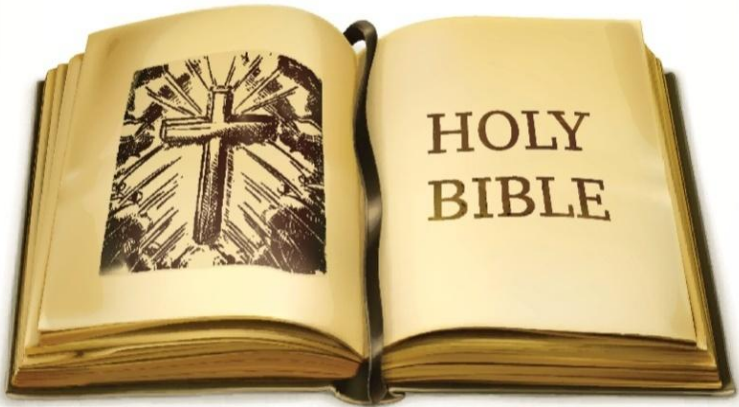


# Each Day in the Word



**May 3-30, 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.

The two witnesses clothed in sackcloth (v.3) signify faithful teachers in the church. There are two witnesses because the Lord said, "By the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established" (Dt 19:15). They wear sackcloth to signify that the ministry convicts the world of sin, true righteousness that is by faith in Christ alone, and God's judgment upon the world's idolatry and self-righteousness.

They are like olive trees, producing the oil of gladness in the hearts of those who receive their testimony. They are like lamp stands in that they preach God's word in truth and purity, which enlightens believers' hearts to know the true God, His gospel, and the way believers ought to live as God's children.

The fire that proceeds from their mouth is the condemnation of God's law upon unbelievers, as the Lord says to the prophet, "I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them" (Jer 5:14). This is why the world hates them and rejoices when Antichrist finally puts them to death. This is how the world and false church treat the gospel and faithful ministers of Christ in every generation.

But God receives them into glory and raises up other faithful men so that the Holy Spirit's ministry of convicting the world of sin, true righteousness, and judgment until Christ's returns in glory for the final judgment.

These two witnesses remind us that we are to continually hear God's word when it is preached in its truth and purity and apply it to ourselves. Whenever the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we are to repent and turn to Christ for His perfect righteousness, which we receive by faith. Living in this way, we eagerly await His return and avoid the judgment God has reserved for all who reject His gospel.

Let us pray: O God, who makes the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant to Your people that they may love what You command and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns, with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” By calling Himself the light of the world Jesus testifies to who He is. He is the light of the world because He is the eternally-begotten Son of God, the one of whom John said, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). Hebrews 1:3 calls Him the brightness of His glory and the express image of God’s person. Christians confess in the Nicene Creed of AD 325 that Jesus is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.”

By calling Himself the light of the world He also testifies to what He does. Light enlightens the eyes. It dispels darkness. This is what Jesus does as the light of the world. He preaches the good news that His Father has sent Him to make complete atonement for all sins and earn a perfect righteousness, so that all who believe in Him might receive these blessings and abide in them as ones who were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord (Eph 5:8). He says in John 12:46 “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.”

The Jews did not receive Jesus’ testimony about from where He comes—God the Father—and to where He goes—back to God the Father. Since, “In Your light we see light” (Ps 36:9), when the Jews close their eyes to Jesus’ testimony, they also are unable to see God the Father. If they had known Jesus through faith, they would have known God the Father as well. Even though Jesus had two witnesses and so met the law’s requirements of two or three witnesses, these Jews loved darkness rather than light and wanted to remain in their sins.

All who receive Jesus’ witness, believing that He is the light of the world, know not only Jesus and His great love and compassion, but God the Father and His great love and compassion for sinners as well.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for sending Your only-begotten Son in the flesh to be the light of the world and that in His light we see Your Light, love, and will that we believe in Your Son and be saved. Amen.

Jesus will not always be present with the Jews to teach them what the Father taught Him. He will leave them and go back to the Father. If they refuse to believe that He is the light of the world—the eternal Son of God who enlightens people’s hearts with the gospel—they will die in their sins. He speaks bluntly to these unbelieving Jews, effectively saying, “Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). Jesus offers the perfect forgiveness of every sin and the gift of His perfect righteousness to sinners who would otherwise die in their sin. “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).

Jesus’ teaching saves one from dying in one’s sins because He received it from God the Father. He says, “I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.” This is a human way of speaking. That the Father taught these things to the Son shouldn’t be understood to mean that the Son was ignorant of them until the Father taught Him. If there was a time when God the Son was ignorant, then He would not be “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24). All that the Father has is the Son’s, since He is eternally begotten of the Father, or as He tells these Jews, “I am from above.” Being from above, from God, His teaching redeems men from their sins and the wages of sin, which is death. This will be confirmed at Jesus’ death and resurrection—“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He”—for many believe in Him after He dies and rises.

Though ascended into heaven, Jesus is present in the gospel ministry of His Church, inviting all people to believe who He is and what His sufferings and death earn for them, so that by faith in the gospel they may not die in their sins. Those who believe in Him with faith that endures to the end will not die in their sins because their sins are forgiven and Christ is their life.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks that each day You give us is the day of salvation, a new day in which to hear with faith all the Father has taught You and You teach us through the apostles’ witness in Holy Scripture. Amen.

Jesus says to the Jews who believe in Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” It isn’t just a one-time moment of faith that sets one free, but a persevering faith that abides in Jesus’ word. The Jews, however, are still thinking carnally about Jesus and His work. They respond—with apparent historical amnesia—that as Abraham’s biological descendants they have never been enslaved to anyone.

But Jesus speaks of slavery to sin, for “whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.” St. Paul says in Romans 6:16, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey.” All people born of man and woman are slaves to sin, offering their bodies, minds, and imaginations to serve sin’s lusts and desires. Just as earthly slaves do not have an inheritance in their master’s house, slaves of sin have no share in the eternal inheritance of God the Father’s house.

Just as sons are heirs of their earthly father’s earthly inheritances, so God the Son is heir of the heavenly inheritance. God the Son frees slaves of sin by faith in who He is and what He accomplishes. This is what Abraham did. “He believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen 15:6). True sons of Abraham—and God—believe God’s word about Christ and abide in it. St. Paul says, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus . . . Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:26, 29). God “has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Cor 5:5) of the inheritance which is “incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for us” (1 Peter 1:4).

Since we are sons of God through faith in Christ, with the Holy Spirit as guarantee of this inheritance, we fight sin in our bodies and minds, lest by deliberate sinning, we fail to abide in Christ’s word and go back to being slaves of sin.

Let us pray: We give You thanks, Almighty God, for adopting us as Your sons and heirs through faith in Christ. Keep us in Your Word and away from sin today. Amen.

“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” How often have you asked yourself some rendition of this question? “Why is this happening to me, Lord?” “What did I do wrong that this would happen?” “What lesson are you trying to teach, so I can learn it quickly so that this will pass?” But neither the man sinned (How could he have, for he was born blind?) nor his parents. This affliction was not a punishment for a specific sin. It would serve a much greater purpose.

Why was he born blind? “That the works of God should be revealed in him.” The Lord allowed this affliction to come upon this man so that, at the proper time, Jesus would heal him to show His divinity and that He is, as He testified, the light of the world who enlightens all who believe in Him. Jesus mixes clay and spit, applies it to the man’s eyes, and sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam. He went and washed, and came back seeing. When asked by those who knew him, he confessed that Jesus gave his sight back to him. So it happened that many people would see the works of God done by Jesus.

“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Neither. Afflictions are not always direct punishments for specific sins. For the Christian, the afflictions, trials, and hardships of this life accomplish several things. First, they remind us to live in daily repentance of our sins and faith in Christ. Second, the Lord is exercising our faith. He uses afflictions to drive us to Himself in more fervent prayer and meditation on His Word, reminding us, “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). If God exempted us from trials and afflictions, then we’d be sorely tempted to fall away. Finally, afflictions remind us that the Christian isn’t to be concerned primarily with this life but the life of the world to come, so that we say with St. Paul, “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8), for being present with the Lord is far better than anything this life can offer.

Let us pray: We give You thanks, O Lord, for our afflictions. Give us Your Holy Spirit to use them rightly, so that the works of God may be revealed in us. Amen.

Jesus gives sight to the blind on several occasions, fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah (Is 29:18; 35:5; 42:7). By healing the man born blind, He does something that was unheard of since the world began. But Jesus gives more than physical sight to the man; He enlightens the man's heart by giving him faith. Creating faith in a man's heart is much like opening the eyes of one born blind. All people are conceived and born in sin (Ps 51:15) and therefore spiritually blind. It is only by Christ's gracious work through His word that He enlightens our darkness and opens our eyes to receive His gospel. That Jesus gives the blind man the spiritual sight of faith is evident from his confession to the Pharisees: "Do you also want to become His disciples?" He had become a disciple by receiving a great blessing from Christ. He confessed Jesus to be a prophet from God.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, were divided on what it meant when Jesus healed the man born blind on the Sabbath. Some, thinking it unlawful to heal on the Sabbath, say He can't be from God. Others agreed that to heal on the Sabbath is sin but ask, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" They show themselves to be spiritually blind. They have eyes, yet they are unwilling to see the fulfillment of Scripture right in front of them, even when it is something that was unheard of since the world began. In their spiritual blindness they blaspheme Christ, calling Him a deliberate sinner whom God does not hear (Ps 66:18). The spiritual blindness of the sinful nature mistakes the things of God for the things of the devil, and the things of the devil it calls the things of God.

The Pharisees serve as a stern warning to us that we should not close our eyes to the word of God when it is taught in its truth and purity. It is through His word that Christ wants to enlighten us each day so that we see our sin and repent of it (unlike the Pharisees), and see ourselves as disciples of Jesus whom He daily forgives and strengthens to follow after Him.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, enlighten our darkness so that each day we repent our sins, believe the gospel, and confess Christ as His disciples. Amen.

The formerly blind man had confessed that Jesus was a prophet (v. 17) and that He was “from God” (v. 33). Jesus seeks out the formerly blind man and opens his eyes further. He reveals Himself to be the Son of God. The man believes Jesus to be the Son of God and worships Him. Jesus then says, “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.” Some Pharisees who were with him take umbrage at this. Does this mean that they are blind even though their eyes see?

Jesus explains that if they were blind they would have no sin. If they acknowledged their spiritual blindness and sought the physician of souls, Christ would have enlightened them with the gospel, and so they would have no sin by faith in Christ. But since they claim to see, they imagine they aren’t spiritually blind and have no need for the light of the world. They loved the darkness of self-righteousness and their evil deeds rather than light of the world. Recall what Jesus said in John 3:20: “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.” Their love of sin and the self-righteousness which excuses their sin blind them to Jesus and His gospel.

But to all who acknowledge their blindness and seek the help of the good physician, Jesus enlightens their hearts by His gospel. We see Jesus not only as a prophet from God, but the Son of God who has made full atonement for all our sins. He is the Son who reveals His heavenly Father to us, so that we know God’s great love for us, and that “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9). With hearts enlightened by the gospel, we reject the works of darkness and walk in the light of Christ, confessing Jesus as the Son of God to the glory of the Father, and living in love for God and neighbor.

Let us pray: Enlighten our hearts, O Lord, with Your holy gospel, so that we do not walk in the darkness of sin and self-righteousness, but in the light of Your truth and love. Amen.

Being a highly symbolic writing, John's Revelation can be hard to interpret with all its picture language, fantastic scenes, and visions. Because of that, the book of Revelation should never be one of the first Bible books a new Christian reads. The reason is that it is important to read and try to understand the rest of Holy Scripture first and be taught these things by a faithful pastor so that a person can then find answers to the mysteries of Revelation in the context of the rest of the Bible. Simply put, Scripture interprets Scripture; and interpreting Revelation is a classic example of that important truth.

In today's reading we hear of trumpets, a seventh seal, incense, smoke, thunder, lightning, and an earthquake. Throughout Holy Scripture these events very often accompany God's actions; that was the case particularly on Mount Sinai when God was with Moses in the giving of the Law. Those things are also signs of the final Day of God when He returns to judge the world – a day of terror for unbelievers, but a day of great joy and gladness for believers when He will finally bring an end to all things and usher His bride, the Church, to Himself and celebrate the eternal feast of the Lamb which has no end.

Cling to Christ by God-given faith. Know that your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ paid for all your sins with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death, and this blessing and truth will be yours: "that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true."

Let us pray: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In tomorrow's reading Jesus identifies Himself as "the door of the sheep" (Jn 10:6). In today's reading He calls anyone who does not enter the sheepfold "by the door," meaning, of course, Himself, "a thief and a robber."

Many religions today preach that there are many ways to God, many ways to heaven. In some of these blasphemous religions you don't even have to believe in Jesus or His suffering, dying, and rising again to pay for the sins of all mankind. All you have to do is be a good person and make sure your good works outnumber your bad ones. In those cases, Jesus' atoning death for all sin is replaced by human works, feelings, and intentions; the focus is on self, the focus is inward.

But Christ, our Good Shepherd, walks before us and leads us through the "valley of the shadow of death" (Ps 23). On the Last Day "He will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ." And all of this is not our own doing; it is all His. And His work sets us free from ourselves and the self-centered need to pat ourselves on the back like Little Jack Horner.

Finally, Jesus says that His sheep know His voice. In your church, His voice is that of your faithful pastor who preaches the Law to convict you of your sins and bring you to repentance, and the Gospel of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection which paid for all your sins and freed you from death. Your pastor's ears hear your confession of sins, his mouth delivers Christ's absolution, and his hands deliver Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament for forgiveness, life, and salvation. That's how Jesus, your Good Shepherd, cares for you.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, my Good Shepherd, thanks and praise be to You for Your goodness and mercy freely and lovingly delivered to us Your sheep. Keep us, we pray, in Your fold forever, and bring us at last to Yourself in the perfection and sinlessness of heaven. Amen.

There are a many false shepherds out there in our crazy and mixed-up world. False shepherds point to themselves. False shepherds glorify themselves. False shepherds tell their hearers – their sheep – to trust them. False shepherds preach law to their sheep, that they need to do something in order to be saved; that they need to be better people, give more, do good works and such in order to be saved. False shepherds tell their sheep that God will heal them only if they believe hard enough, and that if they don't get healed, it's their own fault for some sin or lack of biblical knowledge.

Jesus calls these people “thieves” and “robbers” who come only to “steal and to kill and to destroy.” And, of course, Jesus is right. False preachers, false shepherds rob people by not telling them of Jesus's substitutionary life, death, and resurrection. False shepherds point folks to their own doings and works. They “kill” and “destroy” because they do not present Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins. They try to “climb up some other way.”

True sheep of the Shepherd recognize and hear His voice only. Jesus said, “If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved.” You who, by God-given faith, believe that Christ lived, suffered, died, and rose again in order to pay for all your sins have Jesus, therefore you have salvation and the sure and certain promise of eternity in heaven with the Lord and all who have gone before us in the one true faith. Avail yourself of true preaching and right administration of the Sacraments; those are the things that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gives you and by which He keeps you in the faith until He calls you Home.

Let us pray: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus' disciples had arrived obediently at the place where He had told them He would see them. Upon seeing Him they worshipped Him but, Matthew records, "some doubted." Some of the disciples wavered and hesitated at the sight of their Lord and Master. We are not certain as to exactly when this meeting took place, and we are not told which disciples doubted, but it is not important, for the Holy Spirit did not reveal it.

Immediately Jesus commands His disciples – even those who doubted – to go and make disciples by baptizing and teaching those baptized people to observe (watch over and guard) everything He had commanded them. And just in case they continued to worry about this, Jesus promised them His eternal presence: "I am with you always." Not "I *will* be with you," but "I *AM* with you." Jesus' promise most certainly would have bolstered these men throughout their lives as they perpetuated Jesus' teachings, even amidst all the troubles they encountered while doing so.

Jesus' promise is for you as well – that He *IS* with you always – to comfort you, to guide you, to strengthen you, and to keep you in the one true faith. Even after His ascension, Jesus' presence most certainly continues to be with all of His people no matter what they experience.

Cling by faith to Christ's promises for you, especially the promise of His presence. He will never leave you nor forsake you. And if you ever doubt that, look at a crucifix and be reminded of the price Christ paid to purchase you for His kingdom.

Let us pray: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” That’s the first guarantee in this brief reading. We have been redeemed through – bought at the price of – Jesus’ blood which He willingly and deliberately shed on the cross in order to pay for all our sins and the sins of all mankind. The blood of Jesus pays for all sins and, by God-given faith in His work, that forgiveness is poured upon and in us.

“In Him we have obtained an inheritance.” That’s the second guarantee in this reading. An heir receives an inheritance not because of anything the heir has done, but precisely because of whose the heir is.

An adopted child rightly receives the love of the family into which he or she has been adopted in spite of the lack of a biological connection. In the same way you have been adopted into Christ’s family through Holy Baptism and the preaching of the Gospel of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection – and all this in spite of the fact that you, in your sinful nature, were a child of the devil beforehand. But now that Christ has taken you in and put His robe of righteousness on you, you have all the rights and privileges as His full son or daughter, including the most important, the fact that you are a full heir of His and will, by God-given faith, receive everything He has, which includes eternal life in the sinless and glorious perfection of heaven.

These things are absolutely guaranteed to you by faith in Christ. Rejoice, O Christian, in your amazing redemption and inheritance “to the praise of His glory!”

Let us pray: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

This reading is Luke's ever-so-brief account of Christ's ascension. He does, however, greatly expand this account in the opening chapter of Acts. Since yesterday was the day the Christian Church celebrated the Ascension of our Lord, let us examine the blessings of that momentous event.

Most importantly, Christ's ascension does not mean that He is no longer with us. That was the fear the disciples had when Christ told them He would be leaving them and going away; they had a very hard time fathoming life without their Lord and Teacher. In fact, in Acts 1 when they were gazing up at Jesus as He was being taken from their sight, they had to be reminded by the two angels that "this same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Had the disciples paid a bit more attention and trusted Jesus' words instead of focusing on their feelings of loss, they would have had more joy. Eventually they did have perfect joy when they were martyred (except for John) and were taken into Christ's eternal and glorious presence.

So, Jesus' ascension comforts us with the promise of His second and final Coming at the end of all time when he will raise all the dead, change our lowly bodies into a glorious, sinless, spiritual, and powerful body, and reunite the soul with this new body. It comforts us also in that, even as Christ ascended bodily, He continually comes to us today with that same body and blood in Holy Communion. Indeed, through this blessed Sacrament, Jesus is with us always.

Christ did not ascend in order to be farther away from us; He ascended in order to be nearer to us in His Word and in His Sacraments. And you may be certain and confident that just as Christ shares fully in your humanity, so also in Him you are given to share in the life of God Himself.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for the promises and comfort of Your Ascension. Amen.

After Christ's Ascension, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church had an important agenda item – that of filling the vacancy in the apostolic office that was created by the death of Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' original twelve disciples. This selection process in Acts 1 is the only New Testament account of such a practice, a practice that we may assume was similar somehow to the occasional Old Testament practice of using the Urim and Thummim to discern an answer from God on certain questions.

Today's reading tells us that the eleven, along with about 120 others, had gathered for the task of choosing between Matthias or Joseph called Barsabbas who was surnamed Justus. Whichever man was chosen would take Judas' place among the apostles. The men prayed to the Lord to reveal which one He wanted, and "the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles." Since that event, there is no other account in the NT about casting lots to discern God's will; the practice simply disappears from Scripture.

So how do we discern God's will today? Hebrews 1:1-2 gives us the answer: "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets (which probably included the use of Urim and Thummim), has in these last days spoken to us by His Son." We turn to Christ and His Word to inform us about Godly decisions. Most things are clearly spelled out for us in Scripture. But when they aren't, we make the best decision possible, pray that God will bless it, and go about our life in the freedom of forgiveness. For we know that when we sin and make mistakes, we have Christ's all-atoning sacrifice for all sins, the benefits of which are delivered to us by God-given faith in the Gospel rightly preached and the Sacraments rightly administered. Through these our good and gracious God will guide us in His discernment.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, guide and lead us by the solid truth of Your holy Word. Amen.

Jesus prays not only for His disciples who traveled with Him and heard His teaching; He prays for those who would yet come to believe in Him through the word of these first believing disciples. Jesus prays that those who would come to trust in Him through the preaching and teaching of God's Word would also be one in Him, and one with each other. John also speaks of this in his first epistle when he writes: "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

Some try to say that the Jews believe in the same Father as we do, and that they only deny Jesus. Well, that 1st John text also reveals how we Christians do not believe in the same God as the Jewish religion. As Jesus makes clear in today's text, oneness only comes through Jesus! To deny Jesus is to deny the Father! To deny any person of the Holy Trinity is to deny the entire Trinity!

Through His Word, God graciously calls His elect to faith in His Son as Savior and Redeemer. He grants them the forgiveness which Christ won for them on the cross, thus bringing them into fellowship with Him, with Christ Jesus His Son, and with all believers of all time who trust in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. By continuing in His Word and holding fast to Him through faith fed by Word and Sacrament, the more we abide in God's Word of truth. Many think that they can seek unity without regard for the teaching of God's Word. True unity, however, is created by the Holy Spirit working only through His Word and Sacraments delivered to us as we hear and believe all that God's Word teaches!

Let us pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The believing/baptized children of God (according to the New Man, born from above) flock to this message of Christ laying down His life. For it is only through His fully atoning merits that true life is offered.

Is this an acceptable message by the world, our sinful flesh, and the devil? Of course not. The world, sinful flesh, and the devil despise Christ and His works. Thus, division does come about. There will always be those who want to be righteous by works — and, by God’s grace, those who are righteous through faith alone! Thanks be to God, He does not leave us blind to His truth but creates and sustains eyes of faith to behold His glorious scars as marvelous in our sight!

Christ and His fully atoning merits are delivered through His Word and Sacraments. Through such means of grace He is the author and perfecter of faith — ever calling His own to Him to feed us with Himself and send us out to contend with the world, our flesh and the devil. It’s Christ’s laying down of His life that creates proper faith and love of neighbor — as we rightly pray in the Post-Communion Collect, having just proclaimed the Lord’s death (God’s love for us) by partaking of His Body and Blood in Holy Communion: “Grant, we beseech You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another...”.

And, go figure, this brings His believing baptized children to rightly pray the Collect for this Week as well.

Let us pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The unbelief of the Jews can certainly come across as foolish. Yet, those who hear their Shepherd's voice continue to struggle while remaining in sinful, unbelieving flesh as well. Listen to what we orthodox Lutherans are blessed to be brought to believe, teach and confess regarding the total depravity of our flesh, and Who exactly creates and sustains faith:

“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and preserved me in the true faith; just as He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and preserves it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

Thankfully, the Lord brings us to pray “Thy will be done,” thus bringing us – the New Man – to pray against our own fallen flesh. And yet, at the same time, He's bringing us to pray for His sustenance. As we confess:

“How is [God's will] done? When God breaks and hinders every evil plan and will (like the will of the devil, the world and our flesh) that would keep us from hallowing God's name and prevent His kingdom from coming; and when He strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and faith until the end. This is His good and gracious will.”

Rejoice that through His means of Word and Sacraments the Lord keeps telling us plainly that He is the Christ. And through such a feeding of faith, He sustains His sheep while creating godly desires. “Thy will be done” indeed!

Let us pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Jews seek to execute Jesus because they say He speaks blasphemy as a man, making Himself God. But He *is* God and has shown so by His works. The Jews, however, ignore His works, and to that very same Word of God (which tells them to look for the Messiah) they ‘claim’ faithfulness as they believe they have a right to kill Him. The irony is that they put themselves in the place of God — judging and condemning Jesus by their own blasphemous human understanding. Such self-justification takes it all the way back to the Garden of Eden, doesn’t it?

Luther’s explanation of the First Commandment has us believe, teach and confess that we should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. But, as we remain in sinful flesh, our old nature continually brings us to center on ourselves; thus, every man (according to that flesh) is always putting himself in the place of God.

Another truth of God’s Word, regarding our flesh is explained in Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation of 1518. Thesis #7 states: “The works of righteousness would be mortal sins if they would not be feared as mortal sins by the righteous themselves out of pious fear of God.” Basically, Luther is saying that because our fallen flesh is so inclined to turn inward and trust in any works done in the flesh, we need to fear even the good works that God brings us to do according to the New Man.

Thanks be to God, that He brings His believing/baptized children to drown the old Adam’s self-centered trust so that the New Man rejoicingly believes Jesus’ words and trusts alone in Christ’s fully meritorious works for us!

Let us pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

We, the believing/baptized children of God, are so blessed to have the New Testament Holy Scripture as we hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest it. Of course we are thankful for the Old Testament as well, for all of Holy Scripture points to Christ. But the New Testament brings further understanding. As the saying goes, "...in the old the New is concealed, in the New the old is revealed."

Thanks to the Holy Spirit-created belief in the immense amount of spiritual matters contained in Holy Scripture, we are blessed to have insights that those who even walked with Jesus didn't have, although we must admit that we will never be all-knowing on this side of glory. For example, when Jesus says, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it," we, by Spirit-created belief, have a deeper understanding of what Jesus meant. But imagine those who were actually with Him back then? They hear these words of Jesus, but then find out that Lazarus dies anyway. Talk about struggling with doubt! Talk about needing on-the-spot catechesis!

Thanks be to God for inspiring His Word to be written and for His living and active Spirit continuing to work through His means of Word and Sacrament, bringing us to be assured of being partakers of Him who is the resurrection! By grace alone, because of the fully atoning merits of Christ Jesus alone, through faith alone, the death of all of God's saints has been, and ever will be, to His glory!

Let us pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus does all of His actions to reveal God's mercy to the world through Himself. He is God, and through His divinity He obviously knows all things. He knew Lazarus was going to die, so He could have been there beforehand. Yet, Jesus delays not just a minute, or an hour, or a day after Lazarus' death, but four days — all for the merciful sake of creating belief. Then He prays to the Father. Why? "... but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." (vs.42) And, again, He has the power to raise Lazarus out of the tomb without even speaking. But what does He do? "... He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" (vs. 43) Again, for the sake of everyone to hear His Word — that they may believe.

Sounding as if he looked like a mummy, Lazarus "came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth." (vs. 44) Sin had certainly carried itself out to its conclusion, which was death. Yet, listen to what the Word made flesh says to the inescapable wrappings of the Law: "Loose him, and let him go."

Similar blessed words of Christ (the loosening key of Holy Absolution) were given to the Office of the Holy Ministry as well, creating yet another means to which sinners can flee through faith for refuge. For true freedom comes only by grace through faith in Christ's fully atoning merits, and such faith is imputed to believers as righteousness!

Let us pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

There were Jews who were brought to believe in Jesus, and there were Jews who outright hated Him were plotting to kill Him. There were, most likely, those ‘in-between’ as well — and the same is true today. In this day and age of political correctness, when ‘fence riding’ attitudes are fostered and language is heavily spun as being offensive (when it isn’t), some would take offense when it is said that those who are indifferent toward Jesus actuality hate Him. There’s just no fence riding when it comes to Christ! If there’s not faith — namely, a dying of the Old Man (the abandonment of any trust in the flesh), and a rising of the New Man (the full reliance on Christ and His fully atoning merits) — then sinful flesh is winning out.

One of the greatest mysteries to human reason is how God uses the enemies of faith to strengthen those in the faith. Most state this by asking: “Why does a gracious God allow bad things to happen?” All things, however, are for His good purpose. This very text reveals God’s plan of using the evil of the Jews for the greatest good man has ever known! The death of Jesus merited the full atonement for the sins of the world, and it brought forgiveness and everlasting life to all who believe!

The Jews had no idea they were being used by God to solidify His theology of the cross; this is the message that is foolishness to those who are perishing. But to us the message of God in His glory while pouring out His blood for the sake of our justification is the power of God! Rejoice that you are not a fence rider, but a sinner constantly brought to repentance and belief through God’s ever effective means of grace!

Let us pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In our lesson Jesus says that He will ask the Father to give us “another Helper,” and by that He means the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther, in the Small Catechism, said, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith, even as He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (SC, AC III).

All these blessings would not have come to us if the Holy Spirit had not come to us. And the Holy Spirit would not have come to us if Christ our Lord had not sent Him. Fortunately for us, that is precisely what He promises in our text today.

You see, the Christian life, between the time that we first come to faith and the time that we finally get to heaven, is a life of many struggles and many joys. Jesus' promise to us is not that we will only have joys and no struggles; rather His promise is that He, in the person of His Holy Spirit, will be with us through all the struggles and joys. His promise is that He will not leave us as orphans to fend for ourselves, but that He will send us another Counselor, a Helper, a Comforter, to be with us, to give us His gifts, to equip us, to empower us, to stand by us in every time of trial, and to rejoice with us in every time of joy.

Jesus gives us this promise, and a main theme of the Easter season was that because of the resurrection, we know that Jesus always keeps His promises. So, the promise of sending us the Holy Spirit is also a promise that He kept, and we celebrate that on Pentecost and throughout the Pentecost season and indeed in every day of our lives from now until eternity.

Let us pray: O God, you taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit. By that same Spirit give us a right judgment in all things that we may have and always rejoice in His holy comfort; through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.

For the next three days our lessons will focus on St. Peter's sermon on Pentecost Day and the results. For that, Dr. Martin Luther's sermon on Pentecost Sunday is helpful:

"It is not enough simply that Christ be preached; the Word must be believed. Therefore, God sends the Holy Spirit to impress the preaching upon the heart--to make it inhere and live therein. Unquestionably, Christ accomplished all--took away our sins and overcame every obstacle... But the treasure lies in a heap; it is not everywhere distributed and applied. Before we can enjoy it, the Holy Spirit comes and communicates it to the heart, enabling us to believe and say, "I too, am one who shall have the blessing." ...

"Now, with the belief that God has come to our rescue and given us this priceless blessing, inevitably the human heart must be filled with joy and with gratitude to God, and must exultingly cry: "Dear Father, since it is Your will to manifest toward me inexpressible love and fidelity, I will love You sincerely, and willingly do what is pleasing to You." The believing heart never sees God with jealous eye. It does not fear being cast into hell as it did before the Holy Spirit came, when it was conscious of no love, no goodness, no faithfulness, on God's part, but only wrath and displeasure. But once let the Holy Spirit impress the heart with the fact of God's good will and graciousness towards it, and the resulting joy and confidence will impel it to do and suffer for God's sake whatever necessity demands (Summer Postil 1544, cf. AE 77:327-28).

Peter preached, but God gets the glory for the results. The Father sent us the Son; the Son lived, died, and rose again for us; and the Holy Spirit brought us to faith through the Word.

Let us pray: O God, you taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit. By that same Spirit give us a right judgment in all things that we may have and always rejoice in His holy comfort; through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.

After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day, St. Peter is no longer hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Instead, he is boldly preaching to a large crowd gathered from all corners of the globe, and he isn't pulling any punches. His sermon ends like this: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." The Holy Spirit then does His job: "convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (Jn 16:8), and the hearers were "cut to the heart."

Luther explains: "You should deeply believe and not at all doubt that you are the one who tormented Christ, for your sins have certainly done it. So, St. Peter struck and frightened the Jews with a thunderbolt when he said to all of them in common: 'You crucified Him' (Acts 2:[36]). That same day three thousand were frightened and said to the apostles, trembling: 'Dear brothers, what should we do?' (Acts 2:[37])."

The Lord's Apostles, and all true godly pastors who follow them, are called to preach the Word boldly and completely, in both Law and Gospel. However, an ever-growing number of people today would have us tone down the thunderbolt of the Law and preach a "milder, gentler" message of "gospel only." This is not our calling, and such a "gospel" is no Gospel at all. As we see in this lesson, the Holy Spirit uses the thunderbolt of the Law to cut them to the heart—to convict them of sin—and to prepare them for the Gospel by making them thirsty for it. The Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ's death for us on the cross only makes sense if we know first that we have sins that need to be forgiven. Only the thunderbolt of the Law can do that with the Holy Spirit working through that word in the hearts of the hearers to convict them. Then the Gospel is "good news" indeed.

Let us pray: O God, you taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit. By that same Spirit give us a right judgment in all things that we may have and always rejoice in His holy comfort; through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The results of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day were not just for the small gathering of about 120 of Christ's followers, but 3,000 souls were added to them. Further, this growing church of Christ was also given a strong sense of unity of doctrine, community of mutual care, and fellowship of corporate prayer. Rather than compromise quality for the sake of quantity, the Holy Spirit gifts the nascent Christian church with both quality *and* quantity. On Pentecost Day, by the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word, the church is now bigger in quantity and better in quality.

Nevertheless, church-growth gurus typically pit the quality of the church against its quantity. They compromise certain doctrines and practices to be welcoming of more people. This is never seen in the Bible as the way of God's working with His people. Instead, we see just the opposite in Scripture: "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Ps 127:1); Jesus clearly says, "I will build My church" (Mt 16:18); and the Holy Spirit is the One who does the convicting and convincing through the Word (Jn 16:8). Our God-given task is simply to present the Word and let the Holy Spirit go to work.

However, compromise is never an option. We are never called to compromise the message for the sake of adding numbers. Instead, we are told throughout Scripture to remain faithful to the end (Mt 24:13, 1 Cor 16:13, Heb 3:14, 6:11, 10:23, 1 Jn 2:24, Rev 2:10—just to mention a few).

Our marching orders from our Commander in Chief were very clear on this matter: "Teaching them to observe *all* things that I have commanded you"; and His promise is just as clear: "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mat 28:20).

Let us pray: O God, you taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit. By that same Spirit give us a right judgment in all things that we may have and always rejoice in His holy comfort; through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“Let not your hearts be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me” (v. 1). How are we to live in our belief in God and in Christ, to such an extent that we really do not allow our hearts to be troubled by anything in this life? Jesus is serious about this. He is not making pious and overly optimistic statements here.

And the next quote from Jesus in our text today tells us how Jesus handles our troubles for us. He says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (v. 6) Now what's interesting here is that this "I am" statement is kind of like a summary to all of them. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life"; and all the "I am" statements fall into those three topics: the way versus obstacles, the truth versus falsehood, and the life versus death. He is the way (vs. obstacles) as the door of the sheep (10:7, 9); He is the truth (vs. falsehood) as the light of the world (8:12; 9:5); and He is the life (vs. death) as the bread of life (6:35), the good shepherd (10:11, 14), the resurrection and the life (11:25), and the true vine (15:1, 5). So that's three things that Jesus is for us: 1) He is the way through the obstacles of life; 2) He is the truth in the face of all the falsehoods of life; and 3) He is the source of life, as opposed to all the life-drainers that we find around us all the time.

Jesus is about to leave His disciples and so He tells them—and us—these three things. He tells them, and us, these three things that He is for us during this time of His bodily absence from us. He is telling all His disciples that while He is away from us in the body, these three things will still be true for us. And this is very important for us and our lives today. The resurrected Jesus is our way, our truth, and our life. He wants us to know those three things and live in them by faith.

Let us pray: O God, you taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit. By that same Spirit give us a right judgment in all things that we may have and always rejoice in His holy comfort; through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches... Abide in me." Using this vine imagery, Jesus tells us about the Christian life. First, He has seen to it that we have been "grafted" into Him as our source of spiritual life, which happened through the Word spoken to us (v. 3). Second, He explains for us what our life is like, being a branch that draws life and strength from the vine, to produce the "fruit" of good works in our lives. This happens, again, through the Word of Christ abiding in us (v. 7).

Now that we've been saved, what happens next? In our text today, Jesus tells us what's at the heart of our lives of sanctification: either we abide in Him and draw our strength from Him, or we don't; and consequently, either we bear much fruit, that is, show forth and do the good works in our lives, or we don't! It's that simple.

Keep in mind is that we are actually two trees growing together. We have the natural tree of the carnal man, which Paul (in Gal 5) calls "the flesh" and which produces its kind of fruit; and then as redeemed children of God we also have the spiritual tree of Christ's life within us, which Paul calls "the Spirit" and which produces its kind of fruit. The goal then is to minimize the fruit production from the bad tree, and to maximize the fruit production from the good tree. How do we do that? Jesus tells us: Abide in Him and we will bear much fruit. And the way we abide in Him is by abiding in His Word. Any farmer knows that you get better fruit production from providing better resources to the growing plant. You also need to use pesticides to keep the bugs out and so forth. These are the same sort of things that Jesus is doing in us— pruning away the bad through His Word and Spirit, and nurturing the good with the same Word and Spirit.

Let us pray: O God, you taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit. By that same Spirit give us a right judgment in all things that we may have and always rejoice in His holy comfort; through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus, knowing that His departure was ahead, prays for His disciples... all of them. In John 17, Jesus is praying His high priestly prayer, knowing that He is about to leave; so He is praying for us as His people. He is praying for us as the church in all places and in all times; and that means He is praying for us right here in all our local congregations.

Jesus is praying that the same unity that exists between God the Father and Jesus the Son – now pay close attention to this because this is really important – He is praying that the very same unity between the Father and the Son may exist between Jesus and each one of us; and then that the same unity will also exist between each one of us with one another, so that—and this is very important, too—so that the world will see our unity and be drawn to Him.

Last Sunday we heard that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us; and today in our text we hear about Christ interceding for the Apostles and His disciples. It is very important to note that we present-day disciples are also included in His prayers. In our text Jesus says, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word” (Jn 17:20). In that verse, Jesus directly refers to us—we who are present-day disciples of Christ, because we have believed in Him through the Apostles’ message.

Even though Jesus knows that He will soon be betrayed, arrested, falsely accused, and handed over for death on the cross, He still takes the time to pray for us directly! What a comfort to know that we are constantly in His thoughts even at His darkest times, because then even in our darkest times we can be sure that He is still interceding for us.

Let us pray: O God, you taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit. By that same Spirit give us a right judgment in all things that we may have and always rejoice in His holy comfort; through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.