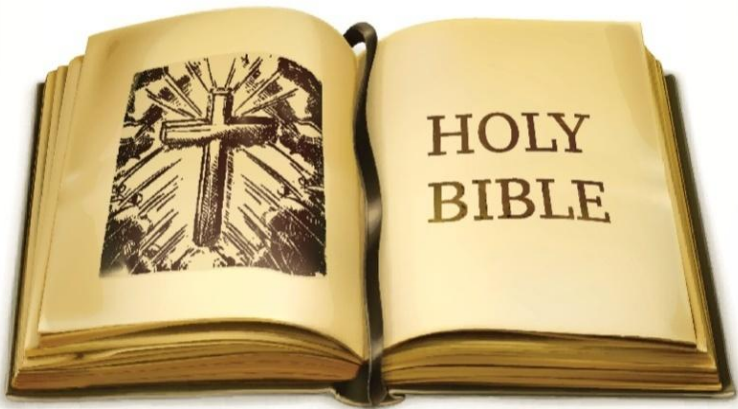


Each Day in the Word



August 30—October 3, 2026

FOREWORD

This booklet is compiled by the pastors of the Confessional Lutheran Ministerium for congregations and individuals not necessarily affiliated with any Lutheran denomination. Indeed, it is for anyone who finds it in their hands whether they are Lutheran or not. It is our prayer that God's people will be edified by this humble offering.

While it is tempting for everyone when reading daily devotional booklets to skip the Scripture lesson and read only the devotional material, it is highly recommended that the reader set their attention on the Scripture lesson before reading the devotion itself. The Holy Spirit tells us in Hebrews 4:12 that "the word of God is living and powerful." As the Scripture is the very Word of God, we ought to devote time and attention to it each day so that through it, God the Holy Spirit may strengthen our trust in His promises and kindle in our hearts love for God and our neighbor.

Contributing authors:

Rev. Ernest Bernet

Rev. David Carver

Rev. Greg Schultz

Rev. Joshua Sullivan

Rev. Paul Rydecki

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

Quotations from Martin Luther works are taken from Luther's Works, American Edition, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86), hereafter AE.

The Christian knows to pray in the right direction. The right direction is, of course, to the Lord, to Yahweh, the only true God, the one who has revealed Himself in the Holy Scriptures. The right direction is also “toward Your holy sanctuary.” For David, that was toward the place on earth where God promised to be merciful, toward the tabernacle with its altars and its ark of the covenant. For the New Testament believer, praying in the right direction means praying in the name of Jesus Christ, through whom alone we have a merciful God who is eager to hear and answer our prayers.

This Psalm teaches us that it is proper to ask God to make a distinction between believers and unbelievers, between the righteous and the wicked. The Lord knows that we are all sinners who fall short of His glory. At the same time, the Lord makes a distinction between the penitent and the impenitent, between believers and unbelievers, between those who, acknowledging Him, strive to do what is right, and those who, forgetting Him, pursue what is evil in His sight. It is good and right to ask the Lord, in humility, to save us from our troubles, even as we ask Him to give the wicked the troubles they deserve. Of course, this also serves as a warning for us, lest we behave wickedly, fail to repent, and receive the very troubles we ask upon the wicked.

As is the case in many Psalms, David begins by praying for the Lord’s help and ends by acknowledging the help that the Lord has already given. “Lord, hear me!” soon becomes “Lord, I thank You for hearing me!” This testifies to the Lord’s faithfulness, urging us to pray even more frequently and fervently.

The Lord was the strength of the Lord’s anointed, King David, even as He was the strength of His Anointed, the Christ, throughout His state of humiliation on earth. In the same way, the Lord will be the strength of all His people who trust in the Anointed One. Since that is true and certain, let us pray boldly for His help in every need!

Let us pray: O Lord, You are our Rock and our strength. Hear us and save us! We praise You for Your help! Amen.

St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians reveals much about the Christians who gathered in Corinth. They thought of themselves as mature Christians, very wise, very knowledgeable about the things of God. But the envy, strife, and divisions among the Corinthian Christians were evidence that they were more like babies in the faith, unable to grasp the deeper things of God. Instead of living according to the Spirit who promotes genuine unity around the Word of Christ, they lived according to the flesh, causing divisions where none should exist.

This was evident in the factions they formed surrounding one minister or another, as if each minister were trying to form his own little sect, made up of members who are loyal to him. God had sent first Paul, then Apollos to preach the Gospel to these people, and through their preaching God had brought many to faith in Christ. But now that they had spent some time in the Church, they were losing their focus on Christ, crediting their faith either to Paul or to Apollos, when all along it had been God working through the preaching of both.

Ministers are not irrelevant; they serve under God and work together with God to build the Church by preaching the Gospel of Christ. One worker lays the foundation; he introduces sinners to Christ, calling them to repent, to believe, and to be baptized. Other workers who come along do not seek to build a new church or a new foundation, but to continue the same work, building on the same foundation, teaching the Church to know Christ and His Word better and better, urging them to live in daily contrition and repentance, guiding them to live as saints, feeding them with the Lord's body and blood.

This is how the Lord has chosen to build His Church. And He calls on immature Christians to grow up, to focus, not on the characteristics of the man who is preaching to them, but on the Word he is preaching and the example he is setting, seeking unity wherever these are in line with Christ's commission.

Let us pray: Father in heaven, we thank You for faithful ministers. Keep us focused on You as they minister to us. Amen.

As long as a minister believes in Christ and is building on the foundation of Christ, teaching the truth of God's Word, he remains a Christian minister and will be saved. But Paul still issues a warning here to ministers: be careful how you build! To build with wood, hay, or straw is to teach other things, things that won't last, to promote practices or human institutions that will perish, to waste time on earthly matters. On the other hand, to build with gold, silver, or precious stones is to fortify Christians in the doctrine of Christ and to guide them in the good works of the New Man.

Paul also issues a warning to laymen: you, the collective Church, are the temple of God. You are the building in which God dwells. Be careful not to defile it! Treat the gathering of Christians as something sacred. Avoid sectarianism. Preserve the unity of the Spirit. And when you come together with your fellow Christians, remember that God is present there, and behave accordingly.

In their "wisdom," the Corinthians had been boasting about the outstanding qualities of this or that minister, and then boasting about their loyalty to their chosen minister. But Paul tells them to abandon this worldly wisdom, because it is foolishness in God's sight. There was no true wisdom in the party spirit that was invading Corinth, just as there is no true wisdom in yearning to be considered wise by the unbelieving world.

"All things are yours," Paul says, including every minister, including the whole world, including life and death. All these things are ours because of our connection to Christ and to God the Father, who has made us coheirs together with Christ of all things. How foolish it would be to boast about having this or that minister, when, in reality, every minister belongs to every Christian! That's how God views the Church. Let's view it as God views it, and so avoid all boasting and worldliness.

Let us pray: Lord God, we thank You for making us into living stones in Your temple and for giving us all things in Christ. Teach us to use all things for Your honor and glory. Amen.

Understanding the pronouns in 1 Corinthians is key to understanding Paul's message. When Paul says in 4:1, "Let a man so consider us," the "us" refers to Christian ministers, like Paul, Apollos, Silas, and Timothy. How should we think of ministers? Not as chairmen of a business. Not as competitors in the marketplace. Not as motivational speakers. And certainly not as employees of the congregation. No, we should think of them as servants or ministers of Christ and as stewards of the mysteries of God which they most certainly are.

Stewards are managers, those in charge of handling the property of another. The "property" ministers manage is the mysteries of God. That phrase refers to all the things we couldn't know about God except by His own revelation of them in His Word. It refers specifically to the Word and Sacraments God has entrusted to His ministers so that they might feed His lambs and sheep (cf. John 21:15-17), giving them food in due season (cf. Matt. 24:45).

God requires faithfulness of His servants. He will be their judge. This means that pastors are not under the authority of the voters' assembly, nor are they under the man made hierarchies of a church body, diocese, or synod. Their preaching should be judged with regard to whether it agrees with the Holy Scriptures, and their conduct should be judged according to the standards for ministers established in the New Testament Scriptures, but neither should be judged on the grading scale of personal preference, as the Corinthians were doing with Paul and Apollos.

In the second part of today's reading, Paul touches on the underlying problem among the Corinthians. They were "puffed up," a word Paul repeats throughout the rest of this epistle. They had "big heads." They thought very highly of themselves and looked down on others, even on St. Paul himself. This is the opposite of the attitude Christ seeks in those who bear His name.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending ministers into the world to feed Your precious flock. Use them to keep us both well-fed and humble. Amen.

What St. Paul says to the Corinthians in these verses (“You are wise! You are strong! You are distinguished!”) are laced with sarcasm. He is not praising them. No, as he says in verse 14, he is warning them.

The Corinthian Christians were “puffed up,” proud of their wisdom and strength and reputation in the world. Meanwhile, the apostles suffered hardships of all kinds as they took the Gospel to the world, unconcerned for their own wisdom, strength, and reputation. And since the Corinthians placed such a high value on worldly wisdom, strength, and reputation, they had even begun to despise and speak ill of the apostles.

So Paul warns them. He is not ashamed of the things he has suffered, nor of the fact that the world counts him a fool. He warns them as a father warns his children about the dangerous path they’re on. Paul truly was a sort of father to the Corinthians, after all, since they were born again spiritually through his preaching. Sometimes children think they are wiser than their parents. Sometimes children bad-mouth their parents. And sometimes parents have to discipline their children for their insubordination. Paul hopes his letter will serve to humble his puffed-up children so that, when their father comes to visit, he won’t have to be harsh with them in person.

It's still a danger for Christians to be attracted to the world's sophistication. We don't like to be ridiculed as uneducated fools for disbelieving the evolutionary theories about the world's history, or for not going along with what everyone claims to be settled science. And if our pastors don't have PhDs from esteemed universities or if our churches are humble and small, the world is quick to judge us as insignificant and unworthy of their attention. But we mustn't crave the world's approval. If we would imitate the apostles, if we would imitate the Lord Jesus, then we must not care what the world thinks, but only what our God thinks.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we humble ourselves before You, and we praise You for sending out apostles and ministers who willingly suffer hardship that we may hear Your Gospel and be saved. Amen.

One of the things the Corinthian Christians were “puffed up” about was their tolerance. They were proud to be so evangelical, so non-judgmental, so wise with regard to their freedom in Christ, that they could accept one of their church members taking his father’s wife to be his own. They allowed this member of their church, this man who called himself a Christian, to go on living openly in sin. And they were proud of it!

Paul has to be stern with the Corinthians. It is unacceptable for a church to tolerate sin in her midst. It harms the sinner because it causes him to think that, in spite of his rebellion against God’s commandments, he’s still in God’s good graces when, in reality, he has cut himself off from Christ by his impenitence and is on the path to hell. It also harms the congregation and its witness to outsiders because others are led to believe that they can willfully live in sin and still enter the kingdom of God.

The Corinthians should have excommunicated this impenitent member on their own; but since they hadn’t, Paul instructs them to do what they should have already done: deliver him to Satan. In other words, use the binding key Christ gave to His Church to declare to the sinner that he has no part in God’s holy Christian Church, that his sins are not forgiven, that he has made himself a child of hell. The goal of this is to bring the sinner to repentance, “that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

“A little leaven leavens the whole lump,” Paul says. That’s true with regard to false teaching that is allowed to spread in a Christian congregation or church body. It’s also true with regard to wickedness that is allowed to fester. The solution is expelling from the Church those who persistently teach false doctrine or who persistently live in wickedness. Yes, we are all sinners. But the Church is the home of penitent sinners, not the impenitent.

Let us pray: Merciful Father, grant us grace always to live in repentance, as well as the courage to call sinners to repent, in humility and love. Amen.

Three times in this Psalm David calls upon the “mighty ones,” or better, the “sons of God,” to give (or ascribe) to Yahweh glory and strength. He could be calling upon the angels to do this as the “sons of God,” although it’s perfectly in line with Scripture for the “sons of God” to be a reference to all believers, for, as Isaiah acknowledges, “You, O Lord, are our Father; our Redeemer from Everlasting is Your name” (Is. 63:16). With good reason we acknowledge the glory and strength of the Lord as we consider His works in the world around us.

Seven times David ascribes these mighty works to “the voice of the Lord.” Since the creation of the universe, the Lord has worked through His voice, that is, through His Word. He speaks, and light is created. He speaks, and the heavens are made. He utters His voice, and the earth melts (cf. Ps. 46:6). David adds other examples here of the things the Lord accomplishes by His voice, both for building up and for tearing down. Truly His voice is powerful!

We should listen to it, then, shouldn’t we? The Lord has spoken by His prophets and apostles and especially by His Son who is called the very “Word” of the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord is just as powerful in the Word of God that is preached and heard as He was in the creation of the heavens and the earth. Just as the Lord’s voice effects great things in nature, so it effects great things in those who hear and meditate on His Word. It brings the dead to life. It converts unbelievers into believers. It makes the simple wise. It gives strength to the weary, comfort to the grieving, and peace to those who are in distress. In short, it’s the Lord’s means of blessing His people with the peace and strength we need to make it safely through this life. Let us join with all the sons of God in ascribing glory and strength to the Lord, who sustains us by His Word.

Let us pray: Blessed are You, O Lord, King of the universe. Your Word is powerful and true. Help us to treasure it and gladly to hear and learn it, that we may know You and Your Son, Jesus Christ, whom You have sent as the Word made flesh. Amen.

This is a Psalm of praise and thanksgiving acknowledging that the Lord is the sustainer of those who are His believing/baptized children. Not only did David (the inspired writer) go through trials and afflictions from his own sin and that of other's upon him, but all of humanity experiences this as well, including God's children. What confirmed words of rescue are prayed through these of Psalm 30; for God, indeed, lifts all believers up through their faith in Christ, the crucified; the One who was lifted up that all might be drawn unto Him.

What comforting words of relief, for indeed, a sinner's soul is snatched away from the grave when they are brought to believe solely in the merits of Christ Jesus for them. Instead, for the Christian at death, the body is at rest and the soul is at peace before the Lord. God's Word and Sacraments (faithfully delivered through the Office of the Holy Ministry that Christ instituted) undoubtedly have kept His believers alive in Christ. And He instituted those means of grace to do just that; and those who faithfully partake of them will not go down to the pit (that is, the grave or Sheol), but are promised a beloved reunion with their resurrected bodies on the Last Day (see 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

One can imagine Jesus praying these words in the Garden before His Passion: "What profit is there in my blood, When I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your truth? Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me; Lord, be my helper!" (vs. 7-10)

And thankfully, the dawning of Easter morning is reflected as well: "Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning. You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever." (vs. 5, 11-12) And, indeed, we will too.

Let us pray: O Lord, continually bring us to live in the undeserved and unchanging glory that was fully won and is offered through the merits of Christ the crucified. Amen.

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” (vs. 9). Every sin is offensive to God. Nevertheless, there are some sins which can entrap a believer so that he falls from grace and “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Clinging to sin in impenitence will cause one to be “cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched.” By the grace of God, it is better to take action right now, while you still can.

Gracious! It even seems like drastic and decisive action is needed to remove the cause of sin so that the believer can still enter into eternal life. If one of the hands, feet, or eyes is found to be the cause of sin, then amputation would be justified. However, thanks to God’s Word, we know that it is the heart of man that controls the hands, feet, and eyes. You cannot remove the desire to sin except through God replacing your sinful heart with a new heart that fears and loves Him.

Jesus’ solution includes the application of fire and salt. Fire has a burning property which cleanses impurities, while salt preserves and cures the germs of corruption in food. We have “salt within ourselves” when we are brought to constantly apply the Law to our thoughts, words, and deeds so that we live a life of repentance. We season even our sacrifices to God with fire, so we see that our righteous deeds are as filthy rags in God’s sight. As Luther so aptly put it in His Heidelberg Disputation of 1518: “The works of the righteous would be mortal sins if they would not be feared as mortal sins by the righteous themselves out of pious fear of God.” (Thesis 7) In other words, ‘Fear even your good works as evil.’

It is only through a true repentant faith in Christ’s forgiveness that our daily sins of weakness do not harm us.

Let us pray: O God, ever keep us fixed upon Him who is the author and perfecter of our faith, that we may obtain Your promises; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Sexual self-indulgence is just as common today as it was in the 60's and 70's when "free love" or "make love not war" were the popular sayings. The devil, world, and our flesh want us to believe that our bodies are our own so that we use them for our own purpose and pleasure. Today the pro-abortion slogan, "My body, my choice" is the sinful flesh's slogan for all forms of self-indulgence.

St. Paul teaches otherwise. "Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." God hasn't given us our bodies to use for our personal pleasure and gratification. The body is for the Lord and His service. Sexual immorality of any kind is especially dangerous because "he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body." This sin is insidious because it turns the sinner inward so that he worships his desires; it ultimately becomes self-idolatry.

Christians are taught that the body is for the Lord, not only because the Lord made our bodies but because He has made the bodies of believers temples of the Holy Spirit by faith. The Holy Spirit dwells in all who believe to sustain their faith and to bear His fruit in them, especially the fruits of love toward others and self-control of the mind and body. The Holy Spirit dwells in believers to guide them into good works and defend them from every temptation that assails them from the world, the devil, and the wicked impulses of the sinful flesh.

Therefore, flee sexual immorality as something dreadfully harmful. Pursue chastity in thought, word, and deed as something profitable and useful. Use your body to serve others in selfless love and thereby glorify God with your body and spirit since you were bought with the price of Christ's precious blood. The Christian's slogan isn't "My body, my choice," but rather "My body for God's service."

Let us pray: Grant us Your Holy Spirit, working alone through Your Word, that we may be chaste in our thoughts, our words, and our behaviors, and, thus, glorify You. Amen.

Celibacy is the complete abstention not only from lusts and fornication but also marriage; and God inspires Paul to praise it. What makes celibacy good isn't that it justifies us before God or earns God's favor. What makes it good is that it frees men and women from the cares of this world so that they can devote themselves to prayer, the Word, and service to the Lord in the church. Yet celibacy is not for everyone. "Each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that." Celibacy and marriage and a family are all gifts from God, not choices we make.

To those whom God has not given the gift of celibacy, Paul writes, "If they cannot exercise self-control (celibacy), let them marry." Yet even in marriage there is to be self-control so that husbands and wives give themselves to each other in love and sanctification, "not in passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thess. 4:5). Sex within marriage is an expression of the one-flesh union that God has created, so that marriage isn't a matter of "me" but of "we." The Christian spouse asks, "What is good for my spouse whom God has given me? What is good for us? That is what is good for me." This is how the Christian spouse ought to think about all things in marriage, including physical intimacy, so that in all things the one flesh union is celebrated.

Paul then urges the single person who can be celibate to serve the Lord without distraction. But those who desire marriage and family are to pray for a Godly spouse, as well as patience and self-control. Self-control is simply chastity, and chastity is something required outside of marriage and within marriage as well. Whatever gift God has given – celibacy, singleness, or marriage – we are to glorify God by living in sanctification and holiness, loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Let us pray: Grant us wisdom, O Lord, to recognize our callings. Increase in us the gift of self-control that in our callings we may love one another and glorify you. Amen.

Paul turns to married people in situations where both the husband and the wife are Christians. He states unequivocally that divorce is not an option. This is not Paul's own ruling on the matter, although, as you will hear in tomorrow's text, he does later express his counsel as a faithful apostle (e.g., 7:25). In this instance, however, Paul has a specific word straight from the Lord Jesus.

Jesus had specifically forbidden divorce as contrary to Almighty God's design and will (see Matt. 5:31-32), thus He puts Himself at odds with the liberal viewpoints of the so-called law-abiders in the Jewish and Greco-Roman society, those who were always bending or totally changing the actual commands of God along with their own added rules.

Paul then turns from believers who are married to unbelievers. Mixed marriages were common. Timothy's mother was a Jewish Christian, while his father was a pagan Greek (see Acts 16:1). Peter also offers counsel to Christian women married to pagans (see 1 Peter 3:1-6). Paul's advice to Christian in a mixed-marriage is the same as his earlier words to Christian couples (vs 10-11): remain as you are! If the unbelieving spouse is content to be married to a Christian, then the Christian parent should not dissolve the marriage.

How does the Christian spouse "sanctify" the unbelieving spouse? Well, who is the sanctifying One? It is God's Holy Spirit that is the maker of holy ones. And how does He do that? By the Word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:5). This is what the Christian spouse brings into the home, and by bringing this, they bring the One to whom they point and through whom the prayers ascend: Christ Jesus and His fully atoning merits for the forgiveness of sins. If they both are without Him, the couple has no hope!

Let us pray: Lord God, we thank You for the counsel of Your Word. Grant us sustenance in our Christian marriages and help those who need Christ to hear of Him through Your Word. Amen.

Although Paul appears to digress from his speaking on the issues of marriage, this paragraph on the Christian's calling (vs. 17-24) still conveys a principle which should govern any Christian congregation's approach to marriage. That principle would be that unless there are good reasons to the contrary, a Christian should be content with whatever his marital status happened to be at the time of being brought to repentance and belief. Paul is inspired to convey this principle three times — at verses 17, 20 and 24 (that blessed biblical number three!).

The circumstances in which someone was brought in the Christian faith — whether as a male or as a female, single or married, or, as Paul would eventually add, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free, rich or poor — have no bearing on His standing in God's sight. Here we are reminded of Paul's inspired words to the Romans: "For there is no respect of persons with God." (Rom. 2:11)

Paul's words also coincide with his baptismal catechesis in Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28) No one can claim he is a better Christian because of his higher status in society. And now Paul's earlier words to the Corinthians come to mind: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12)

Dear Saints, take heed by foregoing any hope in your flesh and reside, rather, in Christ. Faith in Him and His fully atoning merits for you for the forgiveness of sins is the only way anyone ever stands.

Let us pray: Gracious heavenly Father, ever keep us mindful of that You view us not on any merit or worthiness of our own, but solely on the basis of being in Christ Jesus through your gifts of faith and Holy Baptism. Amen.

Throughout this Psalm we enter into the point of view and thoughts of Jesus in His sufferings. We see His Passion from inside, as it were. There is the plot, recorded in the Gospels, to take His life (see Mark 3:6; 14:1): “Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, (vs. 4)... “Fear is on every side; While they take counsel together against me, They scheme to take away my life.” (vs. 13)

There are the false witnesses rising against Jesus (see Mark 14:55-59): “Let the lying lips be put to silence, Which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.” (vs. 18, just outside our text). We learn of the flight of Jesus’ friends and the mockery of His enemies (see Mark 14:50; 15:29-32): “I am a reproach among all my enemies, But especially among my neighbors, And am repulsive to my acquaintances; Those who see me outside flee from me. I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind;” (vs. 11-12).

There is also that awesome mystery by which God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Cor. 5:21), “So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And He was numbered with the transgressors.” (Mark 15:28): “For my life is spent with grief, And my years with sighing; My strength fails because of my iniquity, And my bones waste away.” (vs. 10).

The reason that God brings His believing/baptized children to pray His words throughout this Psalm is that His Passion itself provides the pattern for our own lives. We are baptized with His Baptism; the bitter cup that He drinks we too are to taste at our core as we live out our cruciform life. The prayer of His Passion becomes our own, because “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (2 Tim. 3:12)

Let us pray: Grant us, O God, the strength to endure our trials and tribulations of life as You keep us fixed and focused on Him who is our true peace; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Of this psalm, Martin Luther writes: “This Psalm is a very remarkable and valuable one. St. Paul quotes it in that profound discussion of his in Rom. 4 where he teaches us what sin is, and how we obtain the remission of sins, and, in a word, how we are justified before God: for it is in this matter that all hypocrites so deeply err: because human reason cannot imagine that sin is accompanied with such great and such infinite guilt before God, and with a guilt that no human powers nor works can wash away. In a word, it knows not what sin is, and thinks that it can be washed off, and taken away by works. Whereas David here plainly says, ‘For this shall every one that is godly pray:’ and he says also, that no one can be justified or sanctified before God, unless he acknowledge himself to be a sinner, and know that he is to obtain the remission of sins without any works and merits, by the mere mercy of God, and by a free and gratuitous imputation. In a word, our righteousness is not placed in us, or in our works; but is such, that the remission of our sins is truly and rightly called the free remission of our sins: and also that our sins are truly said ‘not to be imputed’, but ‘to be covered’. ‘Blessed (says David) are they (that is, such are accepted before God, and are truly righteous and reconciled to God) whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sins are covered.’” (From Martin Luther – A Manual On The book of Psalms, p. 103)

Add to this Augsburg Confession Article IV on Justification: “Men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight.”

Faith alone justifies, for faith trusts in Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection. That eternal truth frees the sinner from ever thinking that he has to do anything to be accepted by God.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for paying for my sins, giving me faith to believe You, and setting me free. Amen.

At the end of the Nicene Creed we pray, “and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” This confession points us away from this present life and world to that which our Lord has guaranteed to those who, by God-given faith, believe in Him. It is a confident statement that there is definitely something much more glorious to look forward to – something almost literally indescribable – that we will enjoy when this current world and life come to an end. As God teaches elsewhere in His Word, Christians will enjoy a sinless existence in heaven with a glorified, powerful, sinless, and spiritual body reunited with the soul. That is certainly what we look for “in the resurrection” and in “the life of the world to come”!

And that is what St. Paul is getting at in today’s reading when he tells the Corinthian Christians “the time is short,” and “the form of this world is passing away.” The focus is clearly not on whatever is going on in this world, but on what is to come and what is promised to every child of God.

The bulk of today’s reading addresses other things that may distract us from our focus on Christ such as marriage. To be sure, Paul is NOT denigrating marriage, for it is certainly God’s holy ordinance first given in Genesis 2, and it is to be honored by all for that very reason. Paul is simply reminding us not to get so wrapped up in God’s creation that we lose ultimate focus on the Creator.

Paul also reminds us at the end of the reading that the marriage vow, drawn from the truths of Scripture (“for as long as you both shall live”) ends properly when the spouse dies, and the living spouse may certainly re-marry another Christian (“in the Lord”).

So let us focus on what is sure and certain: Christ, His Word, His promises, and His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation delivered in His Sacraments, for those are the only things that will get us through this life while we await what is certainly to come.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, keep me faithful to You and continue to strengthen me by Your Word and gifts. Amen.

Idols are false gods. An idol can be any person, thing, or activity that someone trusts in for help and/or comfort other than the one true God. False gods deliver false hope. False gods require all kinds of energy to be expended on pleasing, placating, and pampering them. So, we are bold to say with St. Paul here that, even though we can be distracted by them, “an idol is nothing in the world, and there is no other God but one.”

But then we need to be aware of and sensitive to the fact that, for some Christians, especially those new to the faith, there are things that may still cause them to stumble. In today’s reading Paul addresses the topic of eating things offered to idols. He speaks of this further in I Cor 10:27-29 this way: “If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience’ sake. 28 But if anyone says to you, ‘This was offered to idols,’ do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience’ sake; for ‘the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness.’ 29 ‘Conscience,’ I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man’s conscience?”

Simply speaking, Christians must not knowingly flaunt their own Christian freedoms in front of those other Christians whom they know to be somewhat weak in a certain area. For if we cause others to stumble by our arrogance and over-confidence, then we will be held accountable if they go on to fall away from the faith.

Yes, Christians are free in the Gospel; they are free to live their lives to the glory of God unencumbered by works-righteous rules and regulations that can give the impression that living according to them is what is necessary for salvation. Only Christ frees us from our sins by His all-atoning sacrifice on the cross. In love and service to Him we also take care to watch out for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who need our support and encouragement to look to Christ alone.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, strengthen me by Your grace to live lovingly toward my neighbor. Amen.

In this section of his first letter to the Christians in Corinth, Paul asks many rhetorical questions. A rhetorical question is an inquiry that ends in a question mark but is asked for effect rather than to elicit an answer. It's often used in persuasive writing but is also common in everyday conversation. Depending on the context of the rhetorical question, its purpose may be to emphasize a point, prompt the audience to consider a topic, or lend intrigue to an argument. The answer to a rhetorical question is usually obvious – the answer is either clearly “yes” or clearly “no.”

By his brilliant use of these rhetorical questions, Paul clearly teaches the following: He is an apostle, sent by Christ Himself. He is free from the guilt of his sins because of Christ. He has seen Christ, as evidenced by the life-changing visitation of Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9). The Corinthians are Paul's work in the Lord, for he was sent there to bring the gospel of Christ to them.

Further, Paul and others do have a right to eat and drink unencumbered by the ceremonial laws of the day. Christians do have a right to take on a believing spouse. No one goes to war at his own expense, no one plants a vineyard and fails to eat of its fruit, and no one fails to drink of the milk of his flock. And Paul certainly does not say these things as a mere man, but as a called and chosen man of God not only to the first century Church but to Christ's Church throughout the ages. You get the idea.

As Christians we are free of the requirements of the law; we do not and cannot rely on our own good works to get us to heaven. Instead, we rely solely on God-given faith in Christ who fulfilled the Law for us and in our place. Christ lived in perfect obedience to the Law by His substitutionary life, suffering, and death for our sins. In Him we are free to be who and what God called us to be and to serve Him by serving our neighbor in love.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for setting me free from the punishment my sins deserve. Use me to Your glory and the benefit of my neighbor. Amen.

Today's section of I Corinthians demonstrates Paul's humility and great concern that he be of no hindrance whatsoever either to the Gospel or to the people to whom he has been called by God to minister. He makes it clear that God will provide for him as he carries out Christ's commission to present Christ to all who will hear. Paul did not want the Corinthians to be at all concerned about feeding or paying him, and he cites the OT provisions made for the priests who lived off the offerings and some of the sacrifices that were brought to the temple.

Of special importance are Paul's words in v. 16: "For if I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel." Paul understands that he deserves no special accolades or attention for simply doing what he has been given by God to do: that is, to preach the Gospel of Christ. He is very much aware that preaching the Gospel is of utmost importance. It's almost as if he is saying, "Of the things that I do, if I do not preach the Gospel, I'm wasting everyone's time, and disobeying God in the most egregious way."

Indeed, woe to any and all pastors today who fail to preach the Gospel of Christ. God is greatly displeased at all pastors who waste time telling stories, giving feel-good sermons or talks, and spouting social justice messages that have nothing to do with eternal life and death. If your pastor fails in this manner, get rid of him, or leave and find another church where Christ crucified for sinners is predominantly presented. No greater offense can be given and no worse example of lousy clergy can be on display than a so-called "pastor" not proclaiming the Good News of Christ's all-atoning death for the sins of all mankind. As Paul said so clearly, "woe" to that imposter!

Dear Christian, be comforted that Christ has paid for all your sins on His cross, and that He delivers the benefits of His suffering and death to you in His Gospel rightly and clearly preached and in His Sacraments rightly delivered.

Let us pray: Dear Jesus, grant that all pastors would preach You and You alone. Amen.

Paul's template for his service to Christ is all-encompassing, yet not careless or haphazard. He writes to the Christians in Corinth that he has become "all things to all men, that [he] might by all means save some" (v. 22). By no means does Paul think that he actually saves anyone, for he understands that God is certainly using him to preach Christ crucified to those to whom he has been sent.

That's an important distinction; Christ alone is the Savior of all mankind. But sometimes you hear people ask, "How many people did you save?" Yes, God indeed works through us as we proclaim the Gospel, but we are only the instruments, the means He uses. He gets all the glory; we do not.

Later in the reading Paul mentions those who run a race. When he says in v. 25 "they do it to obtain a perishable crown," he is referring to those who are not Christians. The "perishable crown" refers to the accolades this world gives to those who achieve and win and succeed. Paul seems to be recalling Jesus' words in Matthew 6 when He says that hypocrites do charitable deeds to be seen "that they may have glory from men" (Mt 6:2), that some pray "to be seen by men" (Mt 6:5), and those who fast and "disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting" (Mt 6:6). About all these Jesus says, "They have their reward." It's for this life only.

But Christians live for a much higher reward, that of being received into heaven by faith and belief in Christ's all-atoning sacrifice for sin, solely on account of Christ's work for them. As Paul says, we run "not with uncertainty," but with the sure and certain knowledge that Christ has done all the work for us in His suffering, death, and resurrection. His work is credited to us as righteousness by God-given faith. Christ has won the ultimate race, the ultimate victory, by His perfect obedience to His Father on our behalf. And because of that, we win also, and will be with Him in heaven with all who have gone before us in the faith – free of sin and all its ravages and effects. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray: Dear Jesus, thank You for paying for my sins and winning the race for us to eternal life. Amen.

Of this psalm Luther writes: “The 33rd psalm is a psalm of thanks to God in general for His blessings, for helping His faithful people in all kinds of distress, and for not letting them perish. He is able to help because He made all things and still creates all things with a word, so that nothing is impossible with Him. God is also good and true that He will help and willingly helps, as He promised in the First Commandment: ‘I will be your God,’ that is, I will be your comfort, help, salvation, life, and all good things, and I will stand against anything that would do you harm. That’s what it means to ‘be God.’” (Reading the Psalms With Luther, p. 80).

The psalmist, writing on inspiration from the Holy Spirit, reminds us that the Lord’s eye “is on all who fear him, on those whose hope is in His mercy” (v. 18). That is our comfort, that is our certainty, that is our true joy as Christians – the pure mercy of God. He has indeed had mercy on us, for He has not given us what we deserve for our sins which is His wrath, displeasure, and eternal damnation. Instead, by virtue of Christ’s substitutionary life, suffering, and death for our sins, we receive free and full pardon for our sins and the certain hope of a sinless and eternal existence in heaven when the Lord calls us Home to be with Him. He delivers our soul from eternal death and gives us the promise of eternal life in Him.

That is why “our soul waits for the Lord, for He is our help and shield” (v. 20). God in Christ promises to strengthen us and keep us in His grace through His gifts of the Gospel rightly preached and the Sacraments rightly administered, for these are the very things by which we have Christ dwelling both in our hearts and bodies until the Last Day

Let us pray: O Lord, keep Your Church with Your perpetual mercy; and because of our frailty we cannot but fall, keep us ever by Your help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

This psalm, like all the psalms, is about Christ. This is especially evident when David prophesies, “He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken” (20). None of Christ’s bones were broken after at His crucifixion because He was already dead (John 19:32-33).

In second half of the psalm Christ teaches us the way of life and goodness. “Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” Speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). Avoid sin and do good. Pursue peace with others, “as much as depends on you” (Rom 12:18). This is the way of love, which is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:10). This is the way of life because “the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry” (15). The Lord is against those who do evil, speak deceit, and do not seek peace. He will cut them off from the earth. Christ teaches us the way of life and goodness through His prophet David. He also demonstrates that life for us during the days of His earthly ministry. He always spoke the truth in love. He did good and shunned evil. He sought to be at peace with all men.

This way of life doesn’t always lead to earthly good life and many days. It certainly did not mean that for Christ. He was afflicted. He was persecuted. He suffered, died, and was buried on account of His teaching and life. But God the Father heard Christ’s prayers. He was near to Christ, who was humble and lowly of heart, and delivered Him out of all His afflictions. He even delivered Christ from the affliction of death by raising Him from the dead to everlasting life.

So it is for those who are in Christ by faith. Being counted righteous by faith in Christ, we strive to live righteously and walk in the way of life. Even though our afflictions are many, we accept them in humility as Christ accepted His afflictions, trusting that our Father will deliver us when it is good for us.

Let us pray: Help us, O Lord, in our many afflictions. Increase our humility to accept them as manifestations of your Fatherly will and strengthen our faith so that we may firmly believe they are for our eternal good. Amen.

The Corinthians assumed that idolatry, sexual immorality, tempting Christ to prove His word, and complaining about His apostle were compatible with life in Christ. Paul uses Israel as an example of how dangerous this attitude is.

God delivered Israel from Egypt. He baptized them in the Red Sea, drowning their enemies and setting them apart as His people. He fed them with manna in the desert for forty years. He gave them water to drink from a rock. He also fed them spiritually with these things. God intended Israel to receive these blessings as signs that He would bring them into the land of Canaan just as He had promised. Christ was the spiritual rock that went along with them on the journey to feed and water them. Although all of them were baptized into Moses, ate the same spiritual food, and drank the same spiritual drink, God was displeased with most of them. He was angry with them because they lusted. They desired things which God hadn't given them, especially the creature comforts of Egypt. Many became idolaters by worshiping the golden calf as if it were the Lord. Many committed sexual immorality with Moabite women. Many tempted Christ by doubting His promise to give them the Promised Land, and many complained against God's servant, Moses. All but two of that generation—Joshua and Caleb—died in the wilderness and failed to obtain God's promise.

The same spiritual rock that followed them followed the Corinthians and follows all Christians. Christ baptizes us into His death and resurrection. He gives us the Holy Spirit as streams of living water and Himself as the Bread from heaven, which we spiritually eat by faith. We must be careful to use these gifts in faith so that we do not become discontent with the spiritual food and drink Christ gives us. We strengthen ourselves by them so that we do not fall to the discontentment that leads to idolatry, sexual immorality, tempting Christ, and complaining, but live as those who are His people.

Let us pray: Feed and water us, O Lord, with Your Word, so that, sustained in our spirit by Your gospel, we may avoid sinning and be content with all that you give us. Amen.

All that the Holy Spirit caused to be written is for our admonition. The examples of Old Testament Israel admonish us in two ways. First: warning. We can fall from faith and fail to attain what God has promised, and that fall occurs through deliberate sinning. Second: encouragement. Although everyone's temptations may seem especially difficult or grueling, our temptations are common to mankind.

In His mercy, God does not allow the devil, the world, and our flesh to tempt us beyond what we are able. "With the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (v. 13). God will bring a good outcome from our temptations if we fight them by clinging to God's promises and the identity that He gives us in baptism.

The Corinthians to whom Paul wrote were especially tempted to partake in the pagan sacrifices that were part of their culture. Paul reminds them that "those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar" (v. 18). To eat the sacrifice at an idol's altar is to commune with that idol and partake of all that is taught and confessed at that altar. The Corinthians were to flee this idolatry not only because God threatens to punish it, but also because they already had communion with Him in the cup and the bread of the Lord's Supper. The cup in the Lord's Supper is "the communion of the blood of Christ" and the bread is "the communion of the body of Christ" (v. 16). They partook in Christ's sacrifice on the cross by eating His flesh and drinking His blood which are given in, with, and under the bread and wine. They commune with Christ Jesus and receive the blessings He won for them at the cross.

We are not tempted to worship at pagan altars as the Corinthians were. Our temptations to idolatry are more subtle. The world entices us to fear, love, and trust in the things it offers instead of fearing, loving, and trusting in the Triune God. Armed with God's promises and having communion with Christ's very body and blood in the Lord's Supper, we are strengthened to endure every temptation and flee idolatry.

Let us pray: Strengthen us with Your Word and Sacrament, O Lord, so that we may overcome every temptation. Amen.

Not all the meat sacrificed to idols was consumed. Some of it made its way to the Corinthian markets. Some of it was taken home by the participants. While Christians were not to partake in the idolatrous worship and sacrifices, whether for cultural or family reasons, they were to have clear consciences when it came to what they bought at market or what a dinner host served them. It was no concern of theirs whether the brisket on sale had been sacrificed to an idol. They shouldn't worry as to whether the tenderloin on their host's table had been part of an idol sacrifice. After all, "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." "For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim 4:4).

The only time a Christian was to politely decline was if another Christian's conscience was concerned with the meat's point of origin. Even though all things that do not violate God's commandments are lawful for the Christian, the Christian does not live to himself alone. Christians are part of Christ's body, the Church, and therefore live for the sake of others. Christians have freedom in areas in which God has not spoken, but they are also the servants of their fellow believer. Paul reminds us of this when he writes, "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being" (v. 24). If a brother or sister in Christ's conscience is burdened by our use of Christian freedom, then it's the duty of love to abstain for their sake. Paul himself could write in 9:22, "To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak." We are free in matters in which God has neither commanded or forbidden, but we must use our freedom lovingly so as not to offend our brother but win him over instead and strengthen him in his understanding. Our freedom must be tempered with love that would rather not use our freedom than harm the conscience of our brother in Christ.

Let us pray: You have given us liberty, O Lord, in many things of this life. Increase our love for one another, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ, so that we do not use the things of this world to our brother's detriment, but for his profit and Your glory. Amen.

It was Roman custom that men went about in public with heads uncovered, while women covered their heads. In some cultures this custom continues today. In other cultures the custom is the reverse, so that it is a sign of subjection to listen in church with one's head uncovered, while it is a sign of authority to speak with one's head covered. Paul urges the Corinthians to retain the custom of the times to not offend common propriety. He also urges it because the custom could serve as a reflection of the divine order: "The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (v. 3). Head coverings could serve as a reminder that everyone – men and women – are under someone's authority, which rightly understood is self-sacrificial service. A married woman lives under her husband's self-sacrificial service. She and her husband are both under Christ's authority.

Since this was an apostolic rite that served decorum, women can use it or refrain from using it. It is an indifferent thing whether a woman covers her head in contemporary Western culture. It isn't culturally proper or improper. This means a woman who covers her head for worship does not sin. Nor does a woman sin who worships with head uncovered.

But the principle remains: "The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (v. 3). Christian husbands love their wives "as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph 5:25). Christian wives submit to their husbands "as the church is subject to Christ" (Eph 5:24), receiving their husbands' self-sacrificial love. Living in love toward one another, we confess not only that Christ is our head, but that man and woman are not independent entities, but united in the Lord and under His self-sacrificial love. Living in this harmony we confess: "For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God" (v. 12).

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's head, help us to live faithfully in the order in which You have set us, whether married or single, under Your authority and love. Amen.

Paul states an unfortunate fact about the church in this world when he writes, “For there must also be factions among you” (v. 19). For as much as Christians want to imagine a pristine, golden age of the church in which perfect unity reigned, there has never been such a period. The churches planted by the apostles suffered divisions and factions while the apostles were still alive. Many of the apostles’ epistles (letters) were written to fortify the true faith in the hearts of their hearers against false doctrines that had crept into the congregations. Paul warns the Ephesian pastors, “From among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:30). Peter writes in 2 Peter 2:1, “There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies.” Christ Himself said, “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way” (Matt 13:24-25). Where God builds a church, Satan builds a chapel.

Paul also tells that there must be factions in the church “that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (v. 19). The Lord allows factions to exist to drive us to His Word. Confronted with any doctrine, we are to be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11, who “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” Paul tells the Romans to “note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them” (Rom 16:17). We avoid false teachers because false teaching leads the soul away from Christ and into false security, leading to damnation.

God wants to exercise our faith in His Word, so He allows factions to divide the visible church and He commands the faithful to divide it as well when falsehood is given equal airtime as the truth so that truth and error become indistinguishable. May God grant us such faithfulness!

Let us pray: Fortify us in the doctrine of the apostles, O Lord, that we may see those teachings which are contrary to it and avoid fellowship with those who teach and tolerate error, so that we may possess Your Word in its purity. Amen.

David prophesies about man's wickedness when there is no faith in the Lord. The wicked man does not keep the fear of God before his eyes, that is, constantly on his mind. Instead, he sets his sinful passions and desires before his eyes so that they direct his steps. He takes comfort in his sins and plots wickedness while lying in bed. The wickedness and self-flattery of his heart lead him to deceive others and himself.

Despite the wicked, God's mercy is in the heavens. His faithfulness reaches to the clouds. His righteousness is unmovable like the mountains. His judgments are as deep as a great ocean. It is out of mercy that He preserves man and beast, even those men who do not fear Him and acknowledge His mercy. "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:45).

The children of men are the faithful. They acknowledge God's lovingkindness to them, put their trust in the Lord, and dwell under His protection. Those who trust in the Lord enjoy more than the temporal blessings which the wicked also enjoy. The sons of men enjoy the fullness of the Lord's house and drink from the river of God's pleasures. These are the spiritual blessings God freely bestows on all who believe: forgiveness of sins, the promise of everlasting life, and the Holy Spirit to lead a new life. The sons of men see God's mercy in His Son, Jesus Christ. "In Your light we see light" (v. 9). Christ Jesus is "the brightness of [God's] glory and the express image of His person" (Heb 1:3). In Christ Jesus we see God the Father and the great lovingkindness which He has toward humanity, especially of those who believe in His Son and put their trust under the shadow of His wings. No matter how the wicked prosper in the things of this life because they refuse to see God's mercy and light in Christ Jesus, they are cast down, and the wrath of God abides on them (John 3:36).

Let us pray: We give You thanks, Lord Jesus, that in Your light we see the light of God the Father. Keep the fear of God before our eyes each day, that we may recognize Your mercies, live upright lives, and enjoy the fullness of Your house. Amen.

In his 1531 “Summaries of the Psalms,” Dr. Luther says: “The 38th Psalm is a psalm of prayer, in which the psalmist laments over his sins, on account of which his conscience despairs and is greatly afflicted and can see nothing but God's arrows [v. 3], that is, His anger, threats, death, and hell... For to truly feel one's sins and despair over a guilty conscience is the torture over all torture. And since God here holds back His comfort, this terror in the heart must follow, that God is angry with them on account of their sins. But, for all that, he teaches us to hold fast and not despair. Likewise, we too should pray and not despair in any anxiety, although we are sinners and we feel sharply the burden and assault of our sins.”

Psalm 38 is a heartfelt lamentation over sins that have left the psalmist's conscience in despair. Luther aptly describes this state of the soul as one that can see nothing but God's arrows – His anger, His threats, and the looming specters of death and hell. To truly feel one's sins and despair over a guilty conscience, as Luther suggests, is a torment beyond compare.

In our own lives, we experience moments when our sins, like God's arrows, pierce the very core of our being. Yet, amidst this spiritual anguish, the psalmist teaches us a vital lesson – to hold fast and not to despair. We, like the psalmist, should pray without ceasing and trust in God's boundless mercy. We may be sinners deeply aware of the burden of our transgressions, but we have a Savior who bore our sins on the cross and offers us redemption.

As Luther wisely reminds us, we must not despair in the face of sin's assault on our conscience. Instead, we cling to faith in Christ, embrace God's promises through Him, and seek His righteousness in our daily lives. Then, the comfort of faith will flow once more, and we will find ourselves enveloped in the boundless love and grace of our Heavenly Father.

Let us pray: O Lord, keep your household, the Church, in continual godliness, that through your protection we may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve you in good works to the glory of your name; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Communion is a sacred sacrament instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Bible passage today serves as the basis for the "Words of Institution" and emphasizes the importance of self-examination and proper respect for the Lord's Supper.

Verses 23-25 are at the heart of our liturgical "Words of Institution." The apostle Paul provides a concise account of the institution of the Lord's Supper by Jesus Himself. These words are a precious reminder of Christ's sacrificial love and the forgiveness of sins offered through His body and blood.

However, as we move further in the passage, we encounter Paul's admonition regarding self-examination and proper respect for the Lord's Supper. These verses emphasize the need for those partaking in the Sacrament to engage in self-examination and discernment. Confessional Lutherans hold to a "closed communion" policy, guided by the Lutheran Confessions, to ensure that those who approach the Lord's Table have previously been properly instructed, examined, and absolved. This practice is rooted in the desire to follow the apostolic teaching and safeguard the sacredness of the Sacrament. It is an act of love and pastoral care to help believers approach the Lord's Supper with reverence, understanding, and faith.

Thus, today we are reminded that Holy Communion is rooted in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the importance of self-examination and proper respect for the Sacrament, which are key reasons behind our "closed communion" policy. So, we approach the Lord's Table with hearts prepared, recognizing the incredible gift of forgiveness through Christ's body and blood. And we continue to hold fast to the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions which guide us in faithfully administering and receiving this blessed Sacrament.

Let us pray: O Lord God, heavenly Father, pour out your Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in your grace and truth, protect and comfort them in all temptation, defend them against all enemies of your Word, and bestow on Christ's Church militant your saving peace; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Halloween is a day associated with costumes, candy, and the macabre, while Reformation Day commemorates a pivotal moment in Christian history when Martin Luther, guided by the Holy Spirit, boldly stood against the darkness of error and superstition. In verse 4, Paul writes, “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.” These words remind us that the Holy Spirit equips us with unique gifts and talents for the edification of the Church. The Reformation itself was a testament to the diversity of gifts within the body of Christ, as various Reformers contributed their talents to advance the Gospel.

While Halloween may symbolize darkness and the unknown, the gifts of the Holy Spirit illuminate our path and empower us to navigate the challenges of our time with discernment and confidence. Also, we remember that the Reformers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, courageously faced the darkness of their era, striving to restore the light of the Gospel. Similarly, we are to use the gifts God has given us to share the Good News, bringing His light to a world in need.

Thus, we not only reflect on the past but also recognize the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the Church. We embrace our God-given gifts, share the Gospel boldly, and are lights in the world, dispelling the darkness that surrounds us. In Christ's name, we are called to bring hope, truth, and salvation to a world in need, just as the Reformers did in their time. Through the gifts of the Spirit, we can be agents of transformation, shining the light of Christ every day. Christ's Spirit enlightens us to reflect His light.

Let us pray: Almighty God, through the preaching of your servants, the blessed Reformers, you caused the light of the Gospel to shine forth. Grant that we who know its saving power may faithfully guard and defend it against all enemies and joyfully proclaim it to the salvation of souls and the glory of your holy name; 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 unity in the body of Christ. In verse 12, the apostle Paul declares, "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." This analogy of the body beautifully illustrates the unity of the Church. Just as a human body consists of many different parts, each with its unique function, the body of Christ is made up of diverse individuals, each gifted with spiritual talents and roles within the Church.

Those who have gone before us in the faith serve as examples of how individuals, through faith, can contribute to the unity and growth of the Church. Just as the different parts of the body work together harmoniously, so too do the saints, both past and present, play their unique roles in serving God's kingdom.

As Confessional Lutherans, we hold dear the teachings of the Reformation, which emphasized the essential truths of Scripture and the centrality of Christ in our faith. The saints of the Reformation, like Martin Luther, played significant roles in bringing these truths to light, reminding us of the importance of upholding the Gospel, as Christ works for, in, and through us.

Not only do we rightly remember the saints of the past but also recognize that we, too, are a part of this continuous stream of believers. We are united with the saints of old, the saints of today, and the saints yet to come in the body of Christ. Each one of us has a place, and our unity in Christ's body allows us to work together to proclaim the Gospel to the world. The unity of the body of Christ is a unity that transcends time and earthly distinctions because it is a unity in Christ Himself.

Let us pray: O almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord. May we also follow your blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living that we may come to those unspeakable joys which you have prepared for those who love you; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In verse 21, the apostle Paul writes, "And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" These words convey a profound truth: every member of the body of Christ matters and has a place. In the Church, there are no unimportant or dispensable individuals. Though we are diverse, we contribute to the greater purpose of unity in serving God's kingdom.

Verses 22-23, "No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor." Here, Paul underscores that even those who may appear less prominent or less gifted are indispensable. In God's design, our weaknesses and differences are not shortcomings but opportunities for His grace and power to shine in us and through us.

As Confessional Lutherans we appreciate the Reformation's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, which echoes the teachings of this passage. Martin Luther taught that every Christian, regardless of his station in life, has a calling and a purpose within the body of believers. Our diverse roles and gifts are not based on our own merit but are God's gifts to be used for His glory. Verse 27 reminds us, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." Together, we make up the body of Christ, and individually, we each have a unique and important place. This truth emphasizes the importance of community and the mutual support and care that we are called to provide for one another. Thus, we recognize the value of each member in the body of Christ and strive to honor and support one another, thus fulfilling our God-given callings. Through our unity, we are powerful witnesses to the grace and love of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: O Lord, keep your household, the Church, in continual godliness, that through your protection we may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve you in good works to the glory of your name; 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 turn to a passage that holds profound significance for Christians and encapsulates the essence of our faith. As Confessional Lutherans, we are rooted in the Gospel of grace, and this chapter beautifully illustrates how love—God’s love—is at the core of our Christian walk.

In verse 1, the apostle Paul declares, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal." Paul's words remind us that even the most eloquent words, the most profound knowledge, and the most extraordinary gifts are empty without love. As Confessional Lutherans, we emphasize the importance of rightly proclaiming the Gospel, but Paul urges us to remember that our proclamation must always be fueled by love as well.

Verse 7 continues, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." This love is not a mere sentiment but a steadfast commitment to act on behalf of those we love. This love endures trials, believes in the potential for transformation, and never gives up hope in the Lord.

As Confessional Lutherans, we hold dear the doctrine of justification by faith alone, recognizing that our salvation is a result of God's unmerited love and grace. But this love also calls us to respond in kind, both to God and to one another. We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, extending the same grace and compassion that we have received.

In verse 13, Paul concludes, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Here, we see that faith and hope are essential elements of our Christian walk, but love stands above them all. For us, faith is the root, but love is the fruit and the very essence of God's character and the driving force of His redemptive plan in Christ.

Let us pray: O Lord, keep your household, the Church, in continual godliness, that through your protection we may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve you in good works to the glory of your name; 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: "The 41st Psalm is a psalm of prayer in which Christ Himself prophesies and laments over His betrayer, Judas, together with his comrades, by whom He would be crucified. He prays that He would be raised up from death and that He might be elevated to God's presence at His right hand. But in verse 4 He offers comfort for the multitudes, in that He makes of Himself a sinner, though truly He was without any sin. Thus He stands and declares Himself to be in our place, in our person, and He carries our sins as if they were His own, as if He had committed them Himself."

Verse 1 beautifully encapsulates this spirit of compassion and blessing: "Blessed is he who considers the poor; the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble." As Confessional Lutherans, we are reminded of Christ's words in Matthew 25:40, "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'" Our compassion toward the poor and the suffering is, in a sense, an expression of our love and service to Christ Himself.

In verse 4, Christ offers comfort to the multitudes by identifying with sinful humanity, bearing our sins as if they were His own, despite being without sin. Here, we witness the incredible grace of our Lord, who stands in our place, carrying the weight of our transgressions as if they were His.

Verse 13 serves as a fitting conclusion: "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen." This proclamation of God's eternal blessings reminds us that our Savior's love, compassion, and grace extend beyond the bounds of time. In Christ, through faith, they extend to us, and so we utter the Amen through Him and give Him all glory.

Let us pray: O Lord, keep your household, the Church, in continual godliness, that through your protection we may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve you in good works to the glory of your name; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.