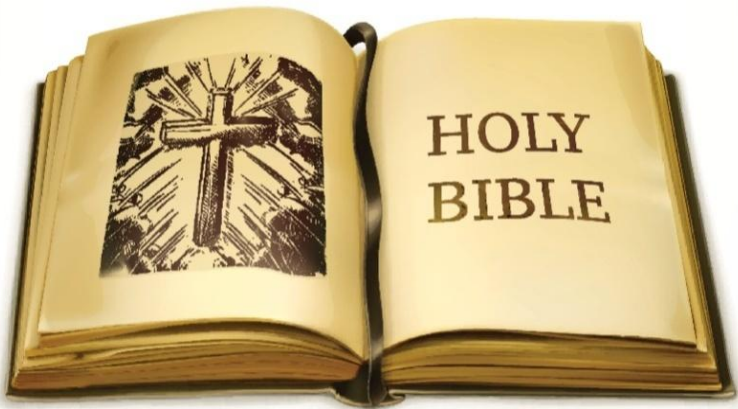


Each Day in the Word



August 2-29, 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.

Psalm 18 is a Psalm of praise for deliverance. The title tells us the circumstances under which David wrote this Psalm; it was after the Lord had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies. That deliverance wasn't immediate, but David was able to look back on all his life-threatening encounters with people who wanted to kill him and see how the Lord had preserved and protected him the whole time, finally bringing him to a place of relative security.

All the descriptors that David uses for the Lord in these verses depict our God as the strong and reliable Defender of His people who hears when we cry to Him for help and comes to our aid at just the right time and in just the right way.

So, sing this Psalm of praise after the Lord has brought you safely through any trial, to give thanks to the Lord for His faithful deliverance. Sing it especially when you consider how God gave His only-begotten Son on the cross to deliver you from sin, death, and the devil, and how He committed Himself to be your strong Protector from those enemies when you were baptized in His name.

But sing it also when you are in need of deliverance, whether from earthly or spiritual enemies, because the Lord's past deliverance of His people is the guarantee of His future deliverance as well. The Lord doesn't change; His commitment to His baptized children does not waver. He will always be the strong Defender of His people until He grants us the final deliverance from every evil and brings us safely into His heavenly kingdom. Call upon the Lord in your distress, cry to Him for help, and praise Him in anticipation of the deliverance He will surely accomplish for you at just the right time and in just the right way.

Let us pray: O Lord, You are our strength and our strong Deliverer. We give You thanks for all the protection You have provided and will provide, and we ask for Your help in every time of trouble, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In Romans 9-11, Paul is answering the charge – or at least the potential charge – that God is unjust for rejecting the Jews who had lived under His Law for so many centuries, and for receiving the Gentiles who had been worshiping idols for so long. In today's reading, Paul removes the matter of race and works from the discussion and focuses on the only thing that has ever mattered: calling upon the Lord in faith.

But no one, whether Jew or Gentile, can call upon the Lord by nature because no one even knows the Lord by nature. All the gods that are worshiped in the world are invented either from people's minds or from demonic influence. The only way to know and believe in the true God is to hear about the true God, to hear His Word proclaiming who He is, and to hear what He demands He promises. True faith is something that God works inside a person through His Word – a Word which must be heard, which requires a preacher, which requires a sender of the preacher.

So, far from being unjust to the Jews, God had shown them special mercy over the centuries seeing to it that they and, for the most part, *only* they were given His Means of Grace. Israel was given all the things required to call upon the Lord in faith, including being the first ones to hear the Gospel when the Christ had finally been sent. And yet, for the most part, they stubbornly rejected the Gospel. That wasn't any unfaithfulness on God's part. It was their own fault.

Likewise, the Gentiles can't claim any credit for believing. No man can boast before God that he believed on his own, because it was God who saw to it that the necessary steps were taken to bring the man to faith. It was God who, in His mercy, reached out to the Gentiles with the Gospel and worked through His Holy Spirit to call people to faith. God deserves all the credit for bringing anyone to faith, while those who disbelieve the Gospel have only themselves to blame for their unbelief.

Let us pray: O Lord, You have revealed Yourself and Your promises to us in the Gospel, and so we call upon You to save us from our sins and from every evil, for the sake of Christ Jesus alone. Amen.

Had God simply discarded the Jews in favor of the Gentiles? No. Consider all the Jews who entered the kingdom of God before Christ came. And consider all the Jews who did believe in Jesus and who became part of the Christian Church. The Apostle Paul was one of them! But here God's foreknowledge comes into play.

When God promised salvation to the Jews, it was never to be by their obedience to the Law; it was always to be by faith in the coming Christ. Those Israelites who refused to seek mercy from God and to rely on Him and His promises were always outside of God's grace, even though they were outwardly associated with the people of God. Sadly, these were always in the majority. On the other hand, those who believed in the God who was merciful for the sake of the coming Christ were always the true people of Israel, preserved by God's grace, although they were only a remnant – a small, leftover bunch. These were the elect, chosen by God in eternity as He foresaw them holding fast to His promises in faith.

But in these verses Paul refers to one of God's terrible punishments against unbelief: A further hardening sometimes occurs. Even as God punished Pharaoh for hardening his own heart (Ex. 8:32) by hardening it for him, eventually (Ex. 9:12), even as God punished the idolatry of the pagans by "giving them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves" (Rom. 1:24), so He punished the persistent unbelief of the majority of the Jews by blinding them even further, at least for a time, so that they were unable to recognize the Christ when He came.

But as Paul points out in vv. 11-12, that hardening wasn't necessarily permanent. It was part of God's plan to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles since the Jews rejected it; but then He would use the salvation of the Gentiles to entice the Jews back into His house through repentance and faith.

Truly God's plans are beyond our understanding. Thanks be to Him for His mercy in bringing the Gospel to us!

Let us pray: Lord God, we thank You for bringing the Gospel to us. Preserve us in the true faith unto life everlasting! Amen.

Even though the Apostle Paul had been severely persecuted and physically assaulted by his own people, he had no vendetta against the Jews. He wanted them to be saved and was actually aiming much of his ministry toward the Gentiles in the hopes that the Jews would realize how much they were missing and come back to God by believing in Jesus as the Christ. He is optimistic about this possibility because, as, he says, “If their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” In other words, if the Jews’ unbelief resulted in the Gospel going out to the Gentiles and reconciling so many of them to God through faith, what immense blessings might come upon the world if the Jews, as a group, would come back into the Church of God!

The Old Testament Church of Israel was indeed the Church of God for a time, the original olive tree that God cultivated from the root of Christ. Paul’s analogy here is similar to Jesus’ analogy of Himself as the vine from which individual branches grew, from which the branches drew their strength, and in which the branches needed to remain. So Paul says that the unbelievers among the Jews were cut off from the Church of God for rejecting Jesus. And just as it’s possible to graft wild olive branches into a cultivated olive tree, so the Gentiles were grafted into the Church of God by faith in Christ after the Jews were excluded for unbelief. And if it’s possible to graft wild branches into the cultivated tree, then surely the original branches, the ethnic Jews, could also be grafted back in. But the Gentiles should not become prideful, because if the Jews were excluded because of unbelief, the Gentiles, too, could be excluded by falling away from faith.

We learn here that humility is the only proper attitude for the Christian. There’s no reason for anyone to boast about anything before God, especially one’s race. Race has nothing to do with being accepted by God. It’s all about faith in Christ Jesus, who invites all men everywhere to repent and believe in Him!

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you for grafting us into Your holy Church. For Jesus’ sake, preserve us there until the end. Amen.

“And so all Israel will be saved.” What does St. Paul teach the Romans with this saying? Let’s follow his argument.

The Israelites – that is, the ethnic Jews – had largely become disobedient toward the Old Testament preaching of repentance and faith in the coming Christ. As a result, God hardened them even further when the Gospel was preached to them, so that they were unwilling to listen to the apostles’ preaching about Christ. This hardening was only partial, because some Jews did still believe the Gospel when they heard it and became Christians.

Israel’s rejection of the Gospel led Paul and the other apostles to turn their attention away from the Jews to the Gentiles who had formerly been disobedient idol worshipers. Through the working of the Holy Spirit many Gentiles were answering the Gospel’s call to repent and believe in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

The mystery of God’s plan of salvation required that the Gentiles should receive greater attention for a time. After all, the people of Israel had received God’s almost-exclusive attention for nearly 2,000 years. The disobedience of the Jews resulted in the “fullness of the Gentiles” coming in. Not that all Gentiles would be converted, but the full number of the elect from among the Gentiles would. In turn, the Gentile Christians would eventually become the evangelists toward the ethnic Jews, some of whom would still be converted, because God’s Old Testament promises to deliver Israel were still valid. But they were only valid when the Jews put their faith in Jesus Christ, the “Deliverer out of Zion.”

“And so,” that is, “in this way,” all Israel will be saved, in that the full number of elect Jews and Gentiles will be grafted into the true, spiritual Israel that was rooted in Christ. Both Jews and Gentiles were, at one time, disobedient. But God used the disobedience of each group to show mercy toward the other, and thus “to have mercy on all.”

Let us pray: O Lord, Your judgments are truly unsearchable and Your ways past finding out! We thank You for revealing Your mercy to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

God's mercy extends to all people – both Jews and Gentiles – first, in giving His Son into death for the world's sins, and second, in sending out preachers of the Gospel to call all men everywhere to repentance. But God's mercy has been shown in particular to you who have been baptized into Christ Jesus, justified by faith, and made heirs of eternal life. Let the mercy of God also have an effect on how you live.

“Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service,” that is, your “spiritual worship.” Many Old Testament animal sacrifices were to be cut into pieces before they were placed on the altar. But at times the Israelites presented a whole burnt offering – the whole body of an animal that was killed and offered up to God all at once by fire. Those who have come to know the mercy of God in Christ are encouraged to offer up their whole bodies at once to God, not as dead sacrifices, but as living ones, so that every day your whole life is devoted to the service of the God who has redeemed you by the blood of His Son. You do not offer this service to God to atone for your sins. Christ is the only atoning sacrifice for sin. As “royal priests” (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9), you offer yourselves to God every day as a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Part of that whole-self sacrifice is refusing to go along with the world in its thinking and its pursuits. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Another part of that whole-self sacrifice is putting your all into your vocations, diligently and faithfully carrying out all the every-day tasks God has given you, showing humility, compassion, and love in all, you do.

And best of all, God promises to accept this service that His children render, not because the service is perfect, but because it's offered by those who have been cleansed through faith in the blood of His beloved Son.

Let us pray: Father in heaven, open our eyes to see the opportunities You have given us to serve You each day, and accept our service for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“The heavens declare the glory of God.” There is a message written into the fabric of creation. The heavens and the earth, the atoms and the molecules, the design of the plants and of all living creatures cry out together: “God, the Creator, exists!” He is good, righteous, all-wise, all-powerful, and worthy of all glory, praise, and worship. We refer to this as the natural knowledge of God, the knowledge that all people have about God from observing the creation.

The other part of the natural knowledge of God is written into the mind and heart of man – God’s standard of right and wrong – where the conscience bears witness to how well or how poorly we have obeyed that standard. Since all people have sinned against God, we know by nature that we will be judged and should rightfully be condemned.

But there is another source of knowledge, an even clearer message that reveals much more about our God, His commandments, and His plan of salvation. Today’s Psalm refers to it as the “law” (the “Torah” or the “teaching”) of the Lord, His Word to mankind, inspired by His Spirit and written down by His prophets. This is the revealed knowledge of God.

And yet, even with so much revelation there is something we are still unable to discern: the depth of our errors, the extent of our sins against God. The Psalmist calls them “secret faults,” secret, not from God of course, but from our own recognition, because they are so deeply embedded in our nature.

And so we pray for forgiveness for our secret faults and for our sins of weakness. We also beg the Lord to keep us from falling into willful, intentional sins. And we ask the Lord to guide our thoughts and our speech, that we may speak according to knowledge, both natural and revealed, and be granted understanding and wisdom as we meditate on all the goodness of our God.

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

Psalm 22 could easily be considered (or turned into) a Canticle of the Lord's suffering and death. While on the cross, Christ recited many words from various Psalms, and because of this there arose in Christian sentiment the popular story that, while He hung there, Jesus silently recited all of the Psalter that lie between Psalm 22:1 and 31:5 (which, according to Luke, would be His final words, "Into Your hands I commit My spirit").

Obviously, God's Holy Scripture does not reveal this to be something Christ did, so as stated, it's a Christian sentiment. There is, however, no doubt about the importance of Psalm 22 in reference to the Lord's suffering and death. Not only did Jesus pray this Psalm's opening line while fully paying for the sins of the world, other lines of it are clearly prophetic references to details in the Passion of the Christ as well.

Just as each of the Lord's three predictions of His Passion ends with a prediction of the Resurrection (cf. Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34), this Psalm of His Passion appropriately finishes with the voice of victory and the growth of the Church: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship; all those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive. A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation. They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this."

Let us pray: Gracious God, bring us, not only during the Lenten season but throughout the Church Year, to devoutly meditate upon Your undeserved, unmerited love through the beloved Passion of Your Son; for it is only through His wounds that faith is sustained and pours forth forgiveness, life and salvation. Amen.

“A date that will live in infamy.” Those were the words spoken by President Roosevelt when talking about December 7th, 1941. But it’s easy to say that the President’s same words regarding Pearl Harbor can be applied within America to the date 9/11 for as long as this earth is allowed by God to remain. What took place on September 11th, 2001, was a horrific act of terrorism by devout Muslims that brought most of this country to its knees and bringing much suffering and anger.

Paul’s inspired words within the remainder of chapter 12 continue to reveal how Christians are to “present [their] bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, which is [their] reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). When not conforming to this world, and having a renewed mind that’s fixed on Christ, Christians will, by God’s grace, rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, continue steadfast in prayer, distribute to the needs of the saints, be given to hospitality, bless those who persecute them, rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, be of the same mind toward one another, not set their minds on high things, but associate with the humble, be wise in their own opinion, repay no-one evil for evil, have regard for good things in the sight of all men. And if it is possible, as much as depends on them, they will live peaceably with all men, not avenging themselves, but, rather, giving place for wrath – not overcoming evil with evil, but overcoming evil with good.

Can you imagine reading these texts on the mornings of December 7th, 1941 or September 11th, 2001? Now you can get a true grasp on how it is only God that can bring about the renewing of a sinful man’s mind, for man’s flesh thinks only of his own retaliations. Rejoice at His overcoming you with peace that isn’t based in this world but in the merits of Christ!

Let us pray: God Almighty, as we suffer the miseries of this fallen world which are brought on by our own sinful flesh, have mercy upon us, bring us to endure as only You can, and fill us full of true hope, which is only through Jesus Christ, Your son, our Lord. Amen.

A Christian is at the same time a sinner and a saint. There is a constant war going on within them — a battle between their flesh and God's Spirit, between their old nature (old man) and the New nature (New Man) given to them from above, that is, from God. One of the character traits of a Christian's new nature (New Man) is that they honor and subject themselves to the governing authorities, just as God's Word from today's text directs.

All authority is from God — whether it be in the home, in the world, and especially in the Church. Therefore, to honor those authorities is to honor God. And the opposite is true as well, to resist those authorities is to resist God. It's important to point out that sometimes governing authorities (which are made up of fallen man) can enact or carry out ungodly policies. Christians are not to be forced to go against their conscience which is bound to stay true to God's Word. So where the governing authorities veer away from God's truth a Christian says to himself "I will not veer from truth. It is better to fear God than man." (See Acts, chapter 5)

As Luther is found stating in his commentary on Romans: "But he [Paul] makes the statement in 1 Cor. 6:12: 'All things are lawful for me... but I will not be enslaved to anything,' and 'You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men,' and other such statements he makes with reference to a metaphorical slavery, whereby if one involve himself in temporal matters and in business negotiations with men, he will lose his liberty. For he must cling to those people with whom he does business and if he wants to remain faithful, he must make mutual confidence serve the business operations."

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, may the leaders that are given authority over us be further brought to carry out their duties according to Your will, allowing our conscience to be free of conflict and joyfully faithful to You. Amen.

It's popular to believe that sinning is inevitable. Yes, we have sin – the sinful flesh remains after baptism, daily tempting us with ungodly thoughts and desires. But fulfilling those desires and entertaining those thoughts aren't inevitable. Why? Because of what God makes us through the Gospel and Holy Baptism.

St. Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:16). By virtue of faith we are sons of God. In Baptism God has put Christ on us. God has given the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts by faith and bear His fruit in our lives. Part of that fruit is abstaining from sin. This means that when the devil, the world, or our own flesh tempts us with sin and places the sinful thought before our mind, we remember that we are new creatures. Those sinful thoughts aren't what we are (according to our new nature). As the new creation in Christ, we are about loving our neighbors and living as God has commanded. As Paul was inspired to write in today's reading: "make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (vs. 14), striking down temptation at its first beginning by the grace of God.

God's Word brings us to repent of the sin that dwells in our flesh and live in thanksgiving, that by faith in Christ we are righteous in God's sight. When temptation arises, remember who you are and who's you are — that you are in Christ and a new creation — so those things should not be a part of you.

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 manifold changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

The breakdown of common sense – of modesty, of neighborliness, of civil discourse, and the like – has been the topic of conversations and articles for decades. In today’s culture such breakdowns are seeing a rise to new heights, largely because of social media. The attacks on anyone – not only on their ‘supposed’ actions, but on their ‘supposed’ motives, and the ‘supposed’ things in their hearts – over numerous topics often neglects the truth of today’s reading. By that neglect Christians can lead one another to an abominable thing: stumbling in the faith because of their lack of charity toward one another (14:13).

Verse eight is often so emphasized that what comes immediately before it is lost. There you see that in things neither commanded nor forbidden by God, two Christians may do the exact opposite within the framework of living thankfully to the Lord. In things that are “doubtful” (permitting differing opinions without violating Scripture), verse one tells you to receive one another – to submit to one another, as St. Paul writes to the Ephesians (5:21) – rather than condemning fellow servants in the Lord.

Christians should not sin by leading others to stumble, but are, instead, by the grace of God, to seek to build one another up, which is done by keeping God’s Word the source and standard of your teaching. This is the only way that God works and gets the glory – namely, through the power of His Word which continually aims Christians to stay focused on the fully atoning merits of Christ Jesus.

Let us pray: Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore You. Remove from us the burden of our sin as You fix our eyes on Christ Jesus, and, thus, bring us to forgive those who trespass against us. And, further from the benefits of His wounds, let us dwell in charity, and serve our brother willingly. Amen.

Your brother's faith and conscience are more important than your freedom. "If your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love." This is not only true of food, but also drink, the music you listen to, the jokes you make, the words you use, etc. If it distresses your brother, do not do it. If you enjoy it and Scripture does not forbid it, keep it between yourself and God so that you do not distress your fellow Christians.

St. Peter fell into this error, as recorded in Galatians 2. St. Paul publicly rebuked him for showing partiality to the Jews over the Gentiles. "Before certain men came from James, he (Peter) would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision" (Gal. 2:12). This is not recorded that we may ridicule St. Peter. It is recorded to show that the Gospel is offered to all men, that we must repent of offending each other, learn to labor for each other's good, and that there is forgiveness when we fail.

We do not belong to ourselves, but to Christ. Therefore, we labor for the good of Christ's people (our brothers and sisters in Christ). This was also the work of St. Peter and St. Paul; thinking not of the self – which is ever the inclination of man's fallen, selfish flesh – but thinking of others, to the point of thinking about future generations as well.

So it has gone with those of us who, by the grace of God, have been brought to fight the good fight of faith — guarding pure doctrine and calling (and condemning) the false teachings for what they are, heresy. All for the sake of Christ, His beloved Gospel, and for our neighbor.

Let us pray: Almighty God, as You sustain the faith You created by focusing us on Christ and His fully atoning merits, continue, in Your mercy, to drown the old nature that still resides in us, that You would bring the New Man to think more of others and further bring us to pursue the things that make for peace by which one may edify another. Amen.

This is possibly the most memorized Psalm in the Psalter. It's a psalm in which Christians pray about the Lord's sustenance of them on many levels. I have a nuance that I would like to suggest to help the reader gain a slightly different perspective.

While in seminary studying Hebrew (memorizing the vast amount of words used within the Old Testament) for a class project, we read through Psalm 23 in Hebrew and reached verse 6. Now many, if not all, English translations translate the Hebrew word *radaph* as "follow;" even Luther translated the Hebrew into German as "Follow" so that the verse is prayed thus: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Please know that there is absolutely nothing wrong with the English translations' use of the word "follow." But, to get that slightly different perspective, this is how it happened with me. In class our Hebrew professor taught us that the Hebrew word *radaph* can also mean "pursue." I remembered this as I was studying my flash cards, and the back of the *radaph* card had "pursue" as the translation. So, verse 6 could be read (or prayed) with this nuance: "Surely goodness and mercy shall [pursue] me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

What a great conveyance of biblical (Lutheran) theology — that God is the pursuer of man who is lost (like a wandering sheep — or like God pursuing Adam in the Garden). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, pursued fallen, sinful man by taking on man's flesh and fully atoning for man's sins. And that beloved Gospel message continually pursues man through God's Word and Sacraments as it goes out into the world.

Let us pray: Blessed Lord, continue, in Your mercy, to pursue us through Your means of grace. Bring us to rejoice in having Christ Jesus as our Savior and Good Shepherd. Amen.

Of this psalm, Luther writes: “The 24th psalm is a prophecy of the coming world-wide kingdom of Christ. It calls on the ‘doors’ of the world, that is, the kings and princes, to make way for the kingdom of Christ. They and those who for the most part rage against Him (as in Ps 2) ask, ‘Who is this King of glory?’ as if they were to say, ‘This beggar! Yes, this heretic! This criminal! Shall He be a king, and shall we yield and submit to Him? We shall not!’ In this way the psalm shows that God’s Word will certainly be condemned and persecuted” (From Reading the Psalms with Luther, page 61).

Luther may well be right. The unbelieving world around us really couldn’t care less about God, much less His Christ, the Savior and true King of the world. The leaders of this world – a group that most certainly includes the leaders of our own nation – care little if any about Christ’s coming kingdom, for they are too focused on their own power, popularity, image, and influence. With all that power and influence, why would any world leader even consider acknowledging any “king” other than themselves?

But let us not get carried away with the ease and pleasure of railing on this world’s leaders lest we lose track of our own sinful pride and arrogance that causes us to focus too much on ourselves and not on God’s grace offered in Christ. May our good and gracious God bring us also to repentance for any and all self-worship which causes us to consider ourselves as self-sufficient.

Even Christians need Christ just as much as any unbeliever or earthly potentate; and thanks be to God that through faith and trust in Christ’s all-atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, we have the promise of eternal life in heaven when our Lord calls us Home. So, lift up your heads, dear Christian, and rejoice in God’s gift of the true King of Glory: Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior!

Let us pray: Dear Jesus, forgive my self-reliance and keep me humbly reliant on You alone. Amen.

Here in Romans 15, St. Paul strongly and clearly exhorts the Church to be focused on the neighbor, especially “the failings of the weak.” The weak are those weak in the faith who need the support and love of others in the Church in order to continue walking faithfully and growing in Christ.

Paul reminds the Roman Christians not to forget their own humble beginnings as children of God through faith in Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection for them and for all. By this we are also reminded that all God’s people are connected by Christ to each other; we’re family, and family takes care of family.

This section of Holy Scripture is reminiscent also of St. Paul’s words in Rom 12:3-5: “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

No one member of Christ’s body, the Church, is any more or less important than any other part; we’re all connected by God’s gift of faith given through His Word and Sacraments. We all have a unique function in the Body of Christ, and we cannot function fully or completely unless we understand that. Therefore, we GET to love, support, and encourage one another in the same way that Christ served mankind during His earthly ministry. For Christ accepted us, meaning He loved us in a very specific way by living the perfect life that was required of us, suffering horribly for our sins, and then dying on the cross to pay for all our sins.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, grant us a greater measure of Your love and compassion for our fellow brothers and sisters as we dwell in Your unity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In today's reading Paul zeroes in on the most important aspect of his calling – that of being a “minister of Christ to the Gentiles” (v. 16). You may recall that before his conversion along the Damascus Road, Paul was the foremost persecutor of Christ and those who believed in Him. He helped ferret out Christians in hiding, and he helped to drag them out of their houses and off to prison. But then the Lord had a literal “come to Jesus” moment with him. After that, Paul became the foremost preacher and supporter of Christ and those who believed in Him.

In vv. 17-18 Paul writes, “Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me...”. That, in essence, is the heart and soul of Christian preaching – what Christ has accomplished. Any Christian preacher who does not extol Christ and His work is worthless to God's kingdom and fulfills the devil's agenda by pointing people away from God and to themselves.

All you need to do some Sunday morning is to troll around the television stations and you will see and hear all kinds of garbage that is supposed to pass for some form of Christianity. You'll find lousy theology, sloppy agape, shameless pleas for money, and tons of works-righteousness. All this dumpster material points man to himself.

But, if you are blessed to have a pastor like Paul, you will hear your pastor pointing you to Christ, for that is the only worthwhile thing any pastor should be doing. Christ lived as our substitute, perfectly obeying the Law in our place. Christ suffered physically and was crucified in our place to pay for this world's sins. Christ was raised from the dead to give us the sure and certain hope of our own resurrection through God-given faith in His work. And Christ is coming again on the Last Day.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank you for decent pastors who proclaim Your forgiveness and grace. Strengthen them and keep them faithful to You so that Your people will always be strengthened and comforted by the power of Your suffering, death, and resurrection. Amen.

In v. 30 of today's reading St. Paul urges the Christians in Rome to "join me in my struggle by praying to God for me." This request is not hard to understand given everything that Paul was facing and was about to face. After his conversion early in the book of Acts, Paul faced difficulty in establishing himself as a legitimate Christian preacher after spending the majority of his life before that as a persecutor of Christ and His people. And he would continue to face challenges while preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. Among other things, Paul faced imprisonment (Acts 16) for preaching the Gospel.

Paul was probably the strongest proponent of Christianity besides Christ Himself; and because of that, he was persecuted. One quick scan of the Old Testament reveals that, throughout history, every prophet was persecuted, rejected, and marginalized for their faithfulness. Even faithful Noah was mocked for believing that God spoke to him and told him to build the ark...that is, until the rains came and proved God and Noah to be right.

And throughout the New Testament we read that not only Christ Himself was persecuted and rejected, but also all of His disciples; in fact, all but one of the Twelve were martyred for believing and teaching the one, holy, apostolic faith.

So, in today's reading, when Paul asks for prayer on his behalf, we are reminded to pray for our pastors, for they, too, face all kinds of challenges because of their Call into the Holy ministry. Pray that he remains faithful. Pray that he keeps his ordination vow to preach, teach, and administer the Sacraments according to Scripture and, for us Lutherans, adhere to the Lutheran Confessions as well. Pray for his health and strength. Pray that he would be strengthened against any and all onslaughts he might face for being faithful. Pray for his children and wife. Pray that God would give him clarity of mind to proclaim without compromise Christ crucified for all sinners.

Let us pray: Dear Jesus, thank you for my faithful pastor. Bless and protect him and his family and keep him faithful to you. Amen.

“We Are Family” is the name of a song released in 1979 by the group Sister Sledge. “Family Ties” was a popular sitcom from 1982-89 which extolled the blessings of a close and loving family. And if you’re old enough you can probably recall many other songs and/or TV shows which featured families and their lives together.

In today’s reading, Paul asks the Christians in Rome to greet many other Christians who were instrumental in helping others, even to the point of being imprisoned. He commends Phoebe who was a benefactor of Paul and others. He asks the Roman Christians to greet Priscilla, Aquila, Epenetus, Mary, Andronicus and Junia, Ampliatus, Urbanus, and Stachys. These people were all “family” because of their joint faith and trust in Christ. Even though some of these people may never have met in person, they still were family; they were still connected to each other in the way that only Christians can boast of.

One of the cool things about Christianity is that, even though you may not be related by blood, all Christians are part of the family of God, having been grafted in by God-given faith in Christ. We are all related to one another as fellow redeemed. We all have had our sins paid for, we worship the Lord together (even though distanced by geography), and we all share the same gifts that Christ gives – His forgiveness, life, and salvation because of his substitutionary suffering and death for all mankind.

Here’s how Paul states it in I Cor 12: 12-13: “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” Through faith Christ has tied us all together into one body because He sacrificed his own body on the tree of the cross for us all.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for grafting me into Your family. Let me always be a blessing to my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.

In today's reading Paul continues to extend greetings to many more fellow Christians just as he did in yesterday's reading. But then at the end he urges the Christians in Rome to "note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." Here we have some of the clearest direction given to all Christians when they encounter anyone who teaches or practices what is contrary to orthodox doctrine: AVOID THEM. Why? Because, as Paul also writes, "such people are not serving our Lord Christ but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naïve people."

Many a self-serving pastor or preacher is guilty of what Paul warns about. These false prophets preach a theology of glory – the lie that you deserve good things and nice houses and fancy cars and good health all because you are a Christian and God loves you. These people prey on the gullible and the naïve because they can. They point people to themselves, tell them to look into their own hearts for peace, and straight-up lie about Christianity.

When faced with false theology and bad practice, Christians must call it out and avoid it like the plague, and not embrace it or stay in fellowship with it. And they do so because Christ is being robbed of His glory and the Christian is being robbed of his comfort and certainty which comes from Christ's substitutionary suffering and death which paid for the world's sins. Ultimately, eternal life is at stake; that is the threat level, and it could not be more serious.

Therefore, dear Christian, stand by faith in Christ your Lord who took your sins to the cross and who delivers the benefits of His death through His Gospel preached and His Sacraments administered rightly. Do not be deceived. Flee falsehood. Cling to Christ

Let us pray: Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word. Amen.

Of this psalm Luther writes, “The 25th psalm is a psalm of prayer in which the righteous pray that God will make them godly, forgive their sins, guard them from sin and shame, and finally deliver them from all enemies and all evil. Along with this the psalm mocks the false, self-centered spirits and teachers. It belongs to the Second Commandment and the Second Petition” (From Reading the Psalms with Luther, p. 62).

It is indeed a beautiful psalm of David wherein he puts his trust in Yahweh and asks that he not be put to shame nor let his enemies triumph over him. David also asks that God not remember the sins of his youth and that God would show him His paths and truth.

The psalms are the hymnbook of Holy Scripture that every one of us may use, pray, and sing daily. The psalms really teach us how to pray, for they entail nearly every situation and concern that we face throughout our lives.

These petitions of David in Psalm 25 are our petitions. And they are answered week in and week out in the Divine Service. In the Confession of Sins, we admit our sins and failings, and then the Lord delivers the Absolution – His forgiveness – through the mouth of our pastor as well as delivers forgiveness through His body and blood in Holy Communion. The Lord shows us His paths through our faithful pastor who preaches the Gospel and unpacks the liturgical readings. And finally, as we look forward to the life of the world to come, we know that, through faith and trust in Christ, our enemies can never again cause us harm, for we will be safe in the arms of Jesus forever in heaven. Indeed, “in You, Lord my God, I put my trust.”

Let us pray: O Lord, we implore You, let Your continual pity cleanse and defend Your Church; and because she cannot continue in safety without Your aid, preserve her evermore by Your help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit. One God, now and forever. Amen.

In his 1531 “Summaries of the Psalms,” Dr. Luther says this: “The 26th Psalm is a psalm of prayer which laments the false saints who want to be godly through the works of the law and who condemn the saints who are godly only through God’s goodness and grace. It accuses the false saints for willingly accepting bribes [v. 10]. For such saints are certainly pure servants of greed, whose God is their stomach, as St. Paul says (Phil 3:19). But with all their spiritual hypocrisy and their worldly glory, they are destructive saints. Therefore, it is good to pray that they may not deceive us.”

Psalm 26, penned by King David, presents us with a heartfelt prayer that resonates across the ages. Luther points out that Psalm 26 is a lament against those who seek godliness through their own works of the law while condemning those who rely solely on God’s grace. This contrast between works-based righteousness and grace-based salvation is central. David’s lament becomes a plea for discernment. In a world filled with those who profess piety through external acts, we are reminded to be cautious of spiritual hypocrisy. Luther’s quote resonates with verse 10, where David accuses the “false saints” of accepting bribes. These individuals serve their own interests, driven by greed rather than true devotion to God.

Luther likens these false saints to those “whose God is their stomach,” echoing St. Paul’s words in Philippians 3:19. These individuals may put on a veneer of righteousness, but in reality, they are driven by self-serving desires. Their “spiritual hypocrisy” and “worldly glory” mask their true intentions. As Luther suggests, it is indeed prudent to pray for protection from such deception. We face a spiritual battle where false teachings and misleading influences can divert us from the path of genuine faith. By grounding ourselves in the truth of God’s Word and seeking His guidance in prayer, we guard against being led astray by false pretenses.

Let us pray: Lord, we pray that your grace may always go before and follow after us, that we may always be ready to do your good works; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In these closing verses of Romans, the apostle Paul speaks of the victory of Christ over evil and the revelation of God's eternal wisdom. Paul proclaims that "the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly." Here we find the assurance that the battle between good and evil will culminate in victory through the power of God. Even now, through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, Satan's reign is ultimately defeated. This promise echoes the proclamation of the *protoevangelium* in Genesis 3:15, where God declared that the offspring of the woman would crush the serpent's head. We believers are participants in this victorious outcome, standing firm against the forces of darkness through the armor of God.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen." This benediction encapsulates the essence of our faith. The grace that flows from Christ's sacrifice sustains us, empowers us, and transforms us. Our biblical understanding emphasizes that we are saved by grace through faith, not by our works. Christ's grace is our foundation; it is His grace that enables us to stand strong in the face of challenges and trials.

Paul further reflects on God's eternal wisdom revealed through Christ. The gospel Paul preached, and the message of Jesus Christ are the keys to establishing believers in faith. This wisdom, once hidden as a mystery, has been unveiled to the world. Through prophetic Scriptures, God's plan for salvation has been made known to all nations. We, as recipients of this revelation, are called to obedience to the faith.

"To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen." These words emphasize the sovereignty and wisdom of God. In His infinite wisdom, He devised the plan of salvation, and in His grace, He executed it through the sacrifice of Christ. All glory belongs to God, who orchestrated the redemption of humanity and invites us to participate in His eternal purpose.

Let us pray: Lord, we pray that your grace may always go before and follow after us, that we may always be ready to do your good works; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In the opening verses of I Corinthians, the apostle Paul addresses the church in Corinth, emphasizing their sanctification in Christ and the abundant grace bestowed upon them. Paul begins by acknowledging his calling as an apostle and extends greetings to the church in Corinth. He emphasizes that they are sanctified in Christ and called to be saints. This reminds us of our own sanctification, a result of God's grace. Through the redemptive work of Christ, we are set apart, made holy, and called to live out our faith in this fallen world.

Thus, Paul's words are not confined to the Corinthians alone. He includes all who call on the name of Jesus Christ, creating a sense of unity among believers across different places and times. This unity is deeply rooted in the shared faith in Christ, the cornerstone of our salvation.

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This greeting is often used in our congregations to begin the sermon; it encapsulates the heart of the gospel message. It is through God's grace that we receive peace – peace with God and peace within ourselves. Our biblical understanding centers on salvation by grace through faith, a grace extends beyond our comprehension, embracing us in the warmth of God's love.

Paul expresses gratitude for the grace given to the Corinthians through Christ Jesus. He points out that they were enriched in every way—utterance, knowledge, and spiritual gifts. This enrichment is a result of Christ's work in their lives, and it highlights the various ways in which God equips His people for service in His kingdom. Paul's assurance that God will confirm them to the end and keep them blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ underscores the faithfulness of God's promises. Our faith clings to the certainty of God's promises in Christ and the unshakable assurance of His sustaining grace.

Let us pray: Lord, we pray that your grace may always go before and follow after us, that we may always be ready to do your good works; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

In this passage from I Corinthians the apostle Paul addresses the issue of division within the church at Corinth. Paul begins with a passionate plea for unity among the believers. He appeals to them by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, emphasizing the significance of Christ's authority in resolving conflicts.

Paul desires that the Corinthians "speak the same thing" and be "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." This unity isn't merely superficial agreement, but a deeper alignment of hearts and minds around the core teachings of Christ. It is a call to set aside personal preferences and factions in order to uphold the unity of the faith.

Paul had learned about the contentions in the church from Chloe's household. He addresses the divisive mentality that has emerged, where individuals align themselves with different leaders: Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter), and even Christ. This division based on human leaders threatens the unity of the church and diverts the focus away from Christ Himself.

The apostle's rhetorical questions are powerful reminders of the oneness of Christ and the nature of Christian baptism. Christ is not divided; He is the unifying force that brings believers together as one body. Baptism, administered in the name of Christ, signifies and delivers our incorporation into His body and identifies us as His followers.

In our biblical understanding, we emphasize the centrality of Christ's redemptive work in our salvation. Our faith is built on Christ alone, and our unity is anchored in His person and message. We are baptized into Christ's name, not into the names of human leaders or factions.

Therefore, we seek unity in Christ's wisdom and love, focusing on His message rather than human distinctions. Through this unity we reflect the reconciling work of Christ and bring glory to His name.

Let us pray: Lord, we pray that your grace may always go before and follow after us, that we may always be ready to do your good works; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In these verses from I Corinthians, St. Paul contrasts the wisdom of God with the wisdom of the world, highlighting the unique and transformative nature of Christ crucified. Paul emphasizes that human wisdom, despite its sophistication, couldn't lead the world to the true knowledge of God. The world's wisdom fell short, and God's wisdom was unveiled in an unexpected way: through the seemingly foolish message of Christ crucified. This message appears foolish to some, but holds the power of salvation for those who believe.

Paul acknowledges the distinct preferences of different cultures – the Jews seeking signs and the Greeks pursuing wisdom. Yet, the message preached was neither a spectacle nor a philosophical discourse; it was the proclamation of Christ crucified. This message transcends cultural inclinations; it strikes at the heart of humanity's need for redemption.

To the Jews, the idea of a crucified Messiah was a stumbling block, contrary to their expectations of a triumphant ruler. To the Greeks, it seemed foolish, as their philosophical minds sought intricate explanations. However, to those who respond to God's call, Christ is both the power and the wisdom of God. This paradox illuminates the profound truth that God's ways are higher than our understanding.

Paul's declaration that the "foolishness of God is wiser than men" reminds us that God's wisdom surpasses human intellect. God's weakness, demonstrated in the crucifixion, is still mightier than human strength. This teaching challenges our human pride and redirects our focus to God's sovereignty.

Thus, our faith clings to the core of the gospel—the message of Christ crucified and resurrected for our salvation. This message may seem foolish or weak to the world, but it is the essence of God's wisdom and power. Our faith rests not on human wisdom or accomplishments, but on the unfathomable love of God demonstrated through Christ's sacrifice.

Let us pray: Lord, we pray that your grace may always go before and follow after us, that we may always be ready to do your good works; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Moving into I Corinthians 2, the apostle reflects on the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing the deep wisdom of God. Our biblical understanding is that God's wisdom is unveiled through the Spirit in the Word, enriching our faith and drawing us closer to Him. Paul opens by contrasting human knowledge and divine wisdom. He quotes from Isaiah 64:4, affirming that human senses and intellect cannot fully comprehend the unfathomable riches God has prepared for those who love Him. This acknowledgement highlights the limits of human understanding and underscores our dependence on God's revelation. Paul's words shift our attention from human limitations to the profound work of the Holy Spirit. God, in His graciousness, chooses to reveal His truths to us through the Spirit and His Word. The Spirit's searching encompasses the deep mysteries of God, going beyond human capacity to unveil hidden truths through His Word, in communion with God's heart.

This understanding aligns with biblical teaching which emphasizes the centrality of the Holy Spirit in illuminating Scripture and guiding believers. The Spirit doesn't just impart head knowledge but also brings transformative insights that reshape our hearts and perspectives through His Word.

In a world captivated by human wisdom and accomplishments, Paul reminds us that God's wisdom is revealed to humble, receptive hearts. Not through eloquent speeches or persuasive arguments but through the work of the Spirit we come to grasp the depth of God's wisdom.

As we meditate on these verses, we recognize the vital role of the Holy Spirit in our faith journey. And, we approach God's Word with a spirit of humility and openness, allowing the Spirit to reveal the deep truths that are otherwise beyond human grasp. So, we rejoice, as we embrace the gift of spiritual insight that draws us closer to God and transforms our lives.

Let us pray: Lord, we pray that your grace may always go before and follow after us, that we may always be ready to do your good works; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In Luther's "Summaries of the Psalms" of 1531 he says this: "The 27th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, yet it also prays much and gives us comfort against the false teachers who give a false witness, blaspheming without any hesitation. For only entirely foolhardy saints give a witness, bold and impudent, before God—from whom they have no command! It is as we see daily; the more foolish and unlearned the people are, the bolder and more audacious they are to preach and to teach the whole world. No one knows anything; they alone know all. They prepare themselves well to make war and revolt against the true saints and God-fearers."

Luther characterizes Psalm 27 as a psalm of thanks that also serves as a prayer offering profound comfort. In a world fraught with false teachers who distort the truth and blaspheme without hesitation, the psalm becomes a sanctuary of reassurance for believers. Luther's description of "entirely foolhardy saints" echoes the audacity of those who preach without a divine calling. These individuals, driven by their own motives rather than God's command, present a façade of knowledge and piety. Their boldness stands in stark contrast to the humble, God-fearing believers who rely on God's Word as their foundation.

In the Psalm David seeks the Lord's face: it is a prayer for intimate communion and acknowledges that God's answers may not always come in the way or time we expect. This echoes our faith's emphasis on the importance of God's Word as our guiding light amid life's uncertainties.

Luther's caution against false teachers aligns with David's plea for deliverance from enemies and adversaries. In the midst of opposition, David's confidence remains steadfast, rooted in God's promises. This serves as a powerful reminder that true boldness doesn't stem from self-serving motives but from a deep trust in God's faithfulness.

Let us pray: Lord, we pray that your grace may always go before and follow after us, that we may always be ready to do your good works; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.