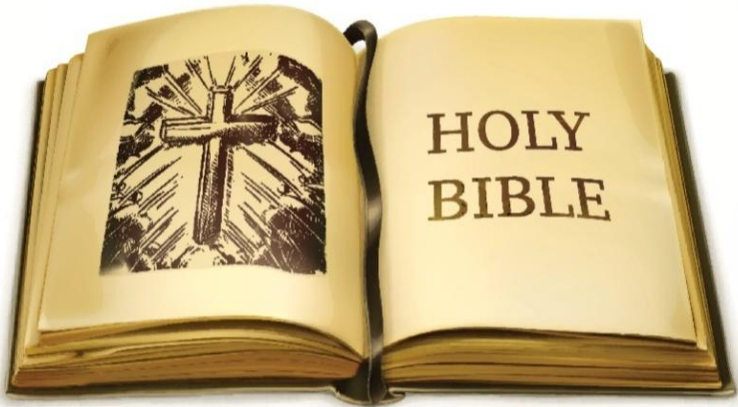


Each Day in the Word



May 31—June 27, 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.

On Trinity Sunday many Lutheran services include the Athanasian Creed, a creed which primarily defends the teaching about the Holy Trinity – such as, that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, yet there are not three gods but one God; and that all three persons of the Trinity are co-equal in majesty.

In our brief but powerful text today, we have the names of all three Persons of the Trinity. Jesus has gathered His disciples to give them their “marching orders,” so to speak. They are to make more disciples – more followers of Jesus – by baptizing in His name and by teaching them to obey all things He has commanded. And the baptisms are to be done “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” In other words, Holy Baptism puts God’s Trinitarian name on us as He calls us His own and brings us into His kingdom. Baptism also “works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this as the words and promises of God declare” (Small Catechism).

The Trinitarian name is integral in the Divine Liturgy. The Invocation places God’s name at the outset of the service, and the Benediction closes the service. Sins are absolved in the name of the Trinity, and sermons begin and end with the name of the Trinity.

By the gift of faith God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has called you His own child, given you His saving name, and delivers himself to You in the Gospel rightly preached and His Sacraments rightly administered. These are the essential things Jesus has commanded and by which you are kept in the one true faith.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.

To God alone be the glory. That's basically what Peter and John said after the people marveled at the man who was healed from lifelong lameness. The man's disability had been removed from his body, and he was so ridiculously happy about this that he leaped up, walked into the temple with Peter and John, and went walking and leaping and praising God.

When Peter saw the crowd which had gathered after this healing, he did not waste the opportunity to set the record straight as to Whom to give glory for what had happened. And in so doing Peter preached a tidy little Law/Gospel sermon.

The Law was that some of these same people in the crowd were responsible for denying that Jesus was the Christ, that they were instrumental in handing Jesus over to death, and that they had demanded a murderer – Barabbas – to be released back into society instead of punished for his crimes.

The Gospel is that Jesus, the One Who was crucified, has also been sacrificed for the sins of the world, including the sins of all those present that day. Once the Law has had its way – to kill, condemn, destroy, and bring people to repentance – then the sweet offer of forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Jesus is given: “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...”

Your sins, O Christian, have been paid for by Jesus, the Righteous One. Through God-given faith in His suffering, death, and resurrection for you, your sins too are “blotted out” and your Savior blesses you with “times of refreshing,” by His Word and Sacraments which sustain you in this life until He calls you Home to be with Him.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.

After the events recorded in yesterday's reading (Acts 3:1-21) where Peter had healed a lame man, the religious leaders were upset that Peter and John had "preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." The Sadducees especially were upset because they denied any resurrection, and their status in the community was being greatly challenged and overshadowed by the Lord's Apostles to whom many people were flocking to hear more.

Peter's preaching this day included the amazingly exclusive statement in v. 12, "Nor is there salvation in any other name, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." No other name except that of Jesus; no salvation in any other name and under no other circumstances except Jesus alone.

As it was then and is in our day, "them's is fightin' words!" Our culture denies any absolute truth, especially truth about the one and only way to have our sins paid for and receive forgiveness – in the name and by the work of Jesus alone. But that pure and correct confession of faith is the only one true confession, a confession that glorifies God and gives great benefits to all who believe in Christ. Those who know and believe this are united under the mantle of "Christianity 101" – faith in Jesus Christ and His suffering, death, and resurrection for the benefit of all mankind. In this one, true, saving faith we have unity with one another and the sure and certain hope of everlasting life with Jesus when He calls us Home. Feeding on His Word and Sacraments, we are kept in that one true faith to the end.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Guts. Boldness. Confidence. Certainty. Those terms describe the words and actions of the apostles in today's reading as they performed many signs and wonders by God's power.

In the early part of the reading, the Holy Spirit gave Peter knowledge of Ananias and Sapphira's dishonesty about the price of land they had sold. When Peter confronted them individually, they both lied about the actual price and then were immediately struck down and died. As a result, "great fear came upon all the church" who realized that God was working mightily among them. Further, believers were being added and all the sick who came to the apostles for healing were indeed healed.

As usual, the religious leaders tried to dissuade the apostles from doing any more wondrous works or preaching in Jesus' name. The apostles were put in prison as a punishment, but God's angel set them free so that they could continue to obey the Lord and do His bidding.

The highlight of the reading comes in v. 29 where Peter and the other apostles declared, "It is necessary to obey God rather than men." This teaches us that whenever governing authorities require us to go against God's Word, we must not obey them, for to do so would be a violation of the First Commandment and give assent to evil. God's Word and commands always come first and, like the apostles, we can trust the Lord to give us the strength and conviction to do His bidding, even if and when we are faced with civil punishment. God is in charge, He blesses obedience to Him, and through His Gospel preached and Sacraments rightly administered, we also will prevail unto the end.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Today's reading is the first part of the story of Stephen's martyrdom. Stephen was one of the seven men who were appointed to assist the apostles in the daily distribution of goods to the early Christian community. This important task was not something that the twelve apostles needed to do; their work was to give themselves "continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word" (v. 4). It's not that the apostles didn't care about the daily distribution; in fact, their concern is very much on display in the choosing of the seven men to serve tables. The apostles understood that their priorities were to study and preach the mighty works of God in Christ.

Until now, Stephen had been relatively unknown among first-century believers; this is the first time he is mentioned in the NT. Now he is thrust onto center stage as the Lord worked mightily through him.

Almost immediately Stephen was persecuted and accused of blasphemy by the Synagogue of the Freedmen, a group mentioned only here in Acts 6. They opposed Stephen on theological grounds but were unable to withstand his powerful preaching because it was the truth about Christ.

All of us Christians are members of the Church Militant while we tarry here on earth and await our heavenly Home-going; it's called the Church Militant because we are constantly battling sin, death, the world, and the devil. While here, we rejoice in God's mercies in Christ for His payment for all of our sins and we seek to obey God in faithfulness to His Word. Do not be surprised when you are vilified for the faith. God promises to keep you strong and unwavering through His Word and Sacraments until your own Home-going. God grant it for Jesus' sake.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Today's account is of Stephen's powerful sermon before the council in Jerusalem where he faithfully recounted the history of Christianity from the time of Abraham. If nothing else, Stephen's sermon demonstrated how completely he not only knew but understood how and through whom God works in the lives of His people.

Stephen's preaching ended with this scathing rebuke: "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you." This clear indictment from the Lord through Stephen had its desired effect; the Law that Stephen delivered was intended to kill, condemn, and destroy the sinful nature in those who heard and bring them to repentance. Instead, those who heard were "cut to the heart" and resisted all the more, not willing to repent. Their anger at Stephen culminated in his stoning and death. And just before he was taken to heaven, Stephen called out to Jesus to receive his spirit and asked that his killers not be charged with this great sin.

When we are rebuked by the Lord's Word – when we are called to repent of our rebelliousness and sin – our sinful nature always wants to recoil and fight back in denial and hot indignation. But our chastening is good, and we in faith may receive such chastening as a demonstration of our heavenly Father's love for us. Like any decent parent He disciplines us to point out our deadly sin and save us from our sinful desires which lead us away from Him.

May God give you the strength and ability always to hear His word of rebuke as nothing but love and concern for your soul, and may you run to preaching and the Sacraments from which you will always receive Christ's forgiveness which He purchased on the cross for all.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In some cases, persecution is a good thing; this is especially true when God ordains it. After Stephen's stoning, the church deeply mourned his death. Meanwhile Saul, who wholeheartedly assented to Stephen's death and even held onto the clothes of those who stoned him, continued to persecute Christians by entering their homes and dragging away men and women to imprison them. All of this served to scatter the believers far and wide.

While the religious leaders in Jerusalem may have been smugly thinking that they had finally rid themselves of many of those pesky Christians, their persecution was most definitely planned and used by the Lord to send His messengers into "Judea and Samaria and to the end of the world" as Jesus had proclaimed at His Ascension (Acts 1:8). Instead of slowing or stopping the spread of Christianity, this persecution served as a powerful springboard to spread the Gospel where it would eventually be preached to the entire world today. Philip took the Gospel to Samaria where it was received and later an Ethiopian eunuch came to faith and was baptized. All of this was God's plan all along, for nothing ever happens without his knowledge or permission.

Do not fear or be dismayed, dear Christian, whenever you speak of Christ's forgiveness to people and are rejected because of it. Speak the truth in love and let the Holy Spirit worry about the result. If and when you are rejected, know that those who refuse to hear you are ultimately rejecting Christ. Because Christ has paid for all your sins and given you the sure and certain promise of eternal life with Him, you can go about your business of being His mouthpiece and trust that His Word of forgiveness and salvation will bear fruit in His time and His way.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.

As is always the case, context is extremely important. One must always go back to read the reference of the words one is considering, especially when the first sentence of a devotion begins with “Flee from these things...” When going back and reading what is being referenced for today’s devotion, one comes to understand the “things” from which one is being exhorted to flee as meaning “different doctrine,” “controversial questions and disputes about words,” and “the love of money.”

Of course all of these things make sense to flee from, for what are they negatively impacting? The Gospel. When the Gospel is being profaned, diverted away from, or obscured and replaced it is never good. But look at what Paul is inspired to focus his readers on and get them to pursue? “...righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.”

Because Scripture reveals Scripture, complimenting itself, it’s not surprising that Paul’s inspired words sound very much like Jesus when He speaks of not being distracted by the worries of life. Jesus, rather, said: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

The “kingdom of God and His righteousness” is Christ Jesus! And when He and His righteousness are sought first or pursued, that is when a blessed perspective comes about. In fact, when Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sin is focused on and pursued, that’s when “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness” come about. So really, just as Jesus was pointing to Himself, so Paul was pointing to Jesus as well! There’s just no better focus!

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who trust in You, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing, grant us Your grace to keep Your commandments that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

At the time of the writing of the account of Saul's conversion there was a saying used that made a lot of sense: "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Farmers used teams of oxen to till the land. The farmer would move the oxen along by using a goad, a long pole with a pointed piece of iron on the end. If an ox were to kick back against the goad, the goad would be driven into the flesh of the ox as a result. Thus, the more the ox kicked, the more the ox would hurt himself.

Saul sought nothing but to harm the followers of Christ. In doing so Saul was really persecuting Jesus, for those who believe in Christ are members of His body. But, unbeknownst to him, the harder Saul fought against Jesus, the more he was "kicking against the goads." Saul was really doing harm to himself.

Jesus confronted Saul with the truth of Saul's sin. Though Saul thought he was serving God by persecuting Christ's followers, Saul was in fact attacking the God whom he thought he served. In his own seeing, Saul did not see the truth. Yet, with scales covering his eyes, Saul was brought to see the truth of God's forgiveness in Christ. The scales fall off, Saul is baptized, and he preaches the truth of forgiveness that was declared upon him in Christ.

Justification – namely, being imputed or accounted righteous for the sake of Christ's fully atoning merits – through faith alone is the only way that sinners are brought to have eyes of faith. Rejoice that you have such Christ focused eyes at God's doing!

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who trust in You, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing, grant us Your grace to keep Your commandments that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

There are two important things to note about Peter's encounter with Cornelius and the reaction of these two men. The first is Cornelius' reaction to the arrival of Peter: "As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him." Overreaction? Cornelius was told by an angel to request Peter come to his house. Cornelius knew this was no ordinary man since Peter was the one who had preached with great authority the sermon on Pentecost. Honestly, how do you think you would have responded having the knowledge that Cornelius had?

The second thing to note is Peter's reaction to Cornelius' way of greeting him: "But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up; I myself am also a man.'" Peter knew he was just a man. The difference in Peter's life was that Jesus selected him to be a disciple and apostle. There was nothing about Peter worth worshiping, for he was a sinner. Peter was simply a person chosen by Christ to preach the Gospel.

Both Cornelius and Peter recognized their respective roles. Cornelius knew Peter was sent by God to preach "all the things commanded [him] by God," and Peter knew that he was just a man. He was a man entrusted by God to speak the Word that God had given to him. By the grace of God, we confess and demonstrate this same understanding thanks to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther's writings helping to properly expose God's Holy Scripture. One of Luther's greatest scriptural discoveries is the understanding of believing/baptized Christians being at the same time sinners and saints! Rejoice, you are one as well!

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who trust in You, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing, grant us Your grace to keep Your commandments that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The scattering of people as a result of persecution is an awful thing. Many times the people were persecuted by close friends and family. They were uprooted, and they left behind most of their earthly possessions. But as we heard in today's reading, the scattered people were used by God.

"For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel" (Augsburg Confession, article V). It pleased God to use these scattered people to preach His Word in the lands where they were driven. They preached the Word.

We, too, are to tell people about the hope within us when the opportunity arises. But what happens when we fail to do so? Well, in spite of our failures, God does not fail. "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day" (John 6:39). Also God says: "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11)

Alas, when we fail to tell someone about Jesus, it is we who are missing out on the opportunity to share our sure hope and joy. And if it be God's will, He will send someone else to speak to that person. After all, He intends to lose no one. God has you! And may He work through you in bringing someone else to hear His Word to be brought to repentance and belief!

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who trust in You, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing, grant us Your grace to keep Your commandments that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

You may have noticed a sort of ebb and flow to the accounts recorded in Acts. There are times of seeming triumph, like Peter preaching on Pentecost, and then times that seem like defeat, like when James is killed, and Peter is thrown into prison. Yet despite all the ups and downs that occur to God's people in the Book of Acts, one thing remains unvarnished: "the word of God grew and multiplied."

Such is the power of God's Word. Nothing can stand in its way, nor will God suffer fools to think of themselves as god. In Peter, Herod thought he had captured a prize he could parade before the people. Yet God delivered Peter from prison and left Herod to the worms.

As we live our lives in this vale of tears, we find ourselves struggling against the forces of evil. Indeed, Satan wishes to devour us. But our solace is not to be found in escaping the tribulations of this world. Our comfort is when we find safe harbor in the wounds of Christ and understand that as members of His body we will share in His sufferings.

Not every Christian may receive a miraculous physical deliverance from evil as did Peter. But every Christian has the same promise from God that He will never leave nor forsake them, especially in the hour of death. Your strength lies within the One who has overcome death. God's Word and Sacraments are your source of strength because they feed you with Christ and keep you in His wounds. Jesus said: "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)

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who trust in You, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing, grant us Your grace to keep Your commandments that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24).

Elymas was such a false prophet. As a sorcerer, he could perform “great signs.” He could wow the people with his sorcery in an attempt to deceive people in the name of God, which is a violation of the Second Commandment. Thus, Elymas stood before the proconsul defying Barnabas and Saul, all in the hope of turning the proconsul away from Christ.

Such modern day “sorcerers” abound and can be seen on TV. They perform so-called miracles in order to wow their audiences, thereby deceiving many people into thinking they are authentic messengers from God. While it appears that various and sundry maladies and illnesses have disappeared from those who were supposedly healed, the only thing that disappears is the money from the wallets of those deceived.

God would not tolerate such deception. Through the voice of the very one who God made blind, but then brought him to see spiritually with Saul, Elymas’ eyes were blinded. The real power of God, not deceptive sorcery, was demonstrated by Saul, and as a result the proconsul believed.

The real power of God continues to show through in spite of the deceptiveness of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. While the false prophets on TV may not be going blind, God’s power is still active in our lives as the Holy Spirit works daily to lead us to repent of our sins and to trust in Christ for forgiveness.

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who trust in You, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing, grant us Your grace to keep Your commandments that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake” (Acts 9:16). Indeed, Saul found out the hard way what it was to be a preacher of Christ crucified. He faced opposition at every turn. In Lystra Saul is stoned to the point where he is dragged out of the city and left for dead! By God's grace he survived. But all the more alarming than being left for dead is the fact Saul *went back* to Lystra. Saul was concerned about the souls of those who witnessed his supposed demise at the hands of the wicked. He wanted the faithful to know the truth: "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." (vs. 22)

The Christian life is a paradox. It is the easiest thing in the world because God has done, is doing, and will do everything to assure your salvation. Yet, it is the hardest thing in the world because every day Christians are assaulted by the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh.

Paul would ask the question that plagues the troubled heart of the Christian: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:24). This is the everyday conclusion of every true Christian. This means that when you have been rightly taught by God's Holy Scripture, there will inevitably be an on-going struggle with your old, self-centered, flesh. But, by the grace of God working through His Word and Sacraments, He brings you to repentance and belief and delivers you through Jesus merits! Thanks be to God, indeed!

Let us pray: O God, the strength of all who trust in You, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing, grant us Your grace to keep Your commandments that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

As we learn in the Gospel for this Sunday in the Church Year (Luke 14:16-24) which comes right before the verses of our devotional reading, God wants His house to be full. And He isn't the least bit concerned about the sinfulness or the worthiness of those He invites. He invites all. He urges all: "Repent and believe in Jesus, My beloved Son and the Friend of sinners, and I will give you a place at My table, in My kingdom, forever." The ones who miss out are the ones who choose not to come, because they have something here on earth that is more important to them.

So, in today's reading, although He has multitudes following Him at the moment, Jesus shows that He isn't interested in numbers just for the sake of numbers. He wants His hearers to understand what following Him entails. It entails hating everything else. Now, the "hating" Jesus calls for here does not at all mean having bad feelings toward anyone or behaving badly toward anyone, which would violate the great commandment to "love your neighbor." No, it's about who or what is most important to you, who or what you live to serve or desire to keep above everything else. If it isn't Jesus and the supper He offers in His kingdom, then you are not worthy of Him. Then you are like one of those invited guests who, when the time came, chose to remain with the thing that was more important to them than the supper.

The Lord demands that no idol should take His place as your God, even the person you hold dearest, even your own life. Turning toward God means turning away from everything else. So hold onto God and His Word tightly, but hold onto everything else loosely, so that, if faithfulness to the Word of God requires it, you are ready to let it go, so that you may have Jesus, and with Him, all things.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, You have called us into Your house by grace, for the sake of Your beloved Son. Keep us from attaching our hearts to anything in this life, that we may be His disciples and spend eternity with You in the life to come. Amen.

When God calls people to come into His house, it is a call to repentance and faith in Christ. It is a call to turn away from sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, to seek the forgiveness offered for Christ's sake, and then to lead a holy life as God's children, turning away each day from sin, with the Holy Spirit's help.

So is it a sin for a man to be uncircumcised, since God commanded it in the Law of Moses? Is it a sin not to follow the rest of the Law of Moses? How does the Law of Moses apply to believers now that the Christ has come and fulfilled the Old Testament and instituted the New Testament in His blood? It took about 15 years from the time of Christ's resurrection for the Church to address these questions, questions which became more pressing as the Gospel reached farther and farther beyond the borders of Jerusalem to the Gentiles.

God the Holy Spirit didn't always teach the apostles directly. He made the truth known to them with the outward gifts He gave. He gave those same gifts – such as the miraculous speaking in other languages – to the Gentiles when they heard the Gospel and believed it, without waiting for them to be circumcised or to learn or to follow the rest of the ceremonial Law of Moses. This was the Spirit's testimony that it is no longer necessary for anyone to keep observing those ceremonies. They had fulfilled their purpose in preserving a special people among whom the Christ was to be born and in teaching that nation the importance of holiness in God's sight.

That was the argument that Peter and Paul used to convince the rest of the Christians in Jerusalem, and it remains an important lesson for Christians to understand. The moral content of the Law of Moses still reveals many things to be sins of which a person must repent. But failing to be circumcised or to follow the rest of the ceremonial content of the Law is not one of them.

Let us pray: O Lord, we thank you for granting Your Church wisdom and understanding from Your Spirit, so that we may all rejoice in the freedom you have given us in the Gospel. Amen.

There is much to learn from the many events recorded in Acts 16. Today's focus is on the very first part: Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy as he sets out on his second missionary journey. This seems ironic, even out of place, as Paul had recently informed the church in Antioch of the decision of the Jerusalem council, acknowledging that circumcision was no longer necessary. If it was no longer necessary – if it had become an adiaphoron, something that was, in and of itself, neither commanded nor forbidden by God – then why would Paul have Timothy circumcised?

It wasn't necessary for the purpose of keeping God's commandments, or for the purpose of entering God's heavenly house. But it was helpful for the purpose of entering the Jewish synagogues in the places where they would be preaching the Gospel. Timothy was raised in the Jewish faith of his mother, but it appears that his Greek father never permitted him to enter fully into the religion of the Jews. So who was this man accompanying Paul? Was Timothy a Jew or a Gentile? Did Paul and Timothy reject the Old Testament entirely? These questions would have received too much attention as they entered each new city. It was helpful that they could immediately brush aside such questions as they met in the synagogues. "We are Jews, like you. And we have found the Messiah who was promised to the Jews, the Savior of both Jews and Gentiles. Now let us tell you about the New Testament He has established in His blood!"

In all matters of adiaphora, where God has not forbidden or commanded a thing in and of itself, we recognize that the same practice may be more helpful in one situation, less helpful in another, and in some cases even sinful, depending on the circumstances. The Lord calls on His people to use discernment and sound judgment in these matters, always seeking to give a clear confession of faith in a way that best serves the Gospel and that shows love and consideration for everyone involved.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, grant us wisdom to know how to use the freedom You have given us for the glory of Your name and for the good of our neighbor. Amen.

When he reaches Athens in the second half of Acts 17, Paul will preach to the pagan Gentiles and compel them to come in “from the highways and hedges” (Lk. 14:23) to the supper of Christ purchased for all men by making atonement for the world’s sins. But in today’s reading, we see Paul in Thessalonica and Berea following his usually practice of going first to the Jews and to the Greeks who had already converted to Judaism. They were the invited guests from among God’s Old Testament people. Now Paul is sent to tell them the good news, to show them from their own Scriptures how the Christ had to suffer, die, and rise again, and then to explain how all the prophecies pointed to Jesus. In other words, Paul is the messenger sent to tell the invited guests, “Come, for all things are now ready!” (Lk. 14:17).

But like the invited guests in Sunday’s Gospel who refused the invitation, many of the Jews Paul encountered also refused to come to the supper, just as most of them rejected Jesus Himself. And just as they persecuted Jesus, so they persecuted the Lord’s messengers who were sent to bring them the good news.

Still, some believed and came to God’s supper. By the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment, the believers in Thessalonica not only became firmly convinced that Jesus was the Christ, but they also weathered the persecutions they faced and helped protect God’s messengers. The godly in Berea did the same, adding that wonderful example of searching the Scriptures to verify the message Paul was bringing to them.

Let us give thanks to God that, in spite of all obstacles, He causes His Gospel to reach the elect in every nation, calling us all away from the human cultures we grew up in so that we may enter His supper of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Let us pray: O Lord, we give You thanks for sending Your Word to us, that we, too, may join with all the saints of the past and present who have believed Your Gospel and tasted the supper of Your goodness in Christ. Amen.

The last major stop on Paul's second missionary journey was the city of Corinth where he spent considerable time. As usual, Paul went first to the Jews, the original invited guests to the supper of salvation in Christ. Most of them clung to their status as physical descendants of Abraham and to the culture that grew out of the Law of Moses. They were unwilling to accept that Jesus had fulfilled and set aside the Old Testament Law by His suffering, death, and resurrection. Instead of going to the New Testament supper God had been inviting them to since the beginning, they opted for a Christ-less religion.

But some of the invited guests came! Aquila and Priscilla, both Jews by birth, not only believed the Gospel but became great helpers of Paul and of the Church. They later served God in their own vocations, offering private instruction to Apollos, another Jew, who went on to be a preacher in Corinth and a mighty defender of the Christian faith, showing from the Old Testament Scriptures that the entire Jewish religion had been pointing to Jesus the Christ, and that, in rejecting Christ, the Jewish religion had become a sham. As Paul said to the Jews who rejected Christ, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles," that is, to those along "the highways and hedges" (Lk. 14:23).

This week's readings from the book of Acts have been showing us over and over again how Jesus' parable of the great Supper (cf. Luke 14) played out in history. Be careful not to take the Gospel for granted. We who were found along the highways and hedges are not superior to the Jews. We have only God's grace, not our own good decision-making or worthiness, to thank for the faith we now possess. So let God's grace to you inspire you to learn the Holy Scriptures better and better, and to defend and explain the Christian faith boldly, in whatever setting the Lord provides.

Let us pray: Father in heaven, we thank You for calling us by Your Spirit into Your kingdom. And we pray for Your ancient people, the Jews, that their hearts may still be opened to believe in Christ Jesus and to join us at Your marvelous Supper. Amen.

Paul had stopped briefly in Ephesus on his way back from his second missionary journey, but it became his main base of operations on his third journey. For about three years Paul taught the Word of God in that region, beginning with a group of twelve disciples who had been baptized some twenty years earlier by John the Baptist but who apparently knew little about Jesus and nothing about the Holy Spirit. So Paul instructed them, baptized them in the name of Jesus, and laid hands on them.

This raises the question whether all who were baptized by John later needed to receive a distinct Christian baptism. In John 3 & 4 Jesus' disciples did baptize those who came to Jesus, even as John continued to baptize his own disciples;. So it is a possibility, although today's reading is the only recorded instance of anyone receiving two baptisms. Regardless, Paul determined that there was sufficient deficiency in the faith and knowledge of these disciples; thus a distinctly Christian baptism was warranted. Further, the Holy Spirit was at that time still manifesting His presence with outward signs in baptized believers; so Paul, an authorized ambassador of Christ, had even more reason to baptize these men and then pass on the gift he had been given to pass on.

We hear in today's reading of other special gifts that Paul was given as an authorized spokesman for God, even as we see the tragic example of the sons of Sceva who attempted to use an authority that had never been given to them. The demons are compelled to bow to the authority of Jesus and His apostles, but they are free to attack pretenders and usurpers.

In contrast, we see in the riot in Ephesus that God still permits idolaters among men to reject the authority of His preachers who invite them to the great Supper of salvation. But that permission will eventually come to an end when the Lord will return and stop inviting sinners to His Supper and reject forever those who rejected His gracious invitation.

Let us pray: O Lord, we thank You for causing Your Gospel to spread through the ministry of Paul, reaching even to us with the good news of Your grace and forgiveness in Christ. Amen.

Paul eventually left Ephesus and completed his third missionary journey with a quick trip through Greece to visit the churches there. As the church met together on a Sunday evening to hear Paul preach, the length of his sermon, combined with the lateness of the hour, resulted in a man named Eutychus falling asleep and falling out a window to his death. But once again, the Lord confirmed the authority of His apostle, and also comforted His church by raising this man from the dead.

Since Paul was hurrying back to Jerusalem, he didn't wish to be detained in Ephesus on his way, but he did arrange to meet the elders, that is, the pastors of the Ephesian churches. The Holy Spirit had been warning him that he would soon be imprisoned for doing the Lord's work, so he had some final warnings and encouragements for the elders, expecting that this would be the last time he would see them. He reminded them of his own example among them, both how he preached and how he lived. He urged them to be faithful shepherds of their flocks and warned them to watch out for the wolves, even from their own number, who would come in and twist the doctrine of Christ, gathering a following for themselves.

We see here the tender love that existed among all these called ministers and the deep respect they had for Paul, having seen with their own eyes that he was no hypocrite, but that he had genuine concern for them, was convinced of the things he had preached to them, and had lived his life accordingly, being willing to suffer for the sake of Christ and for their sake, too.

May the Lord provide such faithful pastors to all His people. May all pastors strive to imitate Paul's example. And may all the flocks who are served by them give thanks to the Lord for such a gift.

Let us pray: O Lord, send forth laborers into Your harvest, bless Your ministers with wisdom, insight, and zeal to carry out their ministry faithfully, and grant us all the grace to receive with humility and thanksgiving the gifts which You hold out to Your children through their faithful service; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

On this Sunday Jesus tells us the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin. Today's reading focuses on the parable that follows the lost coin: the parable of the lost son. This son despises his father and asks for his inheritance even though his father is still alive. After receiving it, he goes to a foreign country where he squanders his entire inheritance on prodigal living. He lived extravagantly, devouring his father's livelihood with sinful living. When his fortune dries up, so does the weather, bringing famine. He hires himself out as a swineherd. His friends abandoned him, having loved him for his money, just as he had loved his father only for his money.

The lost son is a picture of sinful humanity. Our sinful nature is self-centered and self-indulgent. It mistakes its desires for needs that must be met and it doesn't care who it harms to meet those needs. Like the prodigal son we are lost. We are by nature "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1).

But the prodigal son's father is a picture of God the Father. He has compassion upon sinners who acknowledge their sin and are truly sorry for it. He forgives the penitent but He will not make them hired servants in his house. He makes them sons, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). He clothes us with the best robe, Christ's righteousness. He puts a signet ring on our finger, marking us as members of the household. He prepares a feast to celebrate, for there is "more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). What the father says of his son, God the Father says of you who repent and believe: "This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

Let us pray: Father in heaven, thank for your infinite compassion by which you make us sons of your kingdom. Grant us your Holy Spirit so that we may live as your sons who were lost but are now found by faith in Christ. Amen.

Agabus warns Paul that if he travels to Jerusalem, he will be bound and handed over to the Gentiles. Hearing this, the brothers around Paul urge him to stay away from Jerusalem. After all, what good could come from persecution and suffering? This is the way the sinful flesh reacts when it hears the promises of persecution and suffering for the sake of Jesus. The flesh doesn't like to suffer. The Old Adam (another name for the sinful nature) doesn't like to be on the receiving end of hardship. Instead, the flesh wants a life of ease and prosperity without trouble or anxiety.

But Paul isn't driven by the Old Adam. He daily puts the Old Man – his sinful nature – to death by repentance and faith in God's promise of forgiveness, righteousness, and newness of life. Being the new creation, Paul uses the prophet's warning of persecution and suffering as an opportunity to confess his willingness to die for the Gospel, the name of the Lord Jesus, by which men are saved. Whereas the brothers gathered around Paul lamented his fate, Paul, through the Holy Spirit, uses this warning to confess Christ and thereby strengthen his brothers' confidence in the Lord's promises. Paul's willingness to suffer reflects Jesus' promise in Matthew 5:12, "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

We have the same flesh as St. Paul. We are tempted to run from persecution and to shrink back from confessing Christ when it may bring us discomfort. But we are also given the same Holy Spirit whom Paul was graciously given so that we can confess Christ in any and every situation, for our own benefit and for the building up of those around us.

Let us pray: Lord God heavenly Father, grant us grace to endure persecution and hardship for the sake of your Son and His Gospel. Grant us true confidence in all His words that we may always rejoice in our sufferings. Amen.

While praying in the temple after His conversion Paul sees Jesus who says to him, “Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.” Paul understood from the beginning that not everyone would have ears to hear the Gospel. This would not be the Lord’s doing, for the Lord “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Many would reject the Holy Spirit’s work in their hearts. Others would be content with their idols while most would want to earn their salvation through their good disposition and works. We see this in our age as well.

However, we are not to despair over this fact. When one of the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, are there few who are saved?” He answered and said, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:23-24). How many people are saved is not our concern, although we pray that many come to faith. Instead, we ought to take heed to how we are hearing the word of the Lord so that we do not stop up our ears to the apostles’ testimony about Jesus. The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace to give, strengthen, and fortify our faith. We must not cut ourselves off from those means by laziness, ingratitude, or the ever-present temptation to self-righteousness. Instead, we’re to gladly hear the Word of the Lord since Jesus alone has the “words of eternal life” (John 6:68). In the means of salvation—Christ’s Word and Sacraments—He forgives our sins and keeps us in the one true faith so that we firmly believe the testimony concerning Jesus and live lives that reflect the faith He gives us.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, give us the Holy Spirit that we might always desire to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest your Holy Word, to the end that we always remain in your gospel’s promises and live them each day of our lives. Amen.

Paul has confessed Christ before the Jews and again they threaten his life. But in the peril of death Christ says to Paul, “Be of good cheer.” Christ assures Paul that he will go on to confess the Gospel in Rome as he has confessed it in Jerusalem. He isn’t to despair because the Jews resist God’s Messiah. He’s not to view the situation with fleshly eyes. Christ bids him to view the situation through God’s Word. Christ has said he will go to Rome, so he gladly goes to Rome.

Jesus strengthens us with these words spoken to St. Paul. Do you face persecution in your workplace, your family, the society in which you live, or from the false church on account of your confession of Christ and His doctrine? Jesus says, “Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Do you feel alone and isolated? Your Lord says, “Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Do your sins bother you, vexing your conscience and casting a dark pall over your heart? Bring them to Jesus in contrition, confess them to your Lord and believe His word to the penitent paralytic, “My son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you” (Matthew 9:2).

The same comfort He gave to disciples, apostles, and Paul, the chief of sinners, your Lord Jesus gives to you in the midst of all trial, cross, and adversity. He wants you to be joyful in Him, trusting not in what you see with your eyes or feel in your heart. He invites you to place your confidence in His word which forgives your sins and promises the Holy Spirit so that you can endure adversity and bear your cross with peace and joy, knowing your Lord Jesus says to you, “Be of good Cheer!”

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, grant us Thy Holy Spirit so that we might always believe we have a gracious God who loves us, forgives our sins when we confess them, and then lifts us up in joy by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Jews accuse Paul saying, “For we have found this man a plague.” The plague is something to be avoided at all costs because if you contract it, you will most likely die. What they mean is that Paul and his gospel are something that brings spiritual sickness and death. How ironic, that by calling Paul a plague, a cause of death, they confirm their unbelief to the world! St. Paul had written to the Corinthian church, we are “to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life” (2 Cor. 2:15-16). To these Jews Paul smelled like death but to God and those who believed his message, Paul had the fragrance of everlasting life.

So it is with the Gospel, Christ, His Christians, and His pastors, today. We are avoided like the plague at times because we smell like death to the world. To the world our spiritual odor is offensive because we confess that our righteousness is worthless and believe that only Christ’s perfect righteousness avails before God, and that He gives us His perfect righteousness when we repent of our sins and believe His death atones for our all our sins.

To God our fragrance is of those who have been forgiven all our sins by Christ’s word, baptism, and the sacrament of His true body and blood. To God we are the aroma of absolution that wafts from hearts set free from sin and guilt. We may very well be viewed as a plague by the world, something diseased and deathly. But to God, all who are in Christ Jesus by faith are a well-pleasing aroma because by faith they no longer smell like sin and death. By faith in Christ, we smell like our Savior’s righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Let us pray: Lord God, grant us your Holy Spirit so that we see ourselves as you see us, perfect with the righteousness of your Son, and that in that faith we may live righteously. Amen.

Paul stands before the judgment seat of Festus. His accusers cannot prove their accusations. Paul is even able to confess to Festus, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.” How can Paul speak in such a manner, with confidence and steadfastness?

Paul is able to stand before the judgment seat of man because He has stood before the mercy seat of God and been declared ‘not guilty.’ Paul is a sinner. He calls himself the chief of sinners in 1 Timothy 1:15 and still struggles against the sin in his flesh which entices and tempts him daily (Romans 7:18). In spite of the sin in him he said in a previous chapter, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). He writes in 2 Timothy 1:3, “I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did.” Paul doesn’t have a clean conscience before God and man because he doesn’t have sin. That would be to deceive himself as St. John writes in 1 John 1:8. Based on what he writes in Romans 7, Paul is very aware of the sin in his flesh.

In spite of the presence of the sinful flesh with its desires and impulses, and in spite of having consented at times to sin’s enticement, his conscience is free because his sin has been removed from his conscience and covered by the blood of Jesus. He has been baptized by Ananias, Christ’s called servant, and in that baptism, He was washed and made new. By faith in Christ’s merits Paul is declared righteous. This gives him the courage to stand before the judgment seat of man, as it gives all who believe in Christ’s merits courage to approach God our father and stand before our fellow man.

Let us pray: Lord God, when we feel the flesh’s enticements and if we should ever consent to those temptations, cleanse our consciences by the blood of Jesus so that, free from our sins, we may live lives of good works that glorify you. Amen.

Paul recounts His experience on the Damascus Road to Agrippa. He tells Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus what Christ told him on the Damascus Road. Christ would save Paul from both the Jews and the Gentiles “to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” Paul says he preached to all people “that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.” It was for preaching this very thing the Jews seized him in the temple and tried to murder him. They preferred darkness to light, the lies of Satan to the truth of God, and their own self-righteousness to the inheritance and sanctification that comes by faith.

This week’s texts have shown Christ working through the preaching of St. Paul to reclaim lost sheep, lost coins, and lost sons. Some have resisted the gospel call, like Festus and Agrippa, preferring the darkness of their sins and worldly acclaim to the forgiveness and the eternal inheritance offered in the gospel. Many others heard the call of the gospel. The Holy Spirit opened their eyes and turned them from darkness to the light. They repented of their sins and turned to God in faith. Faith in Christ’s atoning death for their sins sanctified them so that in God’s sight they were perfectly righteous. Having repented of their sin and turned to God, they did works befitting repentance.

Christ calls us through the gospel each day so that we repent of the sin we see in our flesh, turn to God in faith, and, being sanctified by faith, amend our lives in a way that befits our repentance. We pursue the opposite virtues of our sins because by faith He sees us as perfectly righteous and holy.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, grant us your Holy Spirit to live lives of sanctification for our good and your glory. Amen.