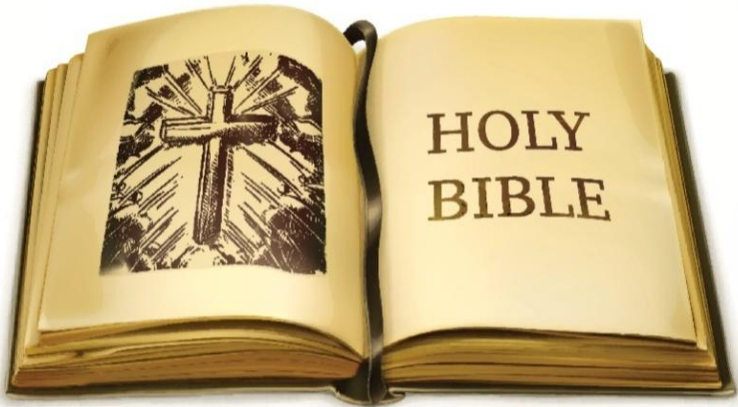


Each Day in the Word



June 28—August 1 , 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.

The first Psalm sets forth two groups of people: the righteous and the wicked. Each group is given its own description here, and its own end.

Those who are counted among the righteous are first righteous by faith. They know that they fall short of God's righteous requirements, so they despair of themselves before God and hope to be accepted by Him only through His mercy, for the sake of Christ the promised Savior. Such a person is counted among the righteous.

The one who is righteous by faith then goes on to do righteous things, things that are both right in the eyes of God and, as is often the case, beneficial to himself in some way, resulting in blessings, either temporal or eternal. The first Psalm highlights devotion to God's Word as being at the heart of a righteous life. The righteous intentionally avoid the bad company, advice, and behavior of the wicked, while sincerely devoting themselves to hearing, learning, and meditating on God's Word.

As a result, they are "blessed." It goes well for them. They benefit from such behavior. They are like a well-watered, healthy, thriving tree. As such a believer learns from God's Word and continually applies it to his life, "whatever he does prospers." God, through His Word, both preserves him in faith and aids him in leading a life that is holy and righteous.

As for the wicked, they are unconcerned with God's Word. They ignore it, or they sit in judgment of it instead of submitting to it and letting the Holy Spirit teach them through it. And so, instead of growing and thriving like well-watered trees, instead of receiving God's blessings, they are like "the chaff that the wind drives away."

Let us pray: O Lord, You have revealed Yourself to us in Your Word and promised to bless us as we use it. Keep us steadfast in Your Word and, according to Your promise, grant us Your blessing, both now and forever, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

For the next two months or so, our devotions will review St. Paul's Epistle (or "letter") to the Romans, where the apostle systematically lays out the Christian faith and nearly all its articles. In these first ten verses, we're given a description of the author, the content, and the recipients of this letter.

The author is the apostle Paul, the same one who formerly persecuted the Christian Church but who has now become the "bondservant" or "slave" of Jesus Christ. That means he does not conduct his ministry according to his own will, but according to the will of his Master. The very title "apostle" means that Paul didn't choose to become a preacher but was chosen for it, called to it, and sent forth on his mission by Christ Himself. His message isn't his; it is Christ's.

The whole content of that message is "the gospel of God," the good news that God first announced through the Old Testament prophets about His Son and now fulfilled in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, who is true God and true man. The gospel of God also includes the preaching of the law, but it centers on (1) the satisfaction for sins that Christ has made and (2) the promise of the forgiveness of sins to all who believe in Christ Jesus.

Finally, the recipients of Paul's letter are identified in these opening verses. We do well to remember that none of the apostles were writing directly to us in the 21st century. The truth, the doctrine, and the principles expressed in their letters haven't changed throughout the centuries, but we must always read these letters in context in order to sort out which things apply to whom. In this case, Paul was writing to all the Christians in Rome, the "beloved of God" who had already been called to faith (and thus also "sainthood") by the gospel which others had preached to them. But his words will have many applications to all people in general and to all Christians in particular.

Let us pray: O Lord, we thank You for using Your apostle Paul to reveal Your truth to us throughout the ages. Bless us and work in our hearts by Your Holy Spirit as we read and ponder Your Word in Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Amen.

Paul had not yet been to Rome. But he wanted to go, because the Lord Jesus had made him an apostle to the Gentiles, to preach the gospel also to the “barbarians,” that is, non-Greeks, like those who lived in Rome and beyond.

The gospel was not always received well by Paul’s hearers. Jews and Greeks alike had both mocked him and persecuted him for the message they had heard from him. But, Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” Why? Because “it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.”

The only way for sinners to be saved is by faith in Christ. The only way sinners can believe in Christ is by the preaching of the gospel, where the Holy Spirit works mightily to convert people to faith, convincing those who hear that God is good, and that He will accept all who seek His mercy through Christ crucified, convincing them that the righteousness we all need to stand before God cannot be provided by us, but was provided for us by the Son of God. That righteousness is ours, not by doing, but by believing.

This gospel was intended for all people, both Jews and Greeks. It was “first for the Jews,” because God had made a commitment to them in the Old Testament not only to send the Christ to them but to send out ministers to search for the lost sheep of Israel after the Christ had come. This is why Paul usually went to the synagogue first before preaching to the Gentiles in any given city. But once the Jews had had their chance to hear, Paul was eager to preach to the Gentiles.

For the next two chapters, Paul will make the case that all men—both Jews and Gentiles—need the righteousness that is by faith, since no one has provided the righteousness that is by works. He begins in the last verses of today’s reading by showing that the Gentiles are obviously lost without the gospel, because they have refused to acknowledge and give thanks to the true God, even though He has clearly revealed both His existence and His goodness in the creation, which is what we call the “natural knowledge” of God.

Let us pray: Lord God, we praise You for revealing Your saving Gospel to us and for granting us the righteousness that is by faith in Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Unlike the Jews who knew the true God and knew that they were supposed to worship only Him, the Gentiles had turned away from Him completely to serve their idols. They worshiped nature itself, or some part of the creation, or gods they had invented from their own imagination. For this, God was angry with them, and revealed His wrath against them.

In part, God's wrath was revealed in the many ways He had given them over to utter depravity. Since they chose to turn away from Him who is pure and good, He gave them what they wanted; He caused them to wallow in their uncleanness, to be consumed by the lusts of their heart, to degrade their bodies more and more. Here the apostle explicitly mentions homosexuality (women with women and men with men) as a vile perversion of God's good and noble design for mankind, in which the loving marriage of a man and a woman was to be the only context for sexual relations. Society's current infatuation with sex, sexual deviancy, gender confusion, drugs, and porn, is evidence that God's wrath has not diminished over the centuries but is still being revealed against those who have chosen to follow their own gods. The depravity in which unbelievers live is not a mark of freedom, but of slavery to sin.

Paul goes on to list a whole litany of evils that were—and still are—prevalent among non-Christians, making it unquestionable that they fall short of the glory of God and cannot provide the righteousness that the righteous God demands of mankind.

Hearing this litany of evils should not fill the Christian with pride; Paul will deal soon enough with those who do not lead such outwardly wicked lives. The point is, death is what we all deserve, because we are all born with the same disease of sin, which may manifest itself differently from person to person, but which is just as deadly to all who are infected with it. We all alike need the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Let us pray: Lord, help us to recognize the world's depravity as sin, but to recognize it in humility, so that we who seek to avoid such wicked behavior may still rely only on the righteousness of Christ for our salvation. Amen.

Those who lead openly immoral lives are obviously unrighteous and cannot presume to earn a righteous verdict in God's courtroom. Clearly they need the gospel, in which God promises to judge sinners who repent and believe in Christ by the righteousness of Christ rather than by their own record of disobedience. But what about those who appear to be good people on the outside? Can they, perhaps, be accepted by God apart from the gospel, based on their record of obedience?

In today's reading, Paul's answer is, "Never!" He slams the door in the face of the "good people" who like to think of themselves as better than the "bad people" of the world, who like to think that they have earned themselves a place in heaven. In Paul's day, it was the Jews above all others who dared to think of themselves as good and righteous when they compared themselves with the pagan Gentiles. Today, many Christians end up falling into this same trap of hypocrisy.

In God's judgment, there are no "good people," because He doesn't only judge the outward appearance. He judges the motives, intentions, and attitudes of the heart. And what He finds, in every single case, is a heart that is tainted by unrighteousness—in addition to all the unrighteous deeds that may be hidden from everyone else.

People often misinterpret God's judgment, or the apparent lack of it. They despise His patience with others, wishing He would rain down fire and brimstone on the "bad people." But they don't realize that when God withholds punishment, it is His invitation to repentance, both for the openly wicked and for the secretly sinful. If we wish God were less patient with others, then we will also forfeit His patience toward us. That would be foolish, because in order to earn the rewards God promises for "patient continuance in doing good," a person has to actually fulfill that lofty requirement. Since no one has or can, the only way to escape wrath in the day of wrath is through God's grace offered to sinners in the gospel.

Let us pray: Gracious Lord, judge us not by our works but only by Your grace in our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In this chapter of Romans, St. Paul is carrying on a theoretical dialogue, making the case for the gospel against various arguments made by Jews or Gentiles. The Jews often boasted about having and knowing the Law, the Ten Commandments given to them by God through Moses, as opposed to the Gentiles, who didn't have or know the Law of Moses. One of their arguments was: "Whoever has the Law is righteous. We Jews have the Law. Therefore, we are righteous. We have no need of the righteousness that comes by faith in Christ." But St. Paul destroys that argument in today's reading.

It isn't having the Ten Commandments that makes one righteous. It's doing them, keeping them, perfectly, all the time, in all a person's thoughts, words, and deeds, from birth until death. The one who has done that can hold up his or her righteousness before God and say, "I have done everything You commanded. Now give me the eternal life that You owe me as my wages!" But who has done that?

The Jews, who had the written Law, certainly did righteous things according to the Law—sometimes. But Paul points out that even the Gentiles, who didn't have the Law, did righteous things—sometimes. The very conscience that God has built into the human soul tells us, in general, what is right and wrong. But no one, neither Jew nor Gentile, has walked in perfect line with either the Law of Moses or the voice of conscience.

Those who have the Ten Commandments may lead more righteous lives than those who don't. But at the end of the day, God will not weigh us on one side of the balancing scale with other people on the other side. He will weigh us against the perfection required by His holy Law, and by that measurement, we will all be found wanting. That's why the gospel warns us not to seek to be weighed in the balance with our works. Instead, it teaches us to look to Christ Jesus and to seek God's approval only in Him!

Let us pray: O Lord, deal with us only according to Your mercy in Christ, and not as our deeds deserve. Amen.

While the author of the second Psalm isn't named in the Psalm itself, the Holy Spirit later identifies David as the author (Acts 4:25,26). It's the first of the Messianic Psalms, and its prophecies apply directly to Christ, the Son of David.

First, there is the prophecy about how the peoples and rulers of the earth would conspire together against the Lord's Anointed. Peter and John note that this was fulfilled when Herod and Pontius Pilate, together with the Roman soldiers and Jewish people, conspired to put Jesus to death. They thought they were successful in opposing God, but their plotting was "a vain thing," because their actions ended up fulfilling God's plan to provide atonement for the sins of mankind. It was also "a vain thing," because Jesus rose from the dead, and, in fulfillment of the second prophecy in this Psalm, was "set as King on the holy hill of Zion." That is, He ascended to the right hand of God to reign invisibly as King over all things for the good of His beloved Church.

Yes, the Lord laughs at men who think they can accomplish anything against Him. Even their disobedience and rebellion are incorporated into God's plan to work all things together for good to those who love Him.

The third prophecy in this Psalm actually looks into eternity, into God's eternal "Today." The relationship of the Messiah to God is the begetting of a Son by a Father, identifying the coming Christ as both true God and true Man.

The fourth prophecy describes the reign of Christ over all nations—a reign that will span this entire New Testament age and be completed when Christ returns on the Last Day. It's a reign that's hidden, but real. The rulers of the earth are warned to acknowledge Him and submit to Him as King. And the people of God are comforted, because Christ is a sure Refuge against every bad thing in this world for all who trust in Him.

Let us pray: O Christ, our King, we praise You and acknowledge You to be our Lord. Shelter us from all the schemes of the wicked who would do us harm, and bring us safely into Your heavenly kingdom. Amen.

“A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son.” For some time David’s son Absalom had been stealing the hearts of the men of Israel (2 Sam 15:6). Having formed a sizable conspiracy, including one of David’s trusted advisers, Ahithophel. Absalom declared himself king of Israel. Hearing this news, David flees Jerusalem to save his life, the lives of his supporters, and the lives of all who dwell in Jerusalem (2 Sam 15:14). David and his retinue cross the Brook Kidron and ascended the Mount of Olives (2 Sam 15:30) in sorrow.

David’s enemies said of him, “There is no help [literally, salvation] for him in God” (2). They interpreted the events as being God’s judgment against David. As David went up by the Ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping and covering his head (2 Sam 15:30), it looked like his enemies were right. But David did not falter. He calls the Lord his shield, his protection. The Lord was David’s glory and one who lifted up his head which was bent down in humble prayer. He could sleep in peace and awake because he was confident the opposite of what his enemies said was true. “Salvation belongs to the LORD” (8), therefore he has no reason to fear a multitude set against him.

The Son of David—the Lord Jesus Christ—walked a similar sorrowful path. On the night in which He was betrayed, He crossed the Brook Kidron (Jn 18:1) and ascended the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39). He was betrayed by a close companion and endured shame even greater than David had. Christ walked David’s path so that He might, by His innocent suffering and bitter death, pay for David’s and the world’s sins. He strikes our enemies—sin, death, and the devil—on the cheekbone, silencing their accusations that “There is no help [literally, salvation] for us in God.” Like David, when we are surrounded by a multitude of spiritual enemies, we are to be confident that “Salvation belongs to the LORD” (8) and that He will save all who flee to Him for mercy for Jesus’ sake.

Let us pray: O Lord our shield, deliver us from our enemies which tempt us to believe there is no help for us in You. Lift up our heads with the promise of the gospel, so that in all affliction we trust in none but You for salvation. Amen.

The Jews imagined they were God's people simply because they were biological descendants of Abraham who showed their obedience to God by being circumcised. This is why the Jews put so much confidence in circumcision and boasted in it. St. Paul agrees that circumcision is profitable, but not in and of itself. "Circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision" (v. 25). Since the Jews did not keep the law—though they boast in it—their circumcision is worthless. Circumcision was not righteousness itself. It required the fulfillment of the law. This is why "if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision" (v. 26). What really mattered wasn't circumcision itself, but the fulfillment of the entire law from the heart.

Since no Jew fulfilled the law from the heart, and circumcision demands the law's fulfillment, a Jew's only recourse was faith in the promised atonement and righteousness of One who would fulfill the law perfectly, the Seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ. Circumcision—the very thing in which the Jews boasted for their salvation—pointed to Christ's shedding of blood for their sins against the law and His perfect fulfillment of the law He gives to all who believe His gracious promise. That faith is counted for righteousness for all who believe, whether they are circumcised Jews or uncircumcised Gentiles. Physical circumcision is not what makes one a member of God's people, but circumcision of the heart, which is faith in Christ.

Jew and Gentile alike are to circumcise their hearts by contrition—sorrowing over their sin and acknowledging that they have offended God by it—and humble faith which believes in the forgiveness won by Jesus on the cross and that His perfect fulfillment of the law is credited to all who believe. This is the true circumcision which makes us God's people.

Let us pray: Circumcise our hearts, O Lord, so that we boast not in our own merits, but rejoice that You declare us perfectly righteous by faith in Your Son. Amen.

God gave His oracles and circumcision to the people of Israel to set them apart from the nations so that they might serve as the incubator for the Messiah. The law and ceremonies directed their faith forward to the promised Messiah, His full atonement for sin and His perfect righteousness which He promises to all who believe as Abraham believed (Gen 15:6). But many Israelites did not believe. They used the law and circumcision as if they were tools of self-righteousness. Did their unbelief render God's faithfulness ineffective? Not at all. He remains true to His promises regardless of whether or not people believe Him and use His gifts properly. Not only that, the unrighteousness of men—their sin and unbelief—demonstrate God's righteousness and faithfulness to His word.

The sinful flesh hears this and wants to use it to justify itself. It argues: "If our unrighteousness demonstrates God's righteousness, then isn't our unrighteousness a good thing? Isn't God unfair to judge us? If God's truth abounds more through my lie, doesn't that make my lie something praiseworthy since it reveals God's truth? If God justifies sinners freely by faith, why shouldn't we do evil so that God may demonstrate His faithfulness and goodness all the more?" Even in Paul's day detractors slandered him, claiming that teaching of justification by faith apart from works of the law led to lawlessness. But anyone who makes the gospel into license for continued sinning is justly condemned.

God has graciously given us His law and the gospel. We must not use the law as so many Israelites did, as an instrument to prove our self-righteousness. Nor should we use the gospel as so many do, as a "get out of jail free" card that allows to deliberately continue in our sins as if our sins glorified God's grace. The law must be used correctly to show us our sins so that we truly repent of them and look to the gospel that forgives the sins and justifies all who believe. In that forgiveness we then live righteously to God's glory.

Let us pray: Give us faith to believe Your gospel, O Lord, so that we may forsake our sins and strive to live righteously, for the good of our neighbor and Your glory. Amen.

The sinful flesh which clings to us hears the words of Scripture Paul quotes in verses 10-18 and says, "I'm not that bad a sinner!" But the sinful nature which we all inherit from Adam *is* that bad. We are not righteous. We don't understand God because our minds are darkened by sin. We don't seek God because we want to live by our own law rather than His. We are spiritually unprofitable and unable to do good because no good thing dwells in our sinful human nature.

Our throats are open tombs that reveal the sinful decay and death of our hearts and minds. We deceive others. We speak poisonous words to our neighbors to tear them down and exalt ourselves. Our mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Our behavior is no better. Our feet are swift to shed blood, and even if we do not physically murder, we kill others with our tongue and in our hearts by maliciously hating them. By nature we do not care for the way of peace because we relish in destruction and misery. We live like this because there is no fear of God before our eyes. We do not fear His wrath. We hate God rather than love and trust Him. God's law—the Ten Commandments—shows us the wickedness of our deeds and our hearts, so that all the world may become guilty before God.

God shows us the depth of our sin and guilt so that we flee to Him for mercy. Just as the healthy do not seek medicine, if we say our sins aren't that bad then we will not go to the physician of souls, our Lord Jesus Christ. But, acknowledging the depth of our depravity and confessing our sins He applies the medicine of the gospel to us. He forgives our sins, having paid for them by His sufferings and death. He gives us His perfect righteousness so that we are righteous in God's sight. He creates new hearts within us that begin to fear God so that we fight against sin, love Him so that we rejoice in His law, and trust Him in afflictions. Apart from faith in Christ we are as bad as the Scriptures proclaim. But by faith in Christ, we are as righteous as Christ, and we seek to live like it each day.

Let us pray: Give us a due sense of our sin each day, O Lord, that, heartily repenting and fleeing to You for mercy, we may receive pardon, peace, and Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Paul has thoroughly demonstrated that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God so that there is not one person who is righteous in God's sight. But out of sheer grace and mercy, God set forth His Son Jesus as "a propitiation by His blood" (25). By shedding His blood upon the cross Christ made perfect payment for the sins of the entire world, for "He died for all" (2 Cor 5:15). Since Christ is true God as well as true man, His death made infinite payment for the world's sins.

The one who has faith in Jesus, believing that His death pays for their sins and that this faith is counted as righteousness in God's sight, is justified, fully forgiven, and righteous in God's sight with Christ's perfect righteousness. This demonstrates God's righteousness, "that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (26). Christ's death shows us that God is just. He will not ignore sin, tolerate it, or cancel it without payment. The debt incurred by mankind must be paid in full. Because Christ made full payment for all sins, God is the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

All of this takes place "by faith, apart from the deeds of the law" (28). The Gentile cannot become righteous in God's sight by following the moral law that God wrote on the hearts of all men at creation (2:15). The Jew cannot become righteous in God's sight by doing the works and ceremonies prescribed by Moses. Nor can we soften the blow to our sinful nature by trying to fit a few works of law into our justification. Any mixture of God's grace in Christ and human worthiness contradicts Paul's words and inserts uncertainty into our justification. It is by faith we are justified and faith alone.

Nor can we say that anyone is justified apart from faith or before faith. Paul does not know of a general justification of the world, nor does he know of any sinner who is justified in any other way than faith in Jesus' perfect payment for our sins.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, strengthen our faith in Your Son's propitiation for our sins, so that as we repent of our sins each day, we may confidently trust Your forgiveness for Jesus' sake and give thanks for justifying us by faith alone. Amen.

In yesterday's reading Paul wrote that "the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets" (3:21). Paul now gives two examples of how the law and prophets testify to the righteousness of God through faith in Christ. Genesis (the first book of the law) tells us of Abraham who was not justified by his works or obedience. "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (3). Abraham was justified—counted righteous in God's sight—by faith, in God's promise of his Seed, the Messiah from sin. David, who prophesied in the psalms, also testifies to the righteousness of faith. The man whose sins are covered by God—and therefore not imputed to him by the Lord—is truly blessed.

Abraham also testifies to the fact that this blessedness is not only for the circumcised Jew alone but for the uncircumcised Gentile as well. He was justified by faith and it was several years later that the Lord gave him circumcision. Even when Abraham received circumcision, it was not as a work of obedience, but as "a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised" (11). As a sign and seal of righteousness, circumcision testified to Abraham's righteousness by faith, conferred that righteousness again, and sealed it. For Abraham's descendants, circumcision became a means of grace by which God worked faith in them which counted them righteous. This makes Abraham the father of the Jews and all who "walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised." (12).

Abraham's faith looked forward to the promised Seed who would bless all families of the earth (Gen 12:3). Our faith looks to the same promised Seed, whom we know as Christ Jesus. In Him all families of the earth are blessed because He paid for the sins of all people. When we believe God's promise that He forgives our sins for Jesus' sake, we walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham once walked.

Let us pray: Grant us Your Holy Spirit, O Lord, that we may daily walk in the steps of our father Abraham, believing Your promises to forgive and justify us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The sons of men distress and anger David. They show contempt for the Lord and His Word. They love worthlessness and seek falsehood. What faithful believer wouldn't be stirred to anger when the holy things of God are reviled?

In his distress David calls upon the God of his righteousness—that is, the God who covers his sins, not imputing them to him, and counts David righteous because he believes God's promise. Because David believes God's promise to forgive sins by faith, he is confident that the Lord has set apart for Himself the godly—that is, believers—and will answer his prayer for deliverance. David then counsels himself, and all the faithful, "Be angry, and do not sin" (4). He does not say, "Do not be angry." He says to be angry, that is, acknowledge the anger, but do not sin in that anger. Words spoken and deeds committed in anger are never godly and righteous (James 1:20). The way to be angry and not sin is to "meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD" (4-5). Meditate on God's promises in Scripture and commit the cause to God who judges righteously. If anger is nurtured in the heart then we "give place to the devil" (Eph 4:27).

David asks God to lift up the light of His countenance upon him, the very thing God does in the benediction He gave to Aaron in Numbers 6:26, "The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace." Through meditating on God's promise, God puts more gladness in David's heart than at a bountiful harvest. This joy allows David to lie down in peace and sleep, trusting in the Lord's salvation.

When the devil and the world distress and anger us by their blasphemies, persecutions, and temptations, the Holy Spirit directs us to meditate on God's word within ourselves, commit our cause to God's righteous judgment, and trust His promise to lighten us with His gracious countenance so that we have joy and peace in the midst of those who would distress us.

Let us pray: Lift up the light of Your countenance upon us in our distress, O Lord, and give us your peace and joy. Amen.

The first thing we notice in verse 1 of this beautiful psalm of David is a clear connection to the 2nd Commandment and the proper use of God's name for praise. Then in verse 2 we understand that even infants and children praise God. The rest of the psalm praises God for His work in the creation and that everything – flocks, herds, birds, and fish – is under God's feet as Lord and Ruler over all things. Unlike many of today's vacuous contemporary "praise songs" which repeat empty words about God, this psalm teaches us to praise God in specific ways and with specific words referring to His works and wonders.

We know that the unbelieving world in which we live couldn't care less about God or the proper use of His name; in fact, it misuses and abuses His name constantly. But even Christians sometimes misuse and abuse God's name in careless ways. Luther taught through the correct understanding of the Second Commandment that God's name is properly used in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. Any other use of that majestic and holy name is sinful. So, repent, dear Christian, of the times you misuse that precious and holy name, and then receive God's forgiveness through your faithful pastor to strengthen you.

Never forget that God Himself has put His name on and in you through Holy Baptism by which He has given you forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation through faith in Christ's suffering and death for your sins on His cross. And the Divine Service you attend begins and ends with God's holy name. So, by remembering your Baptism, receiving Absolution, and having Christ put Himself into you in His Supper, you are kept in the one true faith – all through and because of the wonderful and majestic name of our good and gracious God.

Let us pray: Lord God, You have commanded us not to misuse Your name. Grant that we may fear and love You so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie or deceive by Your name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Five times in today's relatively brief reading St. Paul uses the word "faith." And as this week's readings and devotions demonstrate, faith continues to be central to this Epistle. Righteousness comes by faith, the promise comes by faith, Abraham had faith. To state the obvious, faith is critical to Christianity, for there is no salvation, no forgiveness, no grace received without the precious and God-given gift of faith. And that gift comes only by the Holy Spirit who works faith by and through the Word of God, particularly the Gospel of Christ's substitutionary life, suffering, death, and resurrection in our place and on our behalf, for "it is by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8).

In this reading Abraham's faith is highlighted. In Genesis 15:5-6, Abraham was told by God, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the Lord and He credited it to him as righteousness." Even though it was biologically impossible for Abraham and Sarah to have children because of their advanced age, God made it possible.

And not only did God gift Abraham with his biological son Isaac, He also gave him countless other "offspring" which includes all who, by faith, believe and trust in God through the work of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. As St. Paul writes of Abraham in vv. 23-24, "The words, 'It was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us to whom God will credit righteousness for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead."

So, the central focus of Christianity is Christ Jesus – His suffering, death, and resurrection – all of which He underwent for you and in your place. And God's gift of faith is that which grasps hold of this Gospel truth by which you are saved. Rejoice, child of Abraham; rejoice, child of God!

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for Your gift of faith by which comes Your gifts of forgiveness and salvation. Amen.

St. Paul, writing to Christians in Rome, gives tremendous comfort and strength through his words in today's reading. There's no uncertainty, there's nothing nebulous or unclear about where God's people stand because of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection for them. Because we are justified by faith, we have peace with God. God in Christ has made that peace for us by His successful warfare with all the forces of evil which railed against Him. By His holy, innocent, bitter suffering and death, all our sins are paid for. Or as St. Paul writes, "at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." That powerlessness is our sinful nature and our total inability to save ourselves or do anything to earn God's favor. Therefore, it is all God's work to and for us which frees us from the eternal penalty our sins deserve.

St. Paul also makes it clear that we "boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Anything and everything we have from God is only by His grace and power. All we have to "boast" of is our wretchedness, sin, and inability to please God. That's why it's ridiculous for anyone to say, "I gave my heart to Jesus," for our Lord says in Mt. 15:19, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." Really, that's what you want to offer to God? Nice gift indeed...NOT!

Dear Christian, rejoice in God's love and grace toward you, for everything God does and allows is for your good and His ultimate glory. You are free to live in and for Him, and the best way to do anything for God is constantly to receive His saving Gospel into your ears, remember your Baptism by which you were connected to Christ's death and resurrection, make regular use of the precious gift of Holy Absolution, and run to Christ's altar to feed on His salvific body and blood which delivers more and more forgiveness.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for Your gifts of Word and Sacrament, and let me never despise them or take them for granted. Amen.

How and when did sin enter the world? In Genesis 3 the “one man,” Adam, sinned along with his wife Eve by disobeying God’s command not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God had given the first man and woman the entire Garden of Eden in which to live and eat and enjoy His beautiful creation. They were given only one little rule, one little prohibition...and they failed miserably in obeying God. Of course, the devil tempted Adam and Eve to sin, but they are the ones who disobeyed, and their sin was held against them.

Before the Fall mankind was created in God’s image. According to Johann Gerhard (1582-1637, a Lutheran scholastic theologian during the age of Lutheran orthodoxy), “The image of God in the first man was the natural and total perfection of the whole man and the uprightness of soul and body, his wholeness, his conformity with God his archetype, w/o any wrestling between flesh and spirit, namely, the wisdom and light of the knowledge of God in his mind, righteousness in his will, and a holiness in perfect conformity with the Law of God.” Basically, everything about man was perfectly aligned with God and His will....

“Thus, mankind lost God’s perfect image through sin; after that, Adam’s son Seth was born in his father’s image, an image subject to sin, God’s wrath, the law’s curse, and earthly and eternal death. So, as Paul writes, sin entered the world through one man...”

But thanks be to God that “through the obedience of the one Man the many will be made righteous.” That one Man is Christ, and His one act of obedience to His Father’s will was to suffer and die and pay for the sins of the world, yours included. And through God-given faith wrought by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel of Christ, you have forgiveness for your sins and the sure and certain promise of eternal life with Christ in heaven.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for paying for my sins and giving me the promise of a blissful eternity with You. Amen.

“I know I’m forgiven. It really doesn’t matter how I live because Jesus forgave all my sins.” Umm... nope. St. Paul has plenty to say about that in today’s reading. It is dangerous at best to think and live as if nothing bad can happen to you because you’re a Christian. To live that carelessly is to despise the grace of God and to please the Evil One who has duped you into that very way of thinking.

If that is you in any way, shape, manner, or form, repent. Repent for taking God’s mercy in Christ so lightly. Repent for taking God’s mercy in Christ so callously. Repent for treating God’s grace in Christ as a cheap Get Out Of Jail Free card and for giving the devil so much to work with.

It simply makes no sense for anyone who has all of that to go willingly back into a life of slavery to sin. To paraphrase Paul’s words in Rom 6:1, how shall we who have been freed from hell’s prison purposely go back and put ourselves in chains and behind bars again? That’s exactly what we’ve been liberated from! Why would we willingly want to be anywhere near there and risk falling away from Christ?

St. Paul says, BY NO MEANS! “Those who have died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?” Since we have been baptized into Christ, we have His death to sin. And since we have been baptized into Christ, we have His resurrection promise as well. His death to sin is ours; His resurrection is ours. We have been freed from sin!

This wonderful truth is truly liberating. Christ has set us free from the bonds of sin by His innocent suffering and death – a sacrifice that counts for all people of all time, a sacrifice the benefits of which are ours through God-given faith and trust in Christ’s death on the cross. So, rejoice, dear Christian! Because of Christ, you get to “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Let us pray: Merciful God, help us to trust that baptism works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as Your words and promises declare; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We could easily just repeat everything written in yesterday's devotion because it all applies to today's reading as well. St. Paul continues his teaching about sin and grace and not going back to our former lives as unbelievers.

But the final sentence of today's reading is our focus: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Wages, of course, are what a person is owed for the work he has done. In our workaday world we should expect a day's wage for a day's work; it is what we should expect for our efforts. And when it comes to sin, well, there are "wages" for that too: death! Sin permeates our mortal bodies and subjects it to its ravages and effects. We get sick, we get injured, we get older and frail, we get weak and miserable, and we die. That's all due to our sinful nature and this body that will not make it to heaven in its current form.

To all of that earthly woe Paul says, "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." Christ, by His atoning death on the cross, has paid for all your sins and freed you from the ultimate effect of sin which is eternal death and damnation. Through Holy Baptism God has placed His name on you and called you His own dear child. As you regularly have the Gospel of Christ put into your ears your faith is strengthened and you are comforted. As you avail yourself of Holy Absolution the sins you confess are removed. And as you receive Christ's body and blood in His Sacrament, He literally takes up residence in you and delivers more and more forgiveness. All that to say, you can never get too much Jesus!

Rejoice, dear Christian, for Christ is your Savior and Deliverer. All that He has is yours by His grace and mercy alone without any merit or worthiness in you. For all this it is your duty – and privilege – to thank and praise, serve and obey Him, for this is most certainly true!

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for your all-atoning sacrifice for my sins and for freeing me from sin's slavery. Amen.

In Psalm 46 David writes, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” That is the psalm which inspired Martin Luther to write his famous Reformation hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” Here in the opening verse of Psalm 11 we have similar words: “In the Lord I take refuge.” These are comforting words, strengthening words, words upon which we may rely without hesitation when faced with any number of this world’s challenges.

Of today’s psalm, Luther writes, “[it] is a psalm of prayer. It laments over the heretics and false interpreters of the Scriptures who lead the people away from the true ground of faith and bring them to their mountains, that is, their great high holiness of works. To that end, the heretics and false interpreters of the Scriptures mock the true Teacher and say, ‘What shall the righteous do?’ But the psalm ends with the comfort that God will certainly see this. The false teachers will be condemned, and the righteous will remain. This prayer can be an example for us” (from *Reading the Psalms with Luther*, page 34).

When you are experiencing any backlash from the unbelieving world, when the troubles of this life weigh heavily on your heart and mind, take comfort and solace in God’s holy Word which reminds you that God will, in His time and in His way, deal with the unrighteous. “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you” (I Pet 5:7). Commend all your fears, troubles, and challenges to God who not only knows what you are experiencing but also knows how and when He will deal with them. Take refuge in the Lord who proved his undying love for you and all mankind when His Son, Jesus Christ, suffered and died on the cross for all your sins in your place. God knows what you need and when and how to help you; of that you can be absolutely certain.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, You came into this world to teach us the way everlasting. Have mercy on us, save us from the snares of unbelief and the seductive teachings of the world, and grant us to abide in Your Word and its power. Amen.

God's Word is the ultimate authority and source of comfort in our lives. In Psalm 13 King David pours out his heart in a time of distress, demonstrating the authenticity of his faith in God's unfailing love. Luther, in his 1531 "Summaries of the Psalms," says this: "The 13th Psalm is a psalm of prayer against sorrow or sadness of the spirit which comes at times from the devil himself, at times also from men who act against us with spite and evil tricks. As a result, we are cast down and grieve when we see such evil aligned against us. But prayer is stronger than all misfortune. This psalm gives us here an example, by which we certainly may be comforted and learn in every kind of calamity not to become anxious or downcast, nor bite or destroy ourselves in the heart. Instead we learn to keep ourselves to prayer and cry to God of all of these things, knowing that we will be heard and finally be delivered, as St James 5:13 also says: 'If anyone is troubled let him pray.'"

In the Psalm we see that amid David's struggles, he proclaims his trust in God's mercy. He clings to the assurance of God's steadfast love and faithfulness, recognizing that God's character is one of compassion and grace. As believers, we hold fast to the central truth of God's mercy and grace revealed to us through Jesus Christ.

Like David, we may face moments of uncertainty in our lives, but we can find solace in God's unchanging character and unfailing love. Thus, we continue to approach God with honesty and openness, seeking His presence and guidance in all circumstances, and we trust in His mercy and rejoice in the salvation brought to us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Almighty and eternal God, you are always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and to give more than we ask or deserve. Pour down on us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Today we hear about the liberating truth of being freed from the law through Christ. As believers we trust in the supremacy of God's grace and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Our text in Romans 7 illuminates the transformative power of God's love in our lives.

We have freedom from the law. In this passage, the Apostle Paul uses the analogy of marriage to illustrate our relationship with the law. Just as a woman is released from the law of her husband through his death, we are freed from the demands of the law through the death and resurrection of Christ. Our old self, bound by the law and enslaved to sin, dies with Christ, and we are born anew to a life of freedom in the Spirit.

We are joined with Christ. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we become united with Him, our bridegroom. We are no longer under the dominion of the law but have a new baptismal relationship with our Savior. By being joined with Christ, we are empowered to bear fruit for God, living lives that honor and glorify Him. We are liberated for a new life. In Christ, we are delivered from the bondage of the law, no longer relying on our own efforts to earn salvation. Instead, we serve in the newness of the Spirit, guided by God's grace, and empowered in the new man (through His Word and Spirit) to live according to His will. Our actions are motivated by love, not mere compliance with rules.

We rejoice in the liberating truth of Romans 7. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, we are freed from the demands of the law and united with our Savior through faith. We now serve in the newness of the Spirit, bearing fruit for God and living lives that reflect His grace and love. As believers, we continue to embrace God's grace and find joy in the freedom we have in Christ Jesus.

Let us pray: Almighty and eternal God, pour down on us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

This text helps us to recognize the ongoing struggle with sin in our lives. In it the Apostle Paul shares his own inner conflict between the desire to do good and the presence of sin. As we reflect on this passage, we find encouragement in the transformative power of Christ's grace as we strive against sin.

The struggle with sin is real! Paul's words in this passage resonate with the internal battle we face as believers. Despite desiring to do good and follow God's law, we often find ourselves falling short due to the power of sin that dwells within us. It is essential to acknowledge this struggle because it reminds us of our constant need for God's grace and strength.

The law shows us our sin. The law reveals the reality of sin in our lives and magnifies its presence. Though the law is good and holy, it also exposes our sinful nature and incapability to save ourselves. We recognize that we are helpless in our own efforts to overcome sin.

Therefore, we find deliverance only in Christ. Amid Paul's anguish, he turns to the ultimate source of deliverance: Jesus Christ our Lord. It is through Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection that we find forgiveness, redemption, and the power to overcome sin. Our hope lies not in our own strength but in Christ's victory over sin and death.

The struggle with sin is part of the Christian journey, but we do not lose heart, because Christ has triumphed over sin and death. Through faith in Him, we find the strength to resist sin through the Holy Spirit and the Word. So we continue to fix our eyes on Jesus, seeking His grace and mercy, and rejoicing in the assurance that we are justified and sanctified through His atoning work. With minds constantly renewed by the Holy Spirit through the Word, we earnestly strive to serve the law of God, finding our ultimate deliverance and hope in Christ alone.

Let us pray: Almighty and eternal God, pour down on us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” We treasure the message of God's grace and salvation found in Romans 8. In this passage, the Apostle Paul presents the contrast between life in the Spirit and life in the flesh. In these verses we discover the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The passage begins with the powerful assurance that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Through faith in Christ we are justified and set free from the law of sin and death. God's grace is greater than our sins, and we are forgiven and accepted as His beloved children. The Holy Spirit plays a pivotal role in our lives as believers. It is through the Spirit that the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in Christ and applied to us. The Spirit empowers us to live in faith, receiving the peace Christ won for us.

Paul contrasts the mindset of those who live according to the flesh with those who live according to the Spirit. A carnal mind leads to spiritual death and enmity against God, while a spiritually minded person experiences life and peace through the righteousness of Christ.

We believe that through baptism and faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells within us. The Spirit's presence through the Word not only assures us of our salvation but also enables to walk according to the new man that pleases God.

In Christ, we find freedom from condemnation and the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. As we live according to the Spirit, we fix our minds on the things of God, experiencing life and peace in our walk with Him. So, we rejoice in the assurance that we are no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit, and through His indwelling presence, we have the hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Let us pray: Almighty and eternal God, pour down on us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” We embrace the wonderful truth that through faith in Jesus Christ we have become children of God. Romans 8:12-17 reveals the profound relationship we have with our Heavenly Father. These verses give us encouragement in our identity as children of God.

As children of God, we are no longer bound to live according to the desires of the flesh. Through Christ’s death and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit God has put to death the sinful deeds of the body. Our identity in Christ empowers us to live victorious lives through faith in Him—though His Word and Spirit at work in us through the new man—overcoming the allure of the flesh and its temporary pleasures.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is hidden, but in our lives, He is evident by the transformation He brings. As we are led by the Spirit of God through the Word in the new man, our actions, thoughts, and desires align with His will, though still in weakness. Such alignment, however small as it grows, reveals our status as true sons and daughters of God.

Through faith in Christ we are adopted into God’s family. The Spirit of God testifies within us, assuring us of our relationship with the Heavenly Father. No longer do we live in fear and bondage; instead, we boldly cry out, “Abba, Father,” expressing our intimate and secure connection with our Heavenly Father. Our identity as children of God bestows upon us a glorious inheritance. We are not only heirs of God but joint heirs with Christ Himself. This unimaginable privilege unites us with Christ in His sufferings and promises that we will also be glorified together with Him.

Let us pray: Almighty and eternal God, you are always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and to give more than we ask or deserve. Pour down on us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

We find great comfort and hope in the powerful truths revealed here. In this passage the Apostle Paul addresses the reality of suffering in the world and the enduring hope we have in Christ.

Paul reminds us that our present sufferings, though real, cannot be compared to the glorious future that awaits us. As believers, we understand that through Christ's redemptive work, our hope is anchored in the promise of eternal life and being glorified with Him.

The fallen world we inhabit experiences the consequences of sin, leading to suffering and futility. Nevertheless, there is hope in Christ's redemptive plan. The day will come when creation will be delivered from corruption and brought into glorious liberty, along with God's children.

In moments of weakness and uncertainty the Holy Spirit comes alongside us, interceding on our behalf. We may not always know how to pray, but the Spirit understands the depths of our hearts and communicates our needs to God according to His will.

The passage culminates with the assurance that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. This divine plan includes our predestination to be conformed to the image of Christ, ultimately leading to our justification and glorification.

We take comfort in the profound truths of Romans 8:18-30. As believers we endure the present sufferings with hope, looking forward to the glory that awaits us in Christ; we find strength in the Spirit's intercession and trust in God's sovereign purpose; and we eagerly await the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan, knowing that all things work together for our good and that we are destined to be glorified with Christ.

Let us pray: Almighty and eternal God, pour down on us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In Psalm 14 we encounter a stark portrayal of human depravity and the foolishness of those who reject God. As believers we hold firmly to the biblical understanding of humanity's fallen nature and our desperate need for God's grace and salvation. In his 1531 "Summaries of the Psalms," Luther says: "The 14th Psalm is a prophecy and a psalm of instruction which teaches us that the doctrine and life of all men without faith is nothing but an abomination before God. Their best worship of God is only belly worship by which they fatten themselves by devouring the goods of the people. They do not know or understand anything of the true worship of God, although they teach and praise the law of God. Moreover, they profane and blaspheme God's word, whenever it at all rebukes them and they will hear nothing about trust or faith in God." The Psalm begins with a solemn declaration that those who deny God's existence are foolish. As believers, we acknowledge that our human wisdom cannot save us; we are wholly dependent on God's grace for redemption.

The Psalmist observes the corruption of humanity, emphasizing that all have turned aside and become corrupt. It underscores the universal nature of sin and our inability to do good on our own. This recognition, from the Holy Spirit through the Word, leads us to seek God's mercy and forgiveness, acknowledging our desperate need for a Savior.

Despite the depravity described in the Psalm, there is hope and consolation in God. The Lord is the refuge of the poor and oppressed, offering comfort and deliverance to those who trust in Him. The Psalmist expresses a heartfelt longing for the salvation of God's people. This longing finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the ultimate Savior who redeems us from sin and offers eternal life to all who believe in Him.

Let us pray: Almighty and eternal God, pour down on us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

One of the first things revealed in the Psalm for today is how man (specifically, anybody praying this Psalm) should recognize his condition of total depravity in comparison to the Holy Triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Psalmist poses the question to the Lord; but in praying the Psalm, inevitably, the question gets turned around to be posed toward the self. How would you stack up? Would you be able to abide in God's tabernacle? Would you be able to dwell in His holy hill? Honestly, there's only One that could.

Hear and see, through verses 2-5, how your eyes are opened and, ultimately, re-focused. The condition of the self gets further revealed as each verse throws God's Law at man's impure, sinful flesh. Man's old nature doesn't stand a chance of escaping, having fallen well short of the good life and good works put forth.

The demand of how man was intended to be before the Fall becomes clearer and clearer with each verse. There is a specific way that man is supposed to be in order to abide in God's tabernacle and rest on His holy mountain. And, yet, with fallen, sinful man not being what he's supposed to be, is there hope that he somehow can become that which is demanded. Who can do these things and never be moved?

Thanks be to God for sending Christ Jesus for us! Now that God's Law has brought done its job of revealing man as the sinner that he is, now read through the verses and hear and see how Christ Jesus was the active obedient One, who fulfilled these perfect demands for us. You must be all of these to abide and dwell with God — and you do, through repentance and belief in Christ. God's rescuing Gospel is such a true relief when His Law is wielded clear and deep.

Let us pray: We give thanks to You Almighty God for sending us the way of our rescue, restoring us in Your eyes as You account us as having our true life and being which abides and dwells with You through faith in Christ's fully atoning merits for us. Amen.

All of God's Holy Scripture is meant to be comforting, because all of it points to God's love through Christ Jesus. But these specific verses of Romans are some of the most comforting words of Holy Scripture that all Christians should carry around within themselves at all times. Honestly, these inspired words of Paul are meant to reveal how all Christians have an unconquerable God Almighty. Who in their right mind wouldn't want Him on their side? But "right mind" would only mean the mind of the New Man, for man's old man will always chose to reject Him and go it alone; that's crazy!

When shepherding to hurting and ailing Christians of any sort, these verses are easily turned to for comfort. And to take it up a notch and bring the ailing person to truly connect to these comforting words of God, slide into the midst of these tribulations written in Holy Scripture the very thing that has the Christian caught in their suffering. For example: if a Christian is suffering because of a recent diagnosis, read God's Scripture in this way: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Then add, "And dear believing/baptized Christian, nor can a diagnosis!"

The same can be done with any health ailment, or life tragedy. Because of God's love through Christ crucified and risen, He has truly given man the way of rest, forgiveness, life, and salvation. Thanks be to God, indeed!

Let us pray: Almighty God and Lord, grant us always to know that Christ alone is the way, the truth and the life, and that it is only through faith in His fully atoning merits alone that You account us as conquerors over whatever is ailing us. Bring us to rejoice and be glad through His wounds. Amen.

It is truly amazing how the mind of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther worked when reading God's Holy Scripture. The depth of his thinking, the focus of every little verse. Today's reading is not the easiest to understand. Sometimes texts can go in one ear and out the other; sometimes they can cause the eyelids to grow heavy. But these happen only because we remain in sinful flesh that fights against God and His Holy Word through every hour awake.

Reading Luther, however, reveals a new, refreshing depth of understanding that can bring one to yearn for more. For example, when St. Paul was inspired to write in verse 2 "that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart" here's what Luther says:

"From this text it is very clear that love is found not only in sweetness and delight, but also in the greatest sorrow and bitterness. Indeed it rejoices and delights in bitterness and sorrow, because it regards the misery and sufferings of others as if they were its own. Thus Christ even in the final and worst hour of His suffering was aglow with His deepest love, indeed... it filled Him with the greatest joy to suffer the greatest pain. For thus it is that 'God is wonderful in His saints' (Ps. 68:35), so that He causes them, at every time they are suffering the greatest pains, also to experience the greatest joys." (AE 25, p. 379)

Only God could bring a man's mind to think in such a way! Thanks be to God for working through the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther in bringing our eyes to settle on Christ and His gracious merits for us for the forgiveness of our sins — even in the midst of our trials. As the remainder of this text reveals, it doesn't matter who thinks they are privileged (born first or of a certain bloodline); it's of no advantage without faith in Christ!

Let us pray: We give thanks to You, Almighty God, for Your gracious election, apart from any merit or worthiness on our part. Continue to feed us with the truth of Your Word and Sacraments. Amen.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Paul continues his discourse on how God is who He is and how man holds no place in judgment over God's will. There is no way that there is unrighteousness with God. There would be, however, if He were to have predestined some to hell not taking into consideration their own fault.

Clearly, if the apostle is writing against such thoughts, then there must have been some putting forth such claims. There are still those today who make such claims saying, "God has predestined some to heaven and predestined others to hell." It's called 'double-predestination' and it's anti-scriptural.

God is making clear through St. Paul that with man, of his own will, he has no power when regarding the things of God. But when it comes to the things of God, then He is only behind man's understanding. Thus, God uses evil – through His will allowing it – to keep those who are His own relying upon Him and staying focused outside of themselves and alone on the fully atoning merits of Christ Jesus for rescue.

Luther, quoting Augustine, writes: "God shows mercy out of His great goodness and hardens with no injustice, so that he who is freed may not boast of his own merits and he who is damned has been overcome by nothing but his own deserts. For grace alone distinguishes the redeemed from the condemned, all having been mingled into one mass of perdition by the common cause of their common origin.' Because if such words a man recognizes his own damnation and despairs of saving himself by his own powers, ... But here he learns that grace has raised him up before every will, including his own." (AE 25, p. 395-5) Thanks be to God for His gracious will, indeed!

Let us pray: O, Lord, as You bring us to pray in the prayer You teach all of Your disciples, "Lead us not into temptation," that is, "Let us not lead ourselves, for we would certainly make a ruin of it all!" Rather, lead us by Your will through Your Word and Sacraments. Amen.

Let the rejoicing abound that God did not limit His grace only to the Jews, but so willed in His infinite wisdom to extend it to the Gentiles as St. Paul was inspired to proclaim in this text! His use of Isaiah in verse 29 is especially of great comfort: “Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah.”

Once again St. Paul is inspired (as all of God’s Holy Scripture does) to point his readers to the fully atoning merits of Christ Jesus, for He is the seed begotten of the Father for the purpose of redeeming sinful mankind. Christ, sparing us of becoming so horribly destroyed the likes of Sodom and Gomorrah.

St. Paul further points out, again through the use of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, in verse 33, how Jesus is not only the beloved seed of salvation sent by the Father, but the Christ is also the stumbling block upon whom all who would rather rely upon their own merits turn Him into a rock of offense.

“Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” Oh, how thankful are we, believing/baptized children of God, who have been brought, by God’s grace, to have our feet firmly planted on Him whom we now view, with eyes of faith, the foundation of our faith.

Let us pray: We give thanks to You, O Lord, for bringing us to not rely upon our own presumptuous flesh and stumble over Christ, as if He were an offense, but that You have brought us to view Him as the rock of our salvation. Grant us an ever-continued belief on Christ and Him crucified and risen, who brings us never to be put to shame in Your eyes. Amen.

Again, what very comforting, God-imitated words proclaimed through St. Paul. For just as God desires every man to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), so Paul desires that Israel would believe unto a righteousness that is not their own but is Christ's — accounted to them through faith. To be sure, there are two kinds of righteousness. One by way of works, through which no sinful man would ever be able to attain, and the other the by way of faith which is created by God in sinful man hearing God's Word, bringing about repentance and belief in the fully atoning merits of Christ alone.

Through God-created faith He brings us to have this same desire — not only just for unbelieving Jews but for unbelievers the world over. God brings His believing, baptized children to hold a confession of His Word of truth within themselves. Our confession within the Evangelical Lutheran Church is that the Lutheran Confessions (the writings within the Book of Concord) present the most accurate understanding of God's Holy Scripture. Once one veers off of those writings, which guide us into a right confession of God's Word, then one is veering off (or away) from truth. That's a bad path to be on.

We, then, desire that others would have such a sure-footed confession of God's Word, so we want others to be confessional Lutherans — not out of arrogance or pride, but because we want others to confess God's Word of truth most accurately for the hallowing of God's name among us.

Where God's Word of truth is properly proclaimed and His Sacraments rightly administered, repentance and belief in Christ's fully atoning merits will take place in the heart, and His righteousness is granted. Where this takes, place mouths get opened (confession is made) unto salvation. Rejoice that God has brought you to the only true righteousness — His Son's!

Let us pray: We give thanks, O Lord, that you worked through the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther and the other Lutheran fathers in the preservation of Your Word of truth. Keep us steadfast in Your Word and continue to open our mouths. Amen.

Although today's Psalm is a prophecy about the suffering and resurrection of Christ Jesus (as the apostles themselves quote in Acts 2:25 and 13:35), it is also a Psalm that points the sinner who is praying it toward their only source of refuge — namely, that of being in the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course it is the inspired words of David being prayed, but the voice speaking more deeply, according to St. Peter, is the voice of Christ.

The human nature of Christ is displayed as being in perfect trust in the Lord. What relief to us who, according to our sinful flesh, ever-trust in ourselves; daily striving to make it on our own, disregarding or despising the Lord so easily. Thankfully the new nature promised to us in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism longs for the consumption of that very Baptism through the resurrection on the Last Day.

As David prayed this psalm in the persona of Christ, looking forward to the One who was to come, so do we Christians, when we pray this psalm, identify ourselves in hope with the risen Christ, for we too will rise. As God's Word of truth proclaims: "And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power." (1 Cor. 6:14); "knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you." (2 Cor. 4:14); "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." (Rom. 8:11)

Let us pray: We give thanks to You, Lord Jesus, for your bitter sufferings, Your shameful death, and Your joyous resurrection all for us. By the truth of Your Word and Sacraments, grant unto us a continual faith that is properly focused on and in You, so we may not fall into idolatry and false worship; for to You alone goes all the glory. Amen.