danger of eternal death, and make us partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Jesus knows that simply bearing witness of Himself will not do, so He cites multiple witnesses. This is what Scripture requires: “By the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established” (Dt 19:15). That is, two witnesses are required, if they agree; if they do not agree, then a third witness is required to break the tie. In a fallen world disagreement and opposition are expected, so the best of two out of three witnesses confirms the matter.

Jesus’ testimony about Himself is receiving opposition, so He cites other witnesses to Him: John the Baptist, the works that He has done, the Father Himself, and the Scriptures (i.e., the Old Testament), specifically Moses, “for he wrote about Me” (v46).

“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (vv39-40).

Luther explains these words in a sermon in Halle on August 5, 1545: “So, then, Christ’s words to the Pharisees are as much as to say: ... ‘I will give you a marvelous gloss and interpretation of Holy Scripture, which you do not yet know, so that you may read Scripture and open them aright, and then study the Scriptures so as to find Me, Me in them. Whoever reads the Scriptures so that he finds Me in them is the true master of the Scriptures. The dust is removed from his eyes, and he will certainly find life in them’” (AE 58:248).

Elsewhere, Luther says this: “As for me, I confess: Whenever I found less in the Scripture than Christ, I was never satisfied; but whenever I found more than Christ, I never became poorer. Therefore it seems to me to be true that God the Holy Spirit does not know and does not want to know anything besides Jesus Christ” (AE 14:204). It all hinges on Christ.

Let us pray: O God, by the humiliation of your Son you raised up the fallen world. Give your faithful people constant gladness, deliverance from the danger of eternal death, and make us partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Jesus has just fed the 5,000, and “when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone” (15). Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus made the disciples v into the boat, dismiss the crowd, and then went up on the mountain by Himself to pray (Mt 14:22-23; Mk 6:45-46).

That night they were having difficulty as they headed toward Capernaum because of a strong wind. Then, in the darkness, out on the water, they saw what they thought was a ghost, and they cried out in fear (Mt 14:26; Mk 6:49-50). “But He said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid’” (v20). These words are a comfort to His disciples.

Jesus also has words that challenge the other followers: “You seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life” (vv26-27). Luther explains these words: “How does Christ the Lord handle this problem? He wanted to turn the people away from such an illusion and such a selfish attitude, to draw them from the belly to the Spirit, to show them that the proclamation of the Gospel was not intended to afford them food for the body and earthly goods but rather to give something far superior to food and drink, house and home, wife and children. It is by no means the purpose of the Gospel to instill greed, a sense of smugness, and a spirit of indolence.... It is as though He were saying: ‘I will supply you with a different kind of food. Why do you want to be such wretched beggars and seek and desire such paltry morsels and trifles from Me? I want to give you a different sort of food, which will not perish, bread that will endure to eternity, which will not let you die but will preserve you for everlasting life’” (AE 23:8). Christ would feed us spiritually, as well.

Let us pray: O God, by the humiliation of your Son you raised up the fallen world. Give your faithful people constant gladness, deliverance from the danger of eternal death, and make us partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Our lesson yesterday ended with the people who had followed Him after the feeding of the 5000 asking Him, “‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent’” (vv28-29). Then, our lesson today begins with these verses: “Therefore they said to Him, ‘What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” (vv30-31). Now Jesus must correct them.

First, Jesus does not do “signs” on command, like some side-show attraction. Second, it was God, not Moses, who gave their ancestors bread in the wilderness. And third, that bread was not the true bread from heaven; Jesus is. “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’” (v35).

Luther explains: “This bread is to be a preservative against death. It is as if a physician or a pharmacist were to tell a patient: ‘I will give you a medicine, a potion or purgative, that will save you from death. You will no longer live in fear of death, since you are immune.’... Anyone who eats it will live and will be able to say: ‘Even if all deaths were combined into one, or even if death were to come when it wills, I shall not fear you, death. You cannot harm me, for I have drunk this cup and eaten this food.’ Therefore even if all deaths were combined into one and attacked such a man fiercely, they would not be able to consume and devour him; for Christ will resurrect him on the Last Day. Even if he lay buried a thousand ells under the sod or were dismembered by wolves, eaten by fish, or burned to ashes by fire, he would still live again” (AE 23:41–42). Our faith, and thus our life, is in Him.

Let us pray: O God, by the humiliation of your Son you raised up the fallen world. Give your faithful people constant gladness, deliverance from the danger of eternal death, and make us partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Jesus said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven”; and the people complained and grumbled just like the people in the wilderness (Ex 15:24). So, Jesus therefore answered them, “Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (vv43-44).

Luther explains how God draws men to Himself: “God is not like a hangman, who drags a thief up the ladder to the gallows; but He allures and coaxes us in a friendly fashion, as a kind man attracts people by his amiability and cordiality, and everyone willingly goes to him. Thus God, too, gently draws people to Himself, so that they abide with Him willingly and happily. Thus He wants to show that we do not come to Him through our wisdom, for that would make you really unwilling. But you come to Him when the Father shows you His great mercy, when He assures you that He will reveal Himself as having sent His Son into the world out of paternal love, as is written John 3:16, ‘that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.’ Then you hear that God is not hostile to you, but is your gracious and merciful Father, who gave His Son for you, let Him die for you, and raised Him again from the dead. He directs you to the Son and has Him proclaimed to you. And if this is correctly taught, then we come to Him.”

As we are drawn to Him in faith, we are also fed in Him: “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” (vv54-56). While this is not a direct reference to the Lord’s Supper (because He has not instituted it yet) it does point us to the same thing – namely, Christ Himself. In Him we have life, eternal life.

Let us pray: O God, by the humiliation of your Son you raised up the fallen world. Give your faithful people constant gladness, deliverance from the danger of eternal death, and make us partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

God often uses the things we're familiar with to help us understand something we're less familiar with. In the historic Gospel for today (John 16:16-23), Jesus used the illustration of a woman in labor to help His disciples understand the joy that awaited them after a little while of pain and suffering. The pain is temporary; the joy is lasting and well worth the pain that must first be endured.

Likewise, Jesus and John the Baptist both used people's familiarity with earthly marriage to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the Church. Christ is the Bridegroom; the Church is His beloved Bride.

But St. Paul turns things around in today's lesson. He takes the Christian's familiarity with Christ and the Church and uses it to teach Christians about marriage and how God would have Christian husbands and wives view one another and treat one another. This is necessary, because sin has so corrupted humanity's view of the roles of men and women that a non-Christian can scarcely comprehend God's beautiful design any longer. But if we are first brought by the Holy Spirit to know and trust in the Lord Christ, then husbands and wives have a solid basis for living together as God intended.

The Church recognizes Christ as her Head and submits to Him as her Lord. It could hardly be the other way around! So Christian wives are to view their Christian husbands and submit to them, not as slaves to their masters, but as dear Christians submit to our dear Lord Jesus.

Meanwhile, Christ loved the Church so much that He gave everything for her to make her His own, even shedding His own blood for her and providing the baptismal washing that makes her clean and beautiful in God's sight. So Christian husbands are to think of and treat their Christian wives, as beloved extensions of their own bodies, with sacrificial love that knows no bounds.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, help us to know You rightly that we may also view marriage rightly, so that husbands and wives may live together as You intended. Amen.

When Jesus finished preaching in the synagogue about the necessity to eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to have eternal life, many of His own disciples replied, “This is a hard saying.” Many things the multitudes could believe about Jesus, but when confronted with the teaching that this Man was God, who had come from God and had to be believed in as God and as the only Way to life, they stumbled.

Why? Did Jesus fail to preach His sermon winsomely enough? Was He not eloquent enough or sincere enough? Was the Holy Spirit not drawing, not working through His words? No, Jesus’ words were “Spirit” and “life.” He preached the truth. He preached perfectly. But most members of the Church of Israel stubbornly resisted the Holy Spirit. They simply would not believe in Jesus as their God, and so they left Him.

Nothing has changed. Many people who hear the truth of Christ rightly preached, who may even join a church and live as Christians for a while, eventually walk away for no other reason than that they stumble over Jesus. The question at that point for those who remain is the question Jesus posed to His twelve disciples. “Do you also want to go away?” If, by God’s grace, you are convinced, as eleven of the twelve disciples were, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, if you’re convinced that your church teaches the word of Christ correctly, then you have all you need. You have Jesus. And with Him, you have also the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the sure hope of everlasting life.

Let us pray: O Father in heaven, by Your Word You have graciously drawn us to Jesus as Your Son and our Savior. Keep us firm and steadfast in the faith, that we may always find joy and contentment in His teaching. Amen.

It was about six months before the great Passover of Holy Week. The Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. Jesus' brothers wanted Him to travel south to Judea for the Feast, not to keep the Feast, not to preach the Gospel, namely, that He had been sent from God to save sinners from sin, death, and the power of the devil. No, His brothers were eager for Him to increase His following, to impress the crowds with His miracles, to be a good politician, a populist rabbi, or worse yet, a revolutionary leader. If you want to be any of those things, you need to hit the campaign trail and sell the people on what you have to offer. At this point, even Jesus' own brothers regarded Him according to the flesh (cf. 2 Cor. 5:16). They didn't believe in Him as the Son of God.

As a result, Jesus' brothers were able to avoid the hatred of the world for a while longer. Only those who openly confess Christ before the world can truly be hated by the world, as countless Christians would experience in the brutal tortures, imprisonments, and executions that would accompany those who followed Christ. By God's grace, Jesus' brothers were eventually brought to believe in Him after His resurrection and joined that number of those who were gladly hated for Jesus' sake.

Any number of "Christian" churches today behave as Jesus' brothers did in today's reading by seeking popularity with the world while downplaying the doctrine of Holy Scripture and the truth that Jesus is the true God, who condemns the world's works as evil, even as He calls the wicked to repent and believe in Him for forgiveness. As for you, be counted among those who stand for Jesus as His word reveals Him, not as the world wants to see Him.

Let us pray: Father, help us to know Your beloved Son rightly, to confess Him openly, and to suffer the world's hatred with peace, love, and joy. Amen.

Jesus ended up attending the Feast of Tabernacles, but not to make a big show or to dazzle the people with miracles. He went to teach, although He did perform at least one miracle while He was there: He healed a man on the Sabbath. The authority of His teaching amazed His listeners. His audacity to “work” on the Sabbath made some of them angry, and His claim to have been sent by God to teach and to work made them ready to kill Him.

But He gave them a test to know if He was telling the truth: “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17). Do you truly want to do what God wants, what God wills? If so, then you will pay attention to His Word, where His will is perfectly revealed. And if you pay attention to it, then you will realize that Jesus is speaking and acting according to the Word of God, while those who reject or accuse Him are actually deviating from the Law of Moses.

Yes, if you pay attention to God’s Word, you’ll find that you’re a sinner in need of a Savior—the very Savior described in the Law of Moses, who is human like you, but righteous; a Savior who is God, so that He can win you back from sin, death, and the power of the devil. If you will to do God’s will, you will see that Jesus is telling the truth, and that the prophets, including Moses, all point directly to Him and testify that in Him alone is salvation.

Let us pray: Father in heaven, You have brought us to believe that Jesus came from You in order to reveal You to us, especially Your gracious plan of salvation through faith in Him. Open our hearts to believe everything He teaches and to put it into practice, with faith toward You and with love toward one another. Amen.

There was plenty of speculation about Jesus in Jerusalem. There were plenty of assumptions, plenty of rumors. But there was little interest in finding real answers, or the people would have asked Jesus to explain things to them. We may even wonder why He didn't simply address their questions directly and clear up some of their misconceptions.

What we notice at this last feast which Jesus attended before His final Passover is that Jesus taught those who wanted to be taught and spoke in riddles to those who did not. Many who questioned Him were questioning in unbelief. To them He did not present logical arguments. He did not try to reason them into believing or to market Himself. He did not plead with people to believe in Him. He spoke with enough bold, clear truth to bring people to faith, if they didn't stubbornly resist His Holy Spirit.

Later, Jesus would explain many things to His disciples in private, including what He meant about "going away" in a "little while" (cf. John 16:16-28). He was foretelling His death and resurrection, and also His ascension and coming again at the end of the age.

So also He has explained many things to us through the Scriptures of the Apostles, if we will only listen. But whether or not we understand everything the Bible says, we have enough clear words of Jesus to know Him and to trust Him. And whether or not we can give crystal clear explanations of His Word to those around us, we can trust that the simple message of Law and Gospel is enough to convert those who hear, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray: Gracious Lord, help us always to submit our human wisdom to Your divine wisdom. Enlighten our eyes by Your Holy Spirit and help us to understand Your Word rightly, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Just as Jesus offered “living water” to the woman at the well (cf. John 4), so He calls out to the crowds in today’s reading, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37). To thirst is to know your own sins and your complete inability to save yourself. To come to Jesus is to believe in Him for salvation. To drink is to receive the Holy Spirit, and with Him the forgiveness of sins, rebirth, and eternal life. The evidence of the Holy Spirit, Who is given to all who believe in Jesus, would appear on the Day of Pentecost, when the outward signs of the Spirit “flowed” from the believers like rivers of living water.

These things have been revealed to us by the same Holy Spirit through the witness of the apostles and the preaching of the Word, and not by the wisdom or authority of any human being. The religious leaders in today’s lesson rejected Jesus as the Christ and mocked the ignorant crowds for trusting Jesus instead of trusting their religious leaders, although those leaders were fallible men who had strayed in both their doctrine and practice from the clear teaching of the Old Testament.

While God has appointed ministers in the world, we know that not all ministers preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. They don’t all direct us to trust in Him in order to be justified before God. Watch out for those who don’t. Give thanks for those who do. And drink deeply of the Holy Spirit as He comes to you through the Word that is preached. And from that faith, let all the fruits of the Spirit flow into your life, with love and with all the virtues of a godly Christian.

Let us pray: Lord, our sins have caused us to hunger and thirst for righteousness. We thank You for calling us by the Gospel and for filling us with the righteousness of Your Son, even as we ask for the continued guidance of Your Spirit. Amen.

Moses commanded the Old Testament Israelites, “He who commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death” (Lev. 20:10). It takes two to commit adultery. Where was the adulterous man in today’s reading, the one with whom the woman was caught in adultery? The Pharisees didn’t bring him because they weren’t interested in understanding or fulfilling the Law of Moses. They certainly weren’t interested in bringing the woman to repentance. No, they were hoping Jesus would either support their public execution and make Himself the enemy of tax collectors and adulterers whom He had been inviting to repent and be forgiven, or that He would openly speak against the Law so that they could hold it against Him. He wasn’t about to play along.

Sometimes people get distracted wondering what Jesus was writing on the ground. That’s a waste of time. His laid-back writing on the ground was simply His way of showing He took the Pharisees’ accusation against the woman as seriously as they did, that is, not at all. It also allowed them time to ponder His words, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.”

Jesus did not come to hold the secular office of judge, jury, and executioner, though He will do those things when He comes again. He came the first time to call sinners to repentance and to remove God’s condemnation from those who repented, as He did for the woman caught in adultery. God has never desired the death of the sinner, “but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezek. 33:11). “Go and sin no more,” Jesus said to the pardoned woman. So He says to all pardoned sinners, that we may walk daily in repentance and faith and be filled with joy and hope as we cling to Him, in whom alone we have forgiveness.

Let us pray: Father in heaven, move us by Your mercy to show the same mercy to others that You have shown to us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.