**Read, Mark, Learn, and Inwardly Digest**

This outline is a devotional reading plan that covers the entire Sacred Scriptures in one year. The selections are based on ancient models and are generally in harmony with the liturgical church year. The average reading is three chapters daily. A seasonal canticle is assigned for each month and is scheduled to replace the psalm on the first and last days of the month. All of the Psalms are read twice a year.

The lectionary is in accordance with Martin Luther’s suggestions: “*But let the entire Psalter, divided in parts, remain in use and the entire Scriptures, divided into lections, let this be preserved in the ears of the church.”* Also: *“After that another book should be selected, and so on, until the entire Bible has been read through, and where one does not understand it, pass that by and glorify God.”*

**January 1**

**READ:** Luke 1:68-79 and Mark 2

**MARK:** The Song of Zechariah has been used as a Benedictus in the Church’s daily orders of service for centuries. We sing it with Matins and Morning Prayer when we use these occasional services. Mark 2:5, *“And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.”*

**LEARN:** Zechariah’s first words after being silenced by an angel (see Luke 1:18-20) are this beautiful prophecy regarding his own son. But this prophecy, much like John the Baptist’s ministry, is not so much about John as it is about Jesus—the Savior of the nations who was coming into the world. John constantly pointed to Christ (see John 1:23-27, 29-34; 3:30). Jesus’ words in Mark 2:5 are rather remarkable: when he saw *their* faith, he forgave *their friend’s* sin. John Kleinig, reflecting upon this passage, makes a parallel to praying for people in his life. In both cases, a person is bringing sick and burdened people before Jesus so that he might heal and help them.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The One with the power to give life and death—to heal the sick and condemn the wicked—is the same One who comes with grace and forgiveness for all who will believe. No burden is too heavy for him, no request of yours too large. He is greater, we are less. He has visited and redeemed his people.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, your way has been prepared and you have entered the world. You have overcome sin and the grave. Give us such a bold conficence in you that even those around us may be blessed through your mercy, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**January 2**

**READ:** Psalm 30 and Mark 3

**MARK:** Note David’s confidence in the Lord’s gracious promises despite his own sinfulness: “For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning” (Ps. 30:5, cf. 2 Cor. 4:17-18).

**LEARN:** Already in Mark 3:23-27—and even with hints way back in Mark 1:24-25!—Jesus identifies his real enemy: Satan (cf. Eph. 6:12-13). For any gamers out there, these scribes are but a bunch of n00bs messing with Jesus as he heads towards the boss battle. Note the context of Ps. 30: “A Psalm of [or, perhaps, “regarding”] David. A song at the dedication of the Temple.” David knows his sin (perhaps most famously with Bathsheba). Nevertheless, the Lord has kept his promises to David. God will dwell with his people, even despite themselves.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** How can a holy God dwell with his unholy people? Can he simply ignore their sin? Well, no. Someone or something needs to die; the wages of sin is death. In the OT, the sacrifices given at the altar of God foreshadowed the dwelling of the Son of God with man—God and man together in the person of Jesus, the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world.

**PRAY:** Gracious heavenly Father, do not let your anger burn against us because of our many sins. Because of the death of your Son Jesus Christ, dwell with us by your Holy Spirit and bring us joy and confidence to approach and worship you where you promise to be found: in your Word and Sacraments; for you live and reign as trinity in unity and unity in trinity, one God now and forever. Amen.

**January 3**

**READ:** Psalm 31 and Mark 4

**MARK:** Jesus’ words on the cross: “Into your hand I commit my spirit” (Ps. 31:5a). We may assume he was also thinking as he was hanging there: “you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God” (Ps. 31:5b), along with the rest of this psalm.

**LEARN:** The disciples had seen Jesus cast out demons; heal lepers, paralytics, and others; teach with authority and defend himself against the Pharisees and scribes. And yet, calming the sea was an even bigger step in the minds of the disciples: “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mt. 4:41). This is Jesus. “All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16-17).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!” (Ps. 31:24). How fitting that Jesus prays this psalm, as well, even as he waited on the cross, waited in the tomb, and was rescued from death by the Father on the third day! Rescue is coming.

**PRAY:** Lord God in heaven, be our refuge when our enemies surround us. I commit myself to you, for you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God. Amen.

**January 4**

**READ:** Psalm 32 and Mark 5

**MARK:** According to Psalm 32:5 and 1 John 1:8-9, forgiveness of sins in not simply pretending like they never happened. It is not “forgive and forget.” Rather, forgiveness necessarily involves us admitting “our fault, our own fault, our own most grievous fault.” Only once it is acknowledged can sin be put away.

**LEARN:** “The beginning of this psalm [32] teaches two things: first, that all are in sins [no one is righteous] and no one is blessed; second, that no one is capable of meriting the forgiveness of sin, but it is the Lord alone who forgives freely by not imputing [guilt]” (Luther).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Some people are called to literally follow Jesus. The formerly-demon-possessed man in Mark 5:19-20 is not. Rather, he is to live and serve in his vocations—loving those neighbors whom the Lord has already put into his life—and to proclaim *there* the mercy of God.

**PRAY:** Lord God, heavenly Father, our sins condemn us and the demons make sure we’re constantly aware of our guilt. Grant us the honesty to expose the very depths of our sinful nature to you, that your light might shine even there, for you live and reign with the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**January 5**

**READ:** Psalm 33 and Mark 6

**MARK:** Psalm 33 is nationalistic. When this was written, God’s people were both a political nation (living in the land of Israel and relating to the neighboring people-groups) and a holy nation (the chosen people of God). When examining this time period, w cannot separate one from the other to say, “this here is about them as a country” and “that passage is about them as God’s people.” At this time, they are one and the same.

**LEARN:** “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord…” (Ps. 33:12a) is not first and foremost a cry to make America Christian (again?). After all, what follows? “…the people whom he has chosen as his heritage” (Ps. 33:12b). God has not revealed this to be true of America (unless, perhaps, you’re a Mormon). After God’s people forfeited the land of Israel and were exiled into Assyria and Babylon, and especially after the spread of Christianity (the religion of God’s people now that Christ has come), the land of Israel and the people of God are no longer essentially synonymous. Insofar as Ps. 33:12 applies to us, it effectively reads, “Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord…”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** How was Jesus (God’s Son) treated in his hometown, and how was John the Baptist (God’s prophet) treated? Why do the disciples fear when they saw Jesus walking on the water?

**PRAY:** Guide our nation’s leaders, O Lord, that they may protect the good of all people, and especially of your Church. Help us to trust that you establish all authority and you surpass all authority, Amen.

**January 6**

**READ:** Psalm 34 and Mark 7

**MARK:** “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (Ps. 34:19). David—and all of God’s people—can expect to be assaulted by evil because we trust God; just look at Jesus’ life. Nevertheless, the Lord will deliver us, just as he delivered Jesus from the clutches of death.

**LEARN:** The region of Tyre and Sidon is north-west of Galilee, along the Mediterranean coast. Sailors would come through all the time, bringing with them whatever pagan gods and false teachings they had discovered abroad. Think Corinth, but without the Christians. It’s no wonder that Jesus’ initial response in Mark 7:27 is dismissive.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Jesus is the Messiah (or Christ)—the Anointed One whom God promised to his people of old through the prophets. God’s people (the Jews) waited and longed for the Messiah to come for centuries upon centuries. In Mark 7:29, Jesus reveals that he has not come for the Jews only, but for all who trust him. Being one of God’s people is now clearly a matter of faith.

**PRAY:** We are beggars; this is true. We have nothing within ourselves to offer you as tribute, O Christ. We approach you thoroughly defiled. Evil assaults us on every side. Have mercy upon us, Lord. Amen.

**January 7**

**READ:** Psalm 35 and Mark 8

**MARK:** When the psalmist pleads for the Lord’s justice, he cries out not only for his own deliverance, but also for the wicked to be shamed. This latter point is often lost or misunderstood by American Christians today.

**LEARN:** Re-read Ps. 35:4-8. Justice is rooted in discerning between right and wrong. But justice also involves deciding the judgment for the right and the wrong parties—the righteous and the unrighteous. For a moment, set aside the argument “but no one is righteous!” and consider: the psalmist clearly believes that God is on his side and that the wicked are against him (and, therefore, against God). It would be fitting that the wicked be ensnared by their own traps (v. 8).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** On the one hand, Christians are merciful and forgive those who do not deserve it. On the other hand, though, there is a place for justice. We believe that Christ “will come to judge the living and the dead,” as we confess in the Creed. There will be sheep, and there will be goats (Mt. 25:31-46).

**PRAY:** Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me. Rescue me, for I am yours. Let those who mock your name be utterly shamed. Reveal to the world righteousness, and set it apart from wickedness. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who endured shame from the hand of sinners. Amen.

**January 8**

**READ:** Psalm 36 and Mark 9

**MARK:** In Mark 9, Jesus is teaching about his death, but its purpose and Jesus’ identity are to be kept secret until he has risen from the dead. “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” “…he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” “…he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered…’” “But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him.”

**LEARN:** How blind the disciples are! They see Jesus shining in glory, and they offer to make 3 tents—as if Jesus and the prophets are equals! Elijah has come (John the Baptist), but even the disciples did not recognize him! They could not drive out a demon who could be driven out by prayer! Jesus foretells his death again, and they start arguing about which one of them is the greatest! Thank the Lord that he went to the cross despite his ignorant disciples—and even despite our own ignorance. Thank the Lord that he sent his Holy Spirit to enlighten us, for now we know that Jesus is the Christ and we believe that God has raised him from the dead. The Spirit enables us to believe this “foolishness.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Why does God allow the wicked to prosper while the righteous suffer endlessly for their righteousness? Why does God let the world attack us when we seek to do what is right? The only answer we can find is in Christ, the Righteous One, who suffered hatred and violence from the world. And yet, the Lord vindicated him by raising him from the dead. So, too, our salvation is hidden in this life, but it will most certainly be revealed when Christ returns and vindicates us.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, you came to bring not peace but division. Vindicate your people, we pray, for we are suffering while the wicked have not a care in the world. Be our way, reveal the truth, and give us life. Amen.

**January 9**

**READ:** Psalm 37 and Mark 10

**MARK:** We speak Mark 10:13-16 when performing infant baptisms. The Lord loves babies. He welcomes them, and he has ample time to attend to them and bless them.

**LEARN:** Divorce is never a good thing. In some situations, it may be the lesser of two evils. However, it ought not be celebrated nor assumed as one of the typical outcomes of marriage. When a married couple divorces, the couple has died; we ought to mourn. And yet, Christ forgives us of even this sin. Though we may leave each other, he will never divorce us—his bride, the Church. Thanks be to God that, although we are weak, he is both strong and faithful.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you” (Mark 10:35). What a loaded request! And yet, is our own confidence presumptuous? Is our repentance half-hearted or insincere? May we refrain from lowering Christ to the place of our buddy, and instead honor him as the Lord and King of all creation, who has graciously given us each and every breath we take. For God has had favor on us, but it is for Christ’s sake. Apart from Christ, we are worms; in Christ, we are heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, you bless the poor with the kingdom of heaven. Teach us to put our trust in the Father and to seek his kingdom rather than to imitate the powerful or envy the rich; so may we serve you now and forever. Amen.

**January 10**

**READ:** Psalm 38 and Mark 11

**MARK:** The “cleansing” of the temple is not a cleansing, at all; Jesus does not make it so it can be used properly. Rather, he curses it with judgment, prophesying that it will no longer be used at all (after the Romans destroy it in 70 AD).

**LEARN:** The curse of the fig tree is juxtaposed with the curse of the Temple for a reason. Jesus came to the people of Israel looking for fruit, but there was none. We should not seek to be like the crowds on “Palm Sunday,” for they did not get it. They did not know who was coming. They say the right words, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” But they have no idea what this kingdom will look like. Jesus will *not* overthrow the Romans. Jesus will *not* restore control of the Temple to the Jewish people. Jesus came looking for faith from the people of God—even as Jesus came to the fig tree looking for figs—but he found none. “But it wasn’t even the season for figs!” some will complain. Ok, but must Jesus be reasonable? I love the quote from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (here paraphrased): “Is he safe?” “No! But he is good, and he’s the king.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Psalm 38:12-14 resembles a courtroom scene. My enemies accuse me with lies. And yet, we know that Satan (literally, “the accuser”) accuses us with the truth. We *have* sinned, it is true; we do not deny it (cf. v. 18). We *do* deserve for the Lord to kill us here and now, it is true. And yet, we have an Advocate: the Son who has personally dealt with all of the sins of which Satan accuses us, and the Spirit who encourages us and transforms us. Though the accusations against us be true, we will be found innocent on account of Christ.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, you did not forget the pierced body of your Son nor the mockery his love received. Do not abandon us, your children, weighed down with sins, but give us the fullness of your mercy in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**January 11**

**READ:** Psalm 39 and Mark 12

**MARK:** “And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you. Deliver me from all my transgressions” (Psalm 39:7-8a)—a wonderful prayer. The greatest commandments, Mark 12:29-31.

**LEARN:** Note that the Lord’s glance is not always a good thing (as in, “The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.”) The Lord’s gaze can be quite a threat to one’s life and well-being: “Look away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more!” (Psalm 39:13). The Lord who smiles upon us is also the Lord whose nostrils flare in anger at us.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The two commandments given in Mark 12:29-31 are not a replacement for the rest of God’s Law, as some would argue: “Hey, man, you’ve just gotta love.” Rather, these two commandments are a *summary* of the Ten Commandments, which themselves are a summary of all of the moral law—God’s design for how we are to live. The particular commandments (e.g. “Everyone who is angry at his brother will be liable to judgment” (Matthew 5:22) do not go away; it’s just that the Fifth Commandment and the command to love your neighbor cover all of these other moral commandments.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, you taught us not to fear tomorrow but to commit our lives to your care. Withhold not your Spirit from us, but help us find a life of peace after these days of trouble. Amen.

**January 12**

**READ:** Psalm 40 and Mark 13

**MARK:** Psalm 40:6-8 is cited in Hebrews 10:5-7, where the author argues that Christ did away with the old sacrificial system (which he himself set up) by himself being obedient to the entire law. Christ alone is sufficient to be our priest—the mediator who offers himself as a sacrifice for our sins.

**LEARN:** Christian hope for life after death does not end with dying and going to be with Christ in heaven. Our hope involves that, to be sure, but it does not end there. If Mark 13 tells us anything, it tells us that Jesus is most certainly coming back to earth. From the rest of Scripture, we also know that he will fix the earth from its self-destruction. He will raise us in our bodies—no longer with our bodies in the ground and our souls with Christ, but finally reunited as one, just as we were always meant to be. But much of this is for another time. For now, consider reading 1 Corinthians 15.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** What does Jesus promise in Mark 13 about being a Christian, especially in the last days? Primarily, two things: 1) Things will get really, really bad. False prophets (even antichrists) will arise, attempting to lead us astray. There will be wars, earthquakes, etc. Christians will be handed over to (government) officials to be accused and sentenced. And on and on it goes. However, 2) the Son of Man *will come* with glory and power. The Holy Spirit will give us the words to confess the faith when we are slandered and accused. The Lord’s promise will take place, as surely as his promise about his rising from the dead. Therefore, stay awake, dear Christians.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, by your Holy Spirit strengthen us to endure the tribulations at present and which lie ahead. Keep us steadfast in your Word, that we might forever trust Christ and look for his appearing. Amen.

**January 13**

**READ:** Psalm 41 and Mark 14

**MARK:** Judas, who would betray Jesus, shared one of the most intimate of the Jewish rites with Jesus and the other disciples: they shared the Passover meal, which commemorated God’s not condemning his own people when he poured out his wrath upon Egypt. Soon, God would pour out his wrath upon his Son for the sins of his people—even the sins of Judas (though Judas would not believe and receive this gift).

**LEARN:** Jesus quotes Psalm 41:9 when speaking of Judas (John 13:18). Judas—Jesus’ close friend who even ate the Last Supper with him—betrayed Jesus. Nevertheless, God raised Jesus up (Psalm 41:10-12).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In Psalm 41:4, David prays for the healing of his soul. Oh, how our very being is in anguish over our sin! Our flesh wages war against our spirit (cf. Romans 7:21-23). We lie as on a sickbed, unable to get up and walk rightly, let alone stand on our own. Lord, heal this disease within us!

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, we are in anguish as this disease of sin courses through our veins. Be merciful to us, for our sin is killing us. “Be of sin the double cure; cleanse me from its guilt and power.” Amen. (Quote is from the hymn, “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me”)

**January 14**

**READ:** Psalm 42 and Mark 15-16

**MARK:** Psalms 42 & 43 go together. Note the refrains: “Why are you cast down, O my soul? … Hope in God.”

**LEARN:** It appears that the original version of Mark’s gospel actually ended with 16:8. What a cliffhanger! Did he rise, or didn’t he? Well, that’s the whole point of Mark’s gospel. Mark opens by identifying who Jesus is: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). Throughout the gospel, we *see* Jesus *being* the Christ, the Son of God, and *living* accordingly. We hear Jesus *say* three times that he will die and rise. Rather than giving us a resurrection sighting, Mark calls us to trust what we have already seen and heard. Decades and centuries later, scribes and theologians added several different endings, which you can briefly read about in your Bible’s footnotes.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** How then do we regard Mark 16:9-20? Is it Scripture? Should we trust it? Because its origin is likely not original, we should not place it before any of the clear and well-attested passages of Scripture. What does this mean? When Mark 16:15-16 portray baptism in exactly the same way as the rest of Scripture, rejoice in this and confess it gladly. When Mark 16:18 speaks of drinking deadly poison and living—a statement which is not mentioned of anyone other than the apostles hereafter—we should not assume that this passage alone proves that God wants us to be snake-handlers.

**PRAY:** Father, your Word is one. You have graciously revealed to yourself that we might have life and salvation in you. By your Holy Spirit, help us to trust your Word and to discern its meaning, that we might ever increasingly know you, trust you, and love you. Amen.

**January 15**

**READ:** Psalm 43 and Genesis 1-3

**MARK:** Psalms 42 & 43 go together. Note the refrains: “Why are you cast down, O my soul? … Hope in God.”

**LEARN:** Regarding the serpent’s temptation of Eve, Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers the following in *Creation and Fall*: “[The serpent’s attack] speaks about God, speaks indeed with the attitude of having a deep knowledge of the secrets of God; that is, it speaks in a pious way. The mask of piety, however, is now taken off in an open attack. *Did* God really saw…? Yes, God *did* say… But *why* did God say it…? That is now the conversation proceeds. God said it out of envy… God is not a good but an evil, cruel God; be cleverer, be cleverer than your God and take what God begrudges you… God did say it, yes indeed, you are right, Eve, but God lied; God’s word is a lie… for you will not die at all… That is the ultimate possible rebellion, that the lie portrays the truth as a lie. That is the abyss that underlies the lie—that it lives because it poses as the truth and condemns the truth as a lie. ‘You will not die at all. Instead God knows that on the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God and know what good and evil is.’”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Rather than being created *in the image of God*—the gift given to Adam and Eve—they wanted to be *like God*. They wanted to know what God had not chosen to reveal to them (i.e. knowing good and evil); they wanted to be without their God-given limits and act out of their own resources. “Imago dei (being in God’s image), sicut deus (attempting to be like God), agnus dei (Lamb of God)—the human being who is God incarnate, who was sacrificed for humankind [who attempted to be like God] , in true divinity slaying its false divinity and restoring the [image of God]” (Bonhoeffer).

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, who created all things in proper fashion: we have rebelled, we have sought to build for ourselves heavenly thrones and live in accordance with our own designs and our own desires. Forgive us, dear Lord, for the sake of your Son, who entered the rank of rebels and was executed by them for treason. Amen.

**January 16**

**READ:** Psalm 44 and Genesis 4-6

**MARK:** Even in the midst of his judgment, the Lord promises salvation to his people. It was true in Genesis 3, and it’s true again in Genesis 6.

**LEARN:** The naming of Cain reveals Eve’s genuine hope that this would be the answer to Genesis 3:15. Even though this hope was misplaced, her faith was not in vain, for God would send the Son of Man to crush the serpent’s head, even as he himself was struck to death.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Corruption and righteousness: which will endure the Lord’s judgment? Will God long delay his justice? The Lord who judged the world, “It is very good,” has also judged it, “I am sorry that I have made them.” Surely no fiercer words can strike our hearts. Nevertheless, “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17).

**PRAY:** O God, the sovereign of nations and the judge of men, look with compassion upon this sad world so full of misery and sorrow. Enlighten our eyes that we may see the justice of your judgments. Increase our faith that we may discern the greatness of your mercy. Save us from the sorrow of the world which works death and despair. Fill us with the godly sorrow which works repentance, and the desire to do your will. Teach us how we may build a common life in which the nations of the world may find peace and justice. Show us what we ought to do. Show us also what are the limits of our powers and what we cannot do. So may our purpose to do your will be supported by our faith, for you are able to overrule our will and make the wrath of man to praise you. Recall us to our dignity as co-workers together with you. Remind us of our weakness that we may look to you who works in us both to will and to do your good pleasure and supplies what is needed beyond our powers. Amen.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**January 17**

**READ:** Psalm 45 and Genesis 7-9

**MARK:**  Note the parallels between Genesis 9:1-3, 7 and Genesis 1:28-31. This is a new beginning for God’s people, though it will not be substantially different than God’s blessing at creation.

**LEARN:** Psalm 45 is written for a king at his wedding, praising the glory of the king and calling his bride to join herself to him. Ultimately, this is referring to Christ and his bride the Church. We, too, praise our king as we look forward to the great wedding banquet: “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns… And he has on his robe and on his thigh a name written: King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:11, 12, 16).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Almighty and eternal God, according to your strict judgment you condemned the unbelieving world through the flood, yet according to your great mercy you preserved believing Noah and his family, eight souls in all. … We pray that you would behold [name] according to your boundless mercy and bless [him/her] with true faith by the Holy Spirit, that through this saving flood all sin in [him/her], which [he himself / she herself] has committed since, would be drowned and die. Grant that [he/she] be kept safe and secure in the holy ark of the Christian Church, being separated from the multitude of unbelievers and serving Your name at all times with a fervent spirit and a joyful hope, so that, with all believers in your promise, [he/she] would be declared worthy of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen” (Luther’s “Flood Prayer,” spoken at baptisms).

**PRAY:** O Lord God, who deigns to make covenants with men, how often we stray from you and abandon your good desires for us. As you saved Noah and his family from the wickedness of the world, so save us from the wickedness that overwhelms even our very selves, for the sake of the blood of the New Covenant. Amen.

**January 18**

**READ:** Psalm 46 and Genesis 10-12

**MARK:** The refrain, “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” calls to mind the image of God with his heavenly armies (Lord of Sabaoth/hosts/armies) and the image of God fighting both for and against Jacob (Genesis 28:11-16, 32:22-30).

**LEARN:** Psalm 46 is the basis of Luther’s hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is our God.” In this psalm, God is described both as a protector (v. 1-3) and an attacker (v. 6, 8-9). Thus, Luther writes that our God is “a trusty shield and weapon.” Were we left alone, our enemies would have long since overcome us. However, the Lord of hosts is with us. Ask ye, who is this? Jesus Christ it is! Christ is at once our shield and weapon against the old evil foe Satan. He fights with us and for us.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** For Christians, the stream in Psalm 46:4—one of endless refreshment for God’s holy city—is at once the primeval river of Paradise, the holy font of Baptism, and the water of eternal life.

**PRAY:** Lord God, our refuge and strength, when the restless powers of this world and the waters of hell rise up against your holy city, watch over it and keep it safe. By the river that flows from the throne of the Lamb, purigy this new Jerusalem as your chosen dwelling, for you are with us, our stronghold now and forever. Amen.

**January 19**

**READ:** Psalm 47 and Genesis 13-15

**MARK:** “And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

**LEARN:** Who is this Melchizedek? The king of Salem (which sounds like the Hebrew “shalom”). This is the king of peace, cf. Isaiah 9:6. But more than a king, he is not only a believer in the Lord, but he is even a priest of the Lord. This is long before God established the Levitical priesthood during the wilderness wanderings. This king of peace, this priest of the Lord, in addition to living in the time of Abram and having his own life, is also a foreshadowing of the priest and king Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 6:20-7:19).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “The 47th psalm is a prophecy of Christ, that He shall rise up and become king over all the world, without a battle, simply through shouts, songs, and trumpet calls, that is, through the joyful preaching of the Gospel, just as the walls of Jericho fell by trumpet blasts and shouts, without any weapons at all” (Luther).

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, you reign on high. All of creation sings your praise, and we ourselves can scarcely write enough hymns to tell of your wondrous deeds. Let the seven trumpets blast, that the foundations of the world may be shaken and the new Jerusalem—the kingdom of God—may be established on the earth. Amen.

**January 20**

**READ:** Psalm 48 and Genesis 16-18

**MARK:** Issues, Etc. suggests the following method for evaluating the overall content of a sermon: how many times is God the subject of a verb, and how many times are humans the subject of a verb? Evaluate Genesis 16-17 accordingly: who is primarily “doing stuff” in the establishment of this covenant?

**LEARN:** The Lord has promised Abram that he would be a father, but after waiting and still having no children, Abram and Sarai decide to take matters into their own hands and force God’s promise to be fulfilled. He even questions God’s methods in 17:17-18.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In Psalm 48, the kings (v. 4-6) and the worshippers (v. 9-14) are looking at the same image: the Lord and Mount Zion—Jerusalem and its Temple. The wicked see it as something to fear and flee from, but the worshippers see it as their refuge. Even so, many see God as one to fear and to be angry with, but we the Church see him as our refuge. Let us sing praises to the Lord, for he is greatly to be praised!

**PRAY:** Father, the body of your risen Son is the temple not made by hands and the bulwark of the new Jerusalem. Make this holy city, built of living stones, so shine with radiance that it may show your greatness in the sight of all the nations. Amen.

**January 21**

**READ:** Psalm 49 and Genesis 19-21

**MARK:** God speaks to Abimelech in a dream, warning him of the danger that is about to come upon him. This is significant because Abimelech was not one of God’s chosen people; he was a Canaanite ruler. God even hears Abimelech’s argument and takes it into consideration when deciding his immediate judgment.

**LEARN:** We look for God in the places where he has promised to be—in his Word and Sacraments—and this is good, right, and proper. It is here that God reveals himself most clearly. However, he also manifests himself and his law in the world around us and even in the law which he has written on our hearts (see Jeremiah 31:33; Romans 2:14-16). Even unbelievers typically have some sense of justice, the wrongness of murder, etc. This point reaches its climax in Matthew 8:10 when Jesus says of a Roman centurion (i.e. not a Jew): “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.”

This being said, nothing in the world around us or written on our hearts can save us from our sins. Only Jesus can do that—Jesus who *revealed himself* for this very purpose. This is why we so strongly emphasize the ways in which God promises to be with his people for their good: in his Word and Sacraments. It is only through these means through which unbelievers can actually come to faith.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Psalm 49 offers wisdom as we evaluate our lives and the lives of the people around us. The chief thing the Psalmist notes about our lives is that they necessarily end in death, and he who forgets this is a fool. While money itself is not the root of all kinds of evil (the *love of* money is), having a lot of it sure does make it tempting trust in this for salvation (i.e. to take care of us when everything is falling apart) and to not lead godly lives (i.e. lives of serving one’s neighbor).

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, your Son condemned the rich as having already received their reward, and you praised the widow whose mite was more worthy than the tithes and treasures of the rich. Teach us wisdom, Lord, that we may properly discern godly use of your gifts to us, and let us never trust the gifts rather than you the Giver. Amen.

**January 22**

**READ:** Psalm 50 and Genesis 22-24

**MARK:** Most sacrifices were to cleanse God’s people for not keeping the covenant (negative). Thanksgiving offerings are to glorify God for providing for you (positive; e.g. offering the firstfruits of the harvest back to God who gives the harvest).

**LEARN:** It is inappropriate to “sin boldly” in the sense of intentionally choosing not to follow God’s Law and then promptly say, “Jesus loves me anyway.” This confession on your lips is true, but you’re doing it wrong. As the people whom God has already made holy through the blood of Jesus, we strive to live in ways which reflect this already-true holiness (Psalm 50:14).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Forgive him who would speak in your praise, if he has spoken idly. [Abraham] has spoken humbly, according to the desire of his heart: he has spoken briefly, because brevity is seemly; but he will never forget that you required a hundred years to obtain the son of your old age against all hope and that you had to draw your knife before you could keep Isaac; nor will he ever forget that in a hundred and thirty years you never went beyond faith” (Soren Kierkegaard on Genesis 22:1-18). Abraham now knows the depth of offering true praise: being willing to abandon all of God’s blessings at God’s command.

**PRAY:** O God, all that we have is yours. You do not need our sacrifices, for all of the cattle and all of the hills are yours. And yet, your gifts to us are not for our own sake, but for yours and for our neighbors’. Lead us to steward your gifts well, that we may return the firstfruits and freely give to others as we have been freely given. Hear us for the sake of your Son, your Sacrifice, who has redeemed us by his blood. Amen.

**January 23**

**READ:** Psalm 51 and Genesis 25-27

**MARK:** Psalms 51-53 each offer an answer to the question, “Who is the wicked man?” In Psalm 51, I am the wicked man, by my own most grievous fault. Cleanse me, O God!

**LEARN:** The generations of Abraham continue. God continues to reaffirm his promise to Abraham’s descendants, and Jacob will be the one to receive one particular part of God’s promise: to be a father of many nations (i.e. the 12 tribes of Israel/Jacob).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “You are the man!” said Nathan to David (2 Samuel 12:7). “You are the man” says my soul to my conscience (Psalm 51). Satan truly is the Accuser, for he brings to mind all of the (*true*) sins of our youth and our “wiser now” old age alike. But although his accusations are true—we have committed, and continue to commit, heinous sins—nevertheless, our hearts and our foreheads have been washed, the Holy Spirit has been given, and the blood of Jesus covers all of our bloodguiltiness, for Jesus is our salvation.

**PRAY:** O God, how quickly we toss aside your gracious gifts to us, as if they were some cheap trinket or the wrapping paper which hid the *real* present. Forgive us, Lord, for the sins of the youth and our old age alike, for have not become better or wiser but rather remain selfish fools. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, for the sake of your Son, who has counted us as a treasure and a pearl which is worth the cost of everything he has to offer. Amen.

**January 24**

**READ:** Psalm 52 and Genesis 28-30

**MARK:** Psalm 52 answers the question: the wicked are those who boast in evil. Blessed is he, rather, who boasts in the Lord.

**LEARN:** The descents of Esau will become known as the Edomites. They will be counted among “the nations” (i.e. not the people of God), and they will repeatedly oppose God’s people throughout the OT. Obeying the Fourth Commandment is a big deal, and Jacob and Esau provide a biblical example of what to do and what not to do.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Over and over again, Scripture condemns the love of money. It is typically described as trusting money for one’s salvation (e.g. “Everything will be ok as long as we have some savings” or answering “Who are you?” (said to oneself) with, “Senior VP of Finance at Daktronics” with not even a thought of answering, “A baptized child of God”). Here, though, the love of money is also tied to boasting of evil. Why this connection?

**PRAY:** Lord, keep us from the snares of the evil one, that we might not be devoured by him but rather receive your eternal blessings. Amen.

**January 25**

**READ:** Psalm 53 and Genesis 31-33

**MARK:** Psalm 53 answers the question: the wicked is everyone, for “There is none who does good, not even one.” Jesus is the one whom God praises for trusting in his riches, for God alone is good.

**LEARN:** If Psalm 53 sounds familiar, it’s either because 1) it is almost identical to Psalm 14, and/or 2) Saint Paul quotes it in Romans 3. To the first point, it’s not clear why there are essentially two copies of the same psalm in the 150. 14 and 53 are in two different books or sections of the psalms, where each book can be thought of as its own collection. To the second point, Saint Paul quotes Psalm 53 to make the point that no one, by his own efforts, can stand innocent before God; God alone can (and does) justify us.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “We do not have it within us to find God. We do not have it within us even to begin looking for God. We do not have it within us even to want to look for God. Adam and Eve, with the taste of the forbidden fruit still in their mouths, were not searching for God; they were hiding from Him, and so do we all. Left to our own resources, none of us can do better than to conceal ourselves in the bushes, with our bare behinds hanging out, hoping that God will pass us by” (Patrick Henry Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*).

**PRAY:** Lord, as before the flood, when you look upon us you find none who is innocent. Do not destroy us, we pray, for the sake of your Son, with whom we have drowned and died and through whom we have been raised righteous. Amen.

**January 26**

**READ:** Psalm 54 and Genesis 34-36

**MARK:** When Jacob again fears for his life, the Lord reiterates and confirms the promise he has made to Abraham, Isaac, and even Jacob already, as well as the new name which he had already given Jacob.

**LEARN:** Genesis 34 provides an excellent example for hermeneutics (the reading and interpreting of Scripture). A key point that rises from reading this chapter is that not everything that God’s people do in the Bible is good or is to be replicated. This is a descriptive text (i.e. it describes what Jacob and his sons did), not a prescriptive text (i.e. it does not imply that we are to go and do likewise). The fact that Jacob’s sons murder even goes against God’s limiting of judgment to “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” (Exodus 21:23-24) which makes it wrong to kill someone for giving you a papercut or even for defiling your sister. For someone to quote, for example, Acts saying, “Since fantastic miracles accompanied the apostles’ preaching and Paul was not hurt by a venomous snakebite, then we should be doing these things, too” is simply to read Scripture wrongly.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The title (AKA subheading or first line) of Psalm 54 tells us that it particularly refers to the time when the Ziphites betrayed David (the messianic king, pointing to its fulfillment in Jesus). Jesus himself was betrayed by his own people. Nevertheless, the Lord returns judgment upon unbelievers (v. 5), even as Christ freely offers the sacrifice of his own flesh to deliver us (v. 6-7).

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, by *not* saving Jesus from death at the hand of his enemies, you *have* saved us from the same. We trust in your salvation; vindicate us even as you vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead. Amen.

**January 27**

**READ:** Psalm 55 and Genesis 37-39

**MARK:** In Psalm 55—as in the rest of Scripture and life—when sin and evil assail us, the answer is always to cry out to the Lord.

**LEARN:** “Dreams in that world were usually understood to be externally and divinely generated (cf. Jeremiah 23:25-26), not the result of an interior psychological process. Yet the brothers interpret Jostph’s dreams as if they are the product of Jostph’s own arrogance rather than a divine word about destiny. This ambiguity provides some of the tension in the narrative. Dreams also create tension by their ‘prophetic’ character, as they move from announcement to realization (see 42:6; 43:26, 28; 44:16-17), yet without the brothers’ realizing it! And not inevitably so, for example, since nowhere does *Jacob* ‘bow down’ to Joseph (37:10). Moreover, the brothers *believe* that they can cut off the fulfillment by killing the dreamer, not least because (unlike a prophecy) Jostph himself remains integral to the plot depicted in the dream.

“Eventually, Joseph denies the dreams’ continuing applicability (see 50:19); the brothers are *not* to be his slaves, for he is not in the place of God. That role will be assumed by Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. Slavery cannot shape the relationship of Joseph to his brothers if they are to move toward reconciliation. Joseph takes the place of honor at the end of the story not least because he gives up on the dream. In so doing, Joseph demonstrates what it means truly to be a ruler.

“The dreams do point to a future, but their import depends on the one who hears them and—always a second step—interprets them. One is reminded of the various responses to the visions of the prophets. For the brothers, Joseph’s dreams are understood negatively; for Joseph, they are interpreted in a narrowly personal way; for Jacob, they become a matter for reflection. Jacob’s response seems particularly admirable. He does not appear gullible, nor does he reject the dreams’ potential import. He initially asks questions concerning the nature and implications of the dreams. But he takes these things and ponders them in his heart (see Luke 2:19), revealing an openness to future possibilities” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** As you reflect upon Psalm 55, consider Jesus and Judas Iscariot.

**PRAY:** Lord, keep us from the smooth words of the deceiver who would stretch out his hand and ensnare us. Help us to cry to you in our time of need. Amen.

**January 28**

**READ:** Psalm 56 and Genesis 40-42

**MARK:** Joseph’s repeated weeping demonstrates his growing feelings of compassion for his brothers, as well as his desire for reconciliation rather than revenge.

**LEARN:** It seems that Joseph tests his brothers in order to work toward the best possible situation for the family unit, whose very future is at stake. “The brothers need to pass through an ordeal in order to bring their memories and guilt to the surface, where it can be dealt with adequately, before reconciliation can truly take place, and hence safeguard the future of the family. This process transpires (see v. 21-22, 28; 44:16; 50:16-17; quote from *The New Interpreter’s Bible*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In the story of Joseph, repentance is a requirement for reconciliation. It is one thing to forgive someone, setting the relationship from hostile to neutral, as it were. It is something greater to be reconciled—to restore the full preexisting positive relationship.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, teach us to count the cost, not of our brother’s offence against us, but of your reconciling us to the Father, for you humbled yourself, took our guilt, and raised us to new life and a right relationship in your family. Amen.

**January 29**

**READ:** Psalm 57 and Genesis 43-45

**MARK:** Psalms and Proverbs often speak of the folly of evil—that those who intend evil often wind up falling into their own snares (see Psalm 57:6). Evil and sin are simply destructive; they can only destroy, and they sometimes even destroy those who would destroy others.

**LEARN:** Somewhat contrary yesterday’s reading in Genesis, in chapter 45 we see grace given completely independent of repentance. God sent Joseph to Egypt for the good of Egypt and for the good of His people whether his brothers would repent and join him or not. This is a word of unconditional Gospel.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Joseph looks around at the way things have turned out since he was sold into slavery in Egypt, and he clearly sees God’s hand directing the course of events the whole way. This is a gracious gift, and we, too, rejoice when the Holy Spirit enables us to see the wonders of God’s working in our lives and in the world around us. However, this is often—and even typically—not how things work out. When disaster struck Joseph, he eventually saw how the Lord worked it for his good. When disaster strikes us and our loved ones, we often will never see how anything good could come from it. But we are not supposed to seek out the hidden God—answers and grace from God which he has not chosen to give to us in his Word and Sacraments. We look for him in these places where he has promised to meet us. Moreover, Job’s statement after disaster struck him and his family is also quite faithful: “’Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (Job 1:21-2).

**PRAY:** Gracious Lord, please save us, for wickedness invades our lives at every turn. And when you reveal the wonders of your working in our lives, help us to rejoice in this additional gift and yet not let this revelation take priority in our minds over your clear revelation in Scripture. Guide us by the Spirit of Christ. Amen.

**January 30**

**READ:** Psalm 58 and Genesis 46-48

**MARK:** Joseph (a representative of God’s people) makes slaves of the Egyptians for the benefit of Pharaoh. Generations later, another Pharaoh will make slaves of God’s people.

**LEARN:** Pharaoh himself demonstrates righteous living when he gives the best of the land (think firstfruits) to the one who saved him (Joseph and his family, as representatives of the Lord). Though Pharaoh himself is not a Jew, even unbelievers know something of the way things are simply supposed to work (God’s law revealed in nature and on our hearts).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Psalm 58:10-11 uses graphic language to demonstrate a hard truth: when the Lord judges in righteousness, the righteous will rejoice at their vindication, which comes at the expense of the lives of the unrighteous. This is hard to accept because who would rejoice in someone’s suffering? This is just how messed up our world has become—that it is necessary for the unrighteous to suffer—because *we* have brought sin into the world. We have brought evil which necessitates the suffering of the unrighteous. Thanks be to God that the righteous Jesus has suffered in the place of all of us unrighteous folks. May he, by his Word and Spirit, save those who are perishing.

**PRAY:** Bless us, O Lord, with the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that we might be a blessing to the nations, that the whole earth may be served by your graciousness through us and, moreover, come to know you as the God of grace who has visited his people and redeemed them through Jesus, in order that they, too, may join the family. Amen.

**January 31**

**READ:** Luke 1:68-79 and Genesis 49-50

**MARK:** Jacob demonstrates trust in the Lord’s promises by being buried in the land of Promise, even though it is not currently “home” for God’s people.

**LEARN:** In these closing chapters of Genesis, God reiterates through Israel which he had been making all along: “The last words of Jacob in chapt 49 unify the book of Genesis in significant ways. Llinks with the divine promises to each ancestor are drawn up into this poem. The promises regarding a nation/people (cf. 12:2; 46:3), numerous posterity (cf. 26:24; 48:4), and blessings in abundance (22:17) become a reality in the twelve tribes. Within chaps. 37-50, special attention was initially given to both Joseph (chap. 37) and Judah (chap. 38); now in these last words, Joseph and Judah dominate the scene (in terms of quantity of material), the extent to which the divine blessing affects their lives, and their role and influence in shaping Israel’s future.

“Moreover, the efficacy of the word links the beginning and the end of Genesis, from the creative word of God to the effective word of the patriarch. At the same time, just as one finds a certain vulnerability of the divine word as it waits upon creaturely response, so also the patriarch’s word waits upon the contingencies of historical process as it moves into the future. This appears particularly evident concerning the role of the tribe of Levi, whose ‘dispersion’ can hardly be considered negative due to its special election by God to priestly status (Num 8:14-19; 18:24; Deut 10:8-9). Thus Jacob’s words do not determine fully the future of the tribes” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The story of God visiting and redeeming his people does not end in Genesis 50—not by a long shot! God’s keeps his promises throughout the Old Testament, but it is in Jesus Christ and John his herald that God decisively saves his people. Jesus is not something different from the things which God promised throughout the OT; salvation from our sins through Christ is not unlike salvation from slavery in Egypt through Moses.

**PRAY:** Gracious heavenly Father, you keep your promises to us your people even when we go astray. You *did* bring your people back to the Promised Land, just as Jacob hoped in his last words. You *have* blessed all nations through your people, both temporally as with overcoming famine in Egypt and eternally through your Son. Help us to trust your promises, for they are our hope and our life. Amen.

**February 1**

**READ:** Luke 2:29-32 and Exodus 1-3

**MARK:** Luke 2:29-32; Simeon’s song. Exodus 3:14; The Lord reveals His name to Moses saying, “I Am who I Am.”

**LEARN:** From Simeon’s song we learn that he considers himself the Lord’s servant just as Mary considered herself the Lord’s servant. They both sang for joy. In Exodus we have the account of the birth of Moses leading up to the Lord calling him to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt. Ex. 1:12, the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel for they had multiplied to such a great extent. Childbirth was a great blessing for those in bondage and it is still a great blessing as the Psalms calls children our heritage (Ps. 127:3). “I AM WHO I AM” in Hebrew is the word “Yahweh”. The name of God was so holy that the Israelites wouldn’t even dare to speak it but in reference to God’s proper name use different titles such as “Elohim”, “Adonai”, however whenever you see noted in your English text “LORD” in all capital letters, the Hebrew text reads “I AM WHO I AM” or “Yahweh”, the proper name of God.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The account of the birth of Moses is a familiar one so here are a few things to ponder. 1) See how the Lord used Pharaoh’s order to kill the Israelite boys to raise up Moses as the one who would help release them from bondage. 2) Moses was a foreigner in everywhere he went. He was a foreigner in Pharaoh’s household, the land of Midian, and the wilderness. 3) Moses was a murderer and yet the Lord used in such blessed ways.

**PRAY:** LORD God Almighty, you have given us your name and put it upon us in our baptisms. Grant that we might ever live under the blessing and reign of your name at all times. Amen.

**February 2**

**READ**: Psalm 59 and Exodus 4-6

**MARK:** Psalm 59:16-17; The Lord is our strength and our fortress. Exodus 6:30; Moses confesses that all his sufficiency comes from the Lord.

**LEARN:** Zipporah, Moses’ wife circumcised her son and took the foreskin and touched Moses’ feet with it. This sounds outrageous and a rather odd account of Scripture but let me explain. It was a moment for action for the Lord was ready to put either Moses or his son to death because his son wasn’t circumcised. Why his son wasn’t circumcised, we can only suspect the reason, nonetheless he should have been and the lack of circumcision was a disregard for the sign and promise of God. It likely indicated a family conflict between Zipporah, the Midianite priest’s daughter and Moses. There were two issues of conflict there. One she was a Midianite (a pagan nation) and two, she was the Midianite priest’s daughter. What we can learn here is this; conflict escapes no family we are still called to be faithful. Sometimes through marriage, a spouse despises the promises of God in baptism and the unbelieving spouse is vocally outspoken against God and His word. That doesn’t mean the child should not be baptized nor be brought to services in God’s house to hear the word, quite the opposite. How might you aid a family in this situation in hearing the word proclaimed and sacraments administered?

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Moses complains before the Lord in so many places in this reading as if he is constantly trying to excuse his way out of doing what the Lord had called him to do. Moses strikes me as that young child that comes up with any and every asinine excuse to not do what you simply ask because the child is just lazy and indifferent (or possibly hangry). Moses’ excuses come to a head in Ex. 6:30. If the Lord calls you to do a certain task within your vocation such as being a spouse, a parent, grandparent, friend, coworker, etc., will he not also give you all that you need to fulfill that vocation which he has placed upon you? Yes he will. Hear it in his word.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, forgive me for the times I stray and doubt your word and calling. Give me the faith to trust in your promises and know that you are my fortress and strength. In Jesus Name. Amen.

**February 3**

**READ:** Psalm 60 and Exodus 7-9

**MARK:** Exodus 9:27; Pharaoh admits that he had sinned.

**LEARN:**  The order of the plagues were 1) water turned to blood, 2) frogs, 3) gnats, 4) flies, 5) Egyptian livestock die, 6) boils, 7) hail. Chapter 7 begins with the Lord saying to Moses that he will harden Pharaoh’s heart, however he does not do so until after the 6th plague. Pharaoh had showed in plague after plague a resilience to the word of the Lord from Moses and hardened his heart time and again against the Lord and Moses. The magicians of Pharaoh could not produce gnats by their secret arts showing the power of the Lord over all other earthly and spiritual powers. Pharaoh’s magicians even told him “This is the finger of God,” (Ex. 8:19) but he did not listen nor humble himself.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord used Moses, who was 80, and Aaron, who was now 83, to speak to Pharaoh and lead his people out of bondage in Egypt. All throughout Moses’ life the Lord upheld in him in what he was given to do, even well into old age (he died at 120). The Lord will do the same for us. Pharaoh mocked God with false repentance saying that he would let the Israelites go but in fact Pharaoh does not repent, that is turn from his sin, but instead continues on more stubbornly in it. Continuing in sin makes the heart hard. Do you mock God by saying you repent in one breath, but in the next willingly going back to your sin? If so, your heart is hardening and it is in great spiritual peril. Repent, and turn that you may live.

**PRAY:** O Lord Jesus Christ, soften my heart to hear your word and repent of my sin. Strengthen my heart to seek to do your will. Amen.

**February 4**

**READ:** Psalm 61 and Exodus 10-12

**MARK:** Exodus 12:7-13; the Passover feast is instituted. This prefigures Christ and his sacrifice.

**LEARN:** The final plagues are thus: 8) locusts, 9) darkness, 10) death of the firstborn. Pharaoh continues to give lip service to Moses saying that he has sinned and asking Moses to have God relent but immediately afterward changes his mind. It is as though Pharaoh wants to manipulate Moses and God. In the 8th plague Pharaoh was going to let the men of Israel go and worship but didn’t want to let the women and children go and worship, holding them as ransom for the men’s return. The plague of locusts was sent. In the 9th plague, Pharaoh was willing to let the people go and worship but not with their flocks and herds. The plague of darkness descended. In chapter 12, the Passover was instituted and the plague of the firstborn came upon Egypt. For 430 years the people of Israel lived in bondage in Egypt.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** See how the Lord kept his word all throughout this time. The Lord would send signs and wonders to make Pharaoh let his people go and they would leave with the riches of Egypt. The account of the Exodus is the story of religious freedom. The main request of Pharaoh was simply to let the Israelites go and have the freedom to worship. Countless wars over the centuries have been fought for the same cause. In our country we enjoy so many religious freedoms and we should count our blessings. At the same time we should pray for those in other countries where they are not free to gather and worship our Triune God. The Lord keeps his word and ultimately he will lead all who confess faith in him to the freedom of our eternal promised land where no one rules but God alone.

**PRAY:** Eternal Father, send your Spirit into all peoples of the earth that they might know you and become free to worship you and you alone in spirit and in truth. In Jesus name. Amen.

**February 5**

**READ:** Psalm 62 and Exodus 13-15

**MARK:** Psalm 62:1-2; Our soul waits in silence for God alone. Exodus 14:14; The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.

**LEARN:** The feast of unleavened bread is begun so that the people of Israel remember the Exodus. All the firstborn are to be set apart and shall be the Lord’s. The requirement of redeeming the firstborn and consecrating them to life effectively prohibited human sacrifice which was common among pagan religions. The offering of a lamb in place of a human points to Jesus Christ, the Lamb offered by God on our behalf. The bones of Joseph were taken up with them and traveled back to the Promised Land. Pharaoh and 600 of his chariots came after Israel as they encamped by the Red Sea but the Lord intervened again and held them back with the cloud that then stood behind the people of Israel and before Pharaoh’s host. In chapter 15 we have the song of Moses and Miriam, Aaron’s sister who sang of the Lord’s triumphs. These songs, or canticles of the Old Testament were ways that the people of Israel taught future generations of the faithful actions of the Lord. Our songs and hymns today do just the same. We recount the faithfulness of the Lord and sing the praise of the One who has triumphed so gloriously for us.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The hardness of Pharaoh’s heart surpasses the hardness of all others in scripture. Though it is recounted as God hardening Pharaoh’s heart, he showed a continual behavior of hardening his own heart against the Lord’s word out of the mouth of Moses. It was not as though the Lord did not send his word to soften Pharaoh’s heart. He did through Moses, but Pharaoh continually and willingly chose to do that which was against God’s word. Simply put, Pharaoh did not believe and would not believe. Pharaoh had become his own god and no other God was going to tell him what to do. Calcification of the heart happens to believers too when they give in to the temptation to doubt God at his word and choose to sin. Sin hardens the heart to hear God’s word and the measures employed to break through that hardness are like the increased severity of the plagues. This is seen in Matthew 18 and practiced in the church when one who is in open and unrepentant sin. We pray and are to work diligently for freedom, which inverse to the ‘world’ means – repentance.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, we praise and thank you for being the Lamb of God that takes away our sin. Lend your Spirit to all that all might repent and lean on you for forgiveness and salvation. Amen.

**February 6**

**READ:** Psalm 63 and Exodus 16-18

**MARK:** Psalm 63:3; your steadfast love is better than life. Exodus 16:3; the people grumble against the Lord.

**LEARN:**

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** How quickly we too grumble against God even though his hand is right there providing in great ways for us and our loved ones. Moses instructed Aaron to take some manna and put it in a jar to keep for future generations so that they would know how the Lord provides. It is good for us to recount how the Lord had provided in the past to be assured that he will provide again in the future. See how quick Jethro, a priest of other gods, was to believe in the Lord Most High, yet how resilient Pharaoh was to believe and how dull the Israelites were to trust. Why this is, we don’t know other than it is the Lord’s will. May we be quick to believe, fast to repent, and slow to doubt.

**PRAY:** Oh Father of all mercies, give me a heart that trusts your word and gives thanks for your provisions of body and soul. In Jesus Name. Amen.

**February 7**

**READ:** Psalm 64 and Exodus 19-21

**MARK:** Exodus 20:1-17 are the Ten Commandments.

**LEARN:** The Israelites camp at the base of Mount Sinai and there they hear the commands of the Lord. They respond by saying, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do,” (Ex. 19:8). On the third day of their consecration Mt. Sinai was wrapped in spoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. So holy even was the mountain that the priests were not to approach the mountain lest the Lord break out against them. The Lord commanded them not to make goes of silver or gold nor of hewn stone and chapter 21 was about laws for slaves and other judgements when harm and property are involved. Notice that every Hebrew who willingly becomes a slave is to be set free on the seventh year.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** We take for granted how accessible God is to us on account of Christ. Our baptisms have made it so. Jesus is our mediator who permits us to approach our Heavenly Father with all boldness and confidence.Israel was a theocracy meaning that God ruled all things, even the civil affairs and the common courts. Exodus 21 begins to go into the detail of legal code. One can note how simple and proportional the retribution is for the crime. See also how God considers and unborn child a human being underneath his law.

**PRAY:** O Lord, deliver and consecrate us this day in the renewal of our baptism that we may lead lives that honor you. Amen.

**February 8**

**READ:** Psalm 65 and Exodus 22-24

**MARK:** Exodus 22:29; The first born son is given to the Lord. Exodus 24:7; All the Lord has said the Israelites promise to do.

**LEARN:** The Sabbath was designed to refresh land, animals, and humanity. Luther says, “Man was especially created for the knowledge and worship of God; for the Sabbath was not ordained for sheep and cows but for men, that in them the knowledge of God might be developed and might increase. Therefore although man lost his knowledge of God, nevertheless God wanted this command about sanctifying the Sabbath to remain in force. On the seventh day he wanted men to busy themselves both with his word and with the other forms of worship established by him, so that we might give first thought to the fact that this nature was created chiefly for acknowledging and glorifying God.” [AE 1:80].

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In our fast paced world rest and rejuvenation is something that only happens on a beach in the Caribbean, or so we are lead to believe. While it is not a command that we observe the Sabbath day and entirely rest from our work since Christ has fulfilled the commands of the law perfectly for us, nonetheless the benefit of observing a Sabbath rest is still there for our taking. The motto is work hard for six days and rest in the Lord’s word on the seventh. Dwell in his gifts, rest in him and let his word rejuvenate you for the work week to come.

**PRAY:** Gracious Lord, give me rest in your word. Amen.

**February 9**

**READ:** Psalm 66 and Exodus 25-27

**MARK:** Exodus 25:22; The Lord’s presence resided above the mercy seat which was located on the top of the Ark of the Covenant.

**LEARN:** Moses gave instruction for contributions for the tabernacle and dimensions and detail for building the Ark of the Covenant, the Table for the bread of the Presence, the Golden Lampstand, the Tabernacle itself and the Bronze Altar. The details of the fine craftsmanship of this project for the Lord were accounted here. Prominent in all of these instructions is the significance of their purpose and what they point to. Possessions of fine metals and fibers are returned as offerings. The Ark is constructed pointing to the near-dwelling of God’s presence. Bread and light are daily tended to directing the Israelites to focus the provisions of life that come from God’s hand. Sin is atoned as blood is shed and poured out at the Bronze altar pointing to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. The Lord here provides a way for mortal/sinful man to approach an eternal/holy God. In fact, this is the only way.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** See how Christ in his body and ministry fulfilled every aspect and meaning of the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle. He offered up his body and life willingly. He was the bread that came from heaven and the light of the world. The cross was the altar and himself the ultimate sacrifice. God dwelling in the flesh absolute propitiation of our sins. The curtain is drawn back and unholy people now made holy by his blood can approach the mercy seat of God. This is the way. Jesus is the only way.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, you establish all things to benefit us with your gifts. We praise you for the mercy shown us through your shed blood.

**February 10**

**READ:** Psalm 67 and Exodus 28-30

**MARK:** Exodus 30:17-21; the Bronze Basin is made prefiguring baptism.

**LEARN:** The priestly garments are made and the priests are consecrated in them. Blood and anointing oil is sprinkled both on the priests and on the garments. Everything used in the Tabernacle was consecrated for holy use and not common. Our God is holy and holiness demands perfection. The tabernacle and the rites and worship held therein reflected the holiness and perfection of God. Strict rules were set in place for the Altar of incense and not just anyone can offer the incense and only authorized incense is to be used. This is what Zechariah (John the Baptist’s father) had the privilege to offer at the temple. However, while offering the incense, an angel appeared to him an instructed him to name his son, John.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Israelite Tabernacle and priestly dress looked markedly different from the pagan worship all around. When performing religious rites, the sons of Aaron would dress ornately while the pagan priests would dress in little or nothing at all while performing their immoral rites. Tabernacle worship was other-worldly, and rightly so! God’s presence dwelt there on the mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant. The next time you come to church grab one of those Liturgy explanation cards in the pew and reread why we do what we do.

**PRAY:** Gracious Lord, thank you for anointing me in my baptism that I may serve you in holiness and approach you with all boldness and confidence as dear children ask their dear father. Amen.

**February 11**

**READ:** Psalm 68 and Exodus 31-33

**MARK:** Psalm 68:35; God gives power and strength to His people. Exodus 33:17-23; God shows his backside to Moses.

**LEARN:** Strict laws were set up to safeguard the day of rest. Those who profane the Sabbath Day don’t just profane those 24 hours of rest but profane the work of salvation God has done in promising and giving eternal rest. The Sabbath rest pointed toward the eternal day of rest in heaven won by the savior. It didn’t take too long and the Israelites were out chasing after other gods. Moses’s older brother Aaron fashions a golden calf then they worship and feast before it. Exodus 32:6 says that after they offered their burnt offerings and peace offerings to the golden calf, they rose up to play, meaning that general chaos ensued. Moses returns from the mountain and burns the calf and grinds it into powder, making the people drink it in their water signifying their entire pollution of their sin. Not only is their sin upon them but in them too.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** See how belligerent these people were to the Lord and his commands. Moses is gone for just a little too long and they backslide into horrid idolatry. Aaron lies to Moses in order to justify himself by saying, I threw the gold into the fire and this calf came out. Yeah, right. Moses intercedes on behalf of the people pleading, “But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written,” (Exodus 32:32). Moses puts himself between the sinful people and the Lord’s holiness. Moses intercedes and the Lord shows him the backside of his glory. Our intercessor, our intermediary is Christ Jesus. We have one better than Moses for we behold the glory of God in the face of Christ. May we always quickly turn from our sin and flee for refuge to our savior Jesus Christ.

**PRAY:**  Lord Jesus Christ, my only mediator, look with compassion on my sin and do not hold it against me. Have mercy Lord. Amen.

**February 12**

**READ:** Psalm 69 and Exodus 34-36

**MARK:** Exodus 34:6-7; Luther’s Small Catechism close of the commandments.

**LEARN:** Moses makes new tablets of the covenant and the covenant is renewed. Specific warning is given against becoming like the pagan nations around them such as the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. The Lord goes into specific detail instructing them, both male and female, not to “whore after their gods.” One of the prominent goddesses of the Canaanites was Asherah, the sister-wife goddess to the storm god Baal. She would be worshiped in association with trees, groves and wooden poles and both the physical acts of worship to Baal and Asherah were sexual in nature. So popular was the worship of Baal and Asherah that the only era where archeologists have not unearthed such idol figurines were during the period of the return from exile underneath Ezra and Nehemiah’s reforms.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Moses veils himself because the Israelites, in their sinfulness, are terrified to see a manifestation of God’s glory and presence, but St. Paul reminds us that “when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed… and we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image,” (2 Cor. 3:16,18). Because of Christ, we see the Lord and live in His glorious grace.

**PRAY:** Oh Lord my God, let me see You in Christ under the veil of the incarnation. Amen.

**February 13**

**READ:** Psalm 70 and Exodus 37-38

**MARK:** Exodus 37:6; Mercy seat. Exodus 38:26; the number of men 20 years and older.

**LEARN:** The Ark and other furniture of the Tabernacle is made to exact specifications. The Ark, the Table, the Lampstand, the Altar of Incense, the Altar of Burnt Offering, the Bronze Basin and the court. All of these materials came from the people of Israel which they had taken in the exodus from Egypt. The gold that was used for the golden calf did not come from the plunder but from their everyday jewelry. Now these items formerly used by Israel’s captors to who kept them in bondage now provide a way to free them from the bonds of sin.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** There are many details and lists of things that one might gloss over. Often the Psalmist speaks of the Lord covering or sheltering us with his wings (Psalm 61:4). Coming to the mind of any Israelite would be the Mercy Seat on top of the Ark where the Cherubim would cover the Mercy Seat with the shelter of their wings. So to say that the Lord shelters or covers one with his wings is to say that that one dwells most intimately with God. This isn’t just a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings in a storm, it is dwelling with God Most High.

**PRAY:** O Lord God, most holy are you! Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings! Amen.

**February 14**

**READ:** Psalm 71 and Exodus 39-40

**MARK:** Psalm 71:1-2, 8; This is part of our hymnal liturgy on LSB 295, “Daily Prayer; Morning”

**LEARN:** The priestly garments are completed and so is the Tabernacle. These garments set the priests apart from their fellow countrymen to do the Lord’s will. The Tabernacle is completed and the glory of the Lord dwells within. The cloud descended and his divine presence filled the place and inaugurated all the items of the tent to be used for his purposes only. Now unholy people have a safe way to approach a holy God and that is through the mediation of priests and the life blood of the sacrifices made there.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** You are a priest too, made so by your baptism into Christ. Do you stand out from the world in what you say and do? What you say and do should look different than the rest of the world around you for you are a priest in the royal priesthood of Christ. The Tabernacle and the glory of the Lord filling all things there culminates the book of Exodus as the reason for the Lord freeing his people to be his own. He has chosen to dwell with his people and has made a way for them to come to him. In the New Covenant of Christ’s body and blood he chooses us still and provides a way for us to approach him in holiness through the means of the Word and Sacrament. If you had neither the Word nor the Sacrament you could not come near to God. Thanks be to God his gifts are afforded to you in abundance and may we share his gifts with those who know him not.

**PRAY:** Bless me, O Savior, and consecrate me for service in your kingdom. Amen.

**February 15**

**READ:** Psalm 72 and Leviticus 1-3

**MARK:** Psalm 72:20; book three of the Psalms now begins. Leviticus 2:13; the salt of the covenant must remain.

**LEARN:** Animal sacrifices were commanded by God as a precursor to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. Animals presented to God for the burnt offering must be perfect. They were called not to sacrifice because they merited forgiveness of sins before God, but because they merited forgiveness of sins according to the righteousness of the Law, so that those for whom they were made might not be excluded from the people of Israel. Therefore, for a trespass, the sacrifices were called sin offerings and burnt offerings. The sacrifice of Christ dying on the cross has been enough for the sins of the whole world. There is no need for other sacrifices, as though Christ’s sacrifice were not enough for our sins. People are not justified because of any other sacrifice but because of the one sacrifice of Christ, if they believe that they have been redeemed by this sacrifice.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Animals are sacrifices and blood is poured out, thrown and splattered. Fat is burnt up and grain is offered up. Rigid were the requirements and the rituals. Serious were the offenses and great were the benefits. It is tempting to get caught up in the ritual and the rites or hold them in contempt without knowing the reason for them. The next time you come to church and participate in the liturgy, think of why it is that you confess your sins and let the meaning of the absolution rest with you. Focus on the words of the creed and the Lord’s Prayer and their meanings. Dwell on the reality that comes to dwell with you in the Sacrament of the Altar. The things of the Divine Service is how God connects with you.

**PRAY:** Thank you Lord, for the salutary gifts you give to us. Let them be used to strengthen our faith in you and our love for one another. Amen.

**February 16**

**READ:** Psalm 73 and Leviticus 4-6

**MARK:** Psalm 73:26; God is our strength and portion forever.

**LEARN:** Imagine the combination of a church, a slaughterhouse, and an open-air kitchen and you will begin to form a picture of the Tabernacle. Each day, the priests sacrificed animals and grain offerings. On feast days, they made more extensive sacrifices based on the laws God gave Moses. When people brought their personal sacrifices to the Lord, priests offered these as well. Everyone sinned and everyone had a way to make payment for their sin so that they would not be put out of the assembly. When the sacrifice was made, God would have fellowship with his people again. Thank God the sacrifice has been made once and for all by Christ Jesus!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The offerings we make today may seem vastly different from the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament. However, in at least one way, our offerings and the offerings of the OT worked the same; both offerings have fed the Lord’s ministers and their families. As you make your offering to the Lord, remember what he offered up for you – His only Son! Think of the constant blessings of body and soul the Lord bestows on you each day through Christ. Jesus made the perfect sacrifice once for all upon the cross. The Lord nourished the priests of the old covenant by the sacrifices, but today he nourishes the priesthood of believers through the sacrifice of Jesus, our Passover Lamb.

**PRAY:** Father in heaven, we thank you for your surpassing gifts of grace and fellowship, which come through Christ’s atoning sacrifice. Amen.

**February 17**

**READ:** Psalm 74 and Leviticus 7-9

**MARK:** Leviticus 8:14; Aaron and his sons lay their hands on the sin offering

**LEARN:** Leviticus 7 concludes God’s manual of offerings, a precise manual meant to be strictly followed by priests and individuals. Here is God’s framework to prepare an unholy people to dwell with a holy God. By his incarnation and atoning sacrifice, Jesus Christ today is our Immanuel, “God with us.” In chapter 8 Moses consecrates Aaron as high priest and Aaron’s sons as priests. Today Jesus is our High Priest and we come before him as sinners in need of consecration. Peace offerings marked “peace” between God and man and included a meal shared by family and invited guests.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Aaron begins his priestly duties with God’s approval. In the Divine Service, God’s people today share much in common with God’s OT people. Like them, we come before God and humbly confess our sins. We also seek anew the promise of forgiveness offered by God’s grace. In Holy Baptism God washes us clean. He anoints us with the Holy Spirit. Christ himself consecrates us as priests and we have good works to do and this is a very good thing.

**PRAY:** Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Amen.

**February 18**

**READ:** Psalm 75 and Leviticus 10-12

**MARK:** Leviticus 11:12-20; see all the fish, birds, and insects they were not to eat. This makes sense.

LEARN: Nadab and Abihu bring unauthorized fire into God’s presence and pay with their lives for failing to distinguish between the holy and the common. The story of Nadab and Abihu’s thoughtlessness shows us that God is present in grace and in wrath. The god who justifies sinners also condemns those who will not sanctify the Lord. God’s people, the beneficiaries of his grace, should serve the Lord in reverence and awe. Dietary restrictions were put in place so that God might protect his people from disease and death. As seen in this section, the wages of sin is death, (Romans 6:23a). Disobedience of God’s Word results in death. But in his word, he grants life and fellowship by his grace.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** One has to think, “How could the Israelites ever remain ritually clean?” It be sure it would have proved very difficult. Reflect on how these laws preserved the health and well-being of the chosen nation of Israel. By avoiding things that might cause sickness and disease, they in effect, practiced health care by means of the Levitical Law and the inspection of the priests. Infectious diseases and ailments would be kept at bay and God’s people alive and well. The law sanctifies us, that is purifies us as we keep it, but not as purely as the saving and perfectly sanctifying work of the Gospel that has washed over us in our baptisms.

**PRAY:** Merciful Father, we thank You for the rich blessings we find in your word. There we see how you placed your Son under the law, that we might have rest and peace. Amen.

**February 19**

**READ:** Psalm 76 and Leviticus 13-15

**MARK:** Leviticus 15:31; cleanliness laws.

**LEARN:** No one English word covers all the forms of skin diseases that are covered in these chapters. God commanded his priests to distinguish between the clean and unclean. They acted as religious officials not a doctors prescribing treatment. The most serious of skin diseases had to give warning of their infectious disease by crying out “Unclean, unclean,” with even their hand covering their mouths (Lev. 13:45). Disease is a consequence of the fall into sin which isolates God’s people outside the boundaries he established but he provides a means to readmit those who are healed.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Infectious skin diseases, whether of the body or of clothing make individuals unclean. Priestly legislation keeps God’s people clean, so that God might dwell among them and bless them. Here we see God’s grace and his hand of protection providing guidelines for what is clean and unclean for his OT people. In Holy Baptism, God clothes people today with Christ’s righteousness and holiness. Christ strips off our old self and we are clothed with him.

**PRAY:** Strengthen us, we pray, and purify us with your word and sacraments to eternal life. Amen.

**February 20**

**READ:** Psalm 77 and Leviticus 16-18

**MARK:** Leviticus 16:20-22; the scape goat is sent out into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement

**LEARN:** The Day of Atonement was celebrated annually and it included a day long period of self-denial. Many walked around in sackcloth and ashes lamenting over the sins they had committed. The blood of the atonement cleansed the places, the people and the priests of their sins and pointed forward to the atoning work of the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – Jesus. Leviticus 18 clearly defines the only lawful sexual relations are the ones between a monogamous husband and wife. The phrase “uncover nakedness” is a euphemism for sexual relations. It is likely that the pagan neighbors of the Israelites engaged in all kinds of sexual perversions and they undoubtedly made their evil ways into the Israelite nation.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Many figures of scripture have perverted the will of God for man and woman in marriage by going outside the bounds of what God has ordained as good and God-pleasing sexual relations. Though the Lord may permit plural marriage or marriage of close relatives as was the case with Jacob, the Lord never promotes it. It is unconscionable to see Christians promote other designs of sexual relations other than one man and one woman as husband and wife for life. The consequence for going against God’s order for sexuality for the people’s abominable actions is that the land will, “vomit” them out indicating the illness or sickness of their actions.

**PRAY:** Lord of the Church, forgive me and protect my heart from all impurity. Keep me from sexual sin by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

**February 21**

**READ:** Psalm 78 and Leviticus 19-21

**MARK:** Leviticus 19:2; be holy as the Lord your God is holy.

**LEARN:** God wants holiness reflected in the lives and conduct of his people. Seed, animals, fabric and many other things are not to be mixed. No one is to give their child up to the god Molech nor turn to mediums and necromancers, those who conjure up the dead. God’s people are in every way to be different, separate, distinct from the worldly neighbors around them. Priests are to be especially holy and have added restrictions on them and their daily life.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Sexual immorality defiles individuals, making them unclean. Because these individuals are God’s holy people, their sexual conduct desecrates God’s name as well. Today, the closest thing we have to sacrificing children on Molech’s altar is the sin of abortion offered to the idol of personal convenience. God calls us to honor him with our bodies, to refrain from sexual immorality, and to offer our lives in humble service.

**PRAY:** Lord God, you are a light in the darkness of this world. Forgive our sins. Send your Holy Spirit to bless and keep us. Amen.

**February 22**

**READ:** Psalm 79 and Leviticus 22-24

**MARK:** Psalm 79:5-8; do not remember our former iniquities.

**LEARN:** Our God is a holy God who shares his holiness with his people. By keeping God’s ordinances, the Israelites reflect God’s love back to him and to one another. Today, God brings his people into his holy presence through the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. By his word, God sanctifies us and makes us holy, that we may present ourselves unblemished to God as living sacrifices. Leviticus 23 represents a liturgical calendar for the Israelites. All such festivals and Sabbaths prefigure Christ. The life of Christ shapes the Christian liturgical calendar, granting rest not only rest for our weary bodies but rest for our souls.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In Christ, every day is the day of salvation. Yet the patters of our holidays continue to serve us by serving God’s purposes. They call to mind God’s blessings. They organize our thoughts around the works of his mercy. And, perhaps most important, they draw God’s people together in celebration, to encourage one another through His Word. When the pace of life or the demands of the holidays overwhelm you, pause and remember the Sabbath rest and the feast of blessings provided for you through the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus Christ. Ritual celebrations remind the Israelites of God’s blessing of the harvest. Today, the food that sustains us is likewise a gift from his kindness. At every meal, offer thanks to God for his generous gift of daily bread and blessing.

**PRAY:** Lord, may we always see the life of Christ reflected in our service, since he comes near to us through his precious word and sacraments. Amen.

**February 23**

**READ:** Psalm 80 and Leviticus 25-27

**MARK:**

**LEARN:** Just as humankind needs a Sabbath rest, so the land needs rest. Because the land belongs to God, it was returned to him every seventh year. All we have belongs to the Lord, our Maker and Redeemer. The Year of Jubilee provides God’s people with restored freedoms. Lands are returned to their original owners, slaves are freed, land is given rest, and loans are written off. In this way, the Lord emphasizes freedom, family, property rights, and devotion, which make a nation strong. Leviticus ends with showing how all of God’s people are involved in the stewardship of God’s house. Based on how God has blessed them, each Israelite provides materials and finances for the maintenance of God’s sanctuary for the ongoing operation of the Divine Service.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In Christ we find our jubilee. In him our sins are forgiven and we receive an eternal inheritance. The epitome of God’s grace is seen at the cross. We cling to his word, especially his promise that his people belong to him. We return to him our offerings of thanks and praise and give back to him the things he has first given to us 1) his word of promise that sustains in our souls, and 2) material gifts and income that sustain us in our bodies.

**PRAY:** What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will take the cup of salvation and will call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the Lord’s house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Amen.

**February 24**

**READ:** Psalm 81 and Numbers 1-3

**MARK:** Numbers 3:38; All the tribes encamped around the Tabernacle.

**LEARN:** There is really little division between the book of Leviticus and the book of Numbers other than they are about what can fit on a scroll. Numbers is Leviticus’s continuation. The Lord sets the Levites apart for special service. Their duty is spiritual, not military. God charges the Levites with moving, maintaining, and protecting his tabernacle, God’s dwelling place. As an added means of protection, he instructs the Israelites to encamp around the Tabernacle with the Levites functioning as the final defense against defilement.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Through a census, the Lord shows Moses that Israel has grown mightily. However the strength of God’s people does not depend on size and military strength but on his word and grace. How good to know that God counts you righteous in his sight through his Son, who lived perfectly for you and died as the atoning sacrifice for your sin. In Christ, God numbers you among his people through your Baptism, providing all you need for your earthly journey to the promised land of heaven.

**PRAY:** Praise be to God, who sets us apart by his Holy Spirit, and who guards the faith he has worked in us through our Baptism. Amen.

**February 25**

**READ:** Psalm 82 and Numbers 4-6

**MARK:** Numbers 6:22-27; the Aaronic blessing

**LEARN:** Some commentators think that test for adultery in Numbers 5 is unfair and demeaning of women. However such an interpretation fails to appreciate the serious nature of adultery and its consequences. Adultery undermines people’s lives in serious ways; trust is destroyed, inheritance comes into question, disease is spread, and children might be born without fatherly care. Adultery tears families and nations apart. Because women by nature bear children they carry a special burden in such circumstances, which mad them the focus of this ordeal. All this heightens the special burden on husbands and fathers to properly love and care for wives and daughters.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Today we take vows at important times: Baptism, confirmation, wedding day, citizenship and government service. When you take a vow, honor the Lord by keeping your word. God who does not take lightly any vow made to him, faithfully keeps his vows, including that of the promise in Genesis 3:15, which promises a savior.

**PRAY:** Almighty Father, keep us sexually pure, whether we are married or unmarried. Amen.

**February 26**

**READ:** Psalm 83 and Numbers 7-9

**MARK:** Numbers 8:14; The Levites are separated and are the Lords.

**LEARN:** Israel’s sin is transferred to the Levites, who transfer this sin to sacrificial animals. Only by the blood of sacrificial animals are the Levites cleansed of their sin and allowed to serve as priests of the Most High God. Our God is a God of order. He gives an age requirement for performing the work in his tabernacle. A Levite could begin service at age 25. Once he reached 50, he could assist the younger Levites but could no longer do the work required of the Tabernacle. Just as the Lord provided the Sabbath for his people’s rest, he provided for the Levite’s retirement.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Does the church today provide appropriate care for the health of faithful church workers? We have the Concordia Health Plan which congregations can choose to care for church workers while they are working but not into retirement for the cost would be burdensome. Health care is expensive and there is little way around the expense. Nonetheless, we are to support each other in the household of God. Whatever our station in life, we entrust our days and burdens to God’s most loving hand.

**PRAY:** Lord God, Eternal Father, to you I entrust all my days. Fail me not, for to you I commend my soul. In Jesus Name. Amen.

**February 27**

**READ:** Psalm 84 and Numbers 10-12

**MARK:** Numbers 11:29-30; Would that all the Lord’s people be prophets.

**LEARN:** The Israelites greedily hoard the quail, gathering at least six bushels per person. They eat some and dry the rest to eat later. Meat replaces God in their minds, just as wealth replaces god in Christ’s parable of the rich fool in Luke 12. Job noted, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away.” In all circumstances the Lord leads us to confess, “Blessed be the name of the Lord,” (Job 1:21). He truly doe supply all our needs and bless us.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Sometimes, obeying God causes pain and suffering. When we are tempted to grumble, think of Christ at Gethsemane and how he turned his pains into prayers. Mediate on how he willing submitted to the Father’s will for the sake of our salvation. You may be frustrated at times and become angry with the Lord as was Moses but thank God that he is not like us. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

**PRAY:** Lord, you command us to call upon you in the day of trouble and you promise to deliver us. Thank you for hearing our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**February 28**

**READ:** Luke 2:29-32 and Numbers 13-15

**MARK:** Numbers 14:19; Moses intercedes for the people.

**LEARN:** God permits spies to enter the Promised Land. Twelve spies, one from each tribe are sent. Among them is Moses’s successor, Joshua. The land is just as God had described it to Moses, flowing with milk and honey, yet ten of the twelve spies fear the inhabitants of the land, thereby doubting God. The people complain with new vigor and Moses intercedes. The people of Israel never could stop their complaining and grumbling. They couldn’t stop sinning though the Lord gave them the fullness of the law to halt them.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Just as the Lord gave his people a challenging mission, anticipating great faithfulness, he likewise challenges us. As the Lord grants you opportunity for bold service, meet that challenge with diligence. When you err, diligently repent. Your Lord is generous in mercy. His enduring mission is to bless and provide for you has he has done in Christ Jesus. When you face challenges, do not collapse in doubt. Instead, call on your gracious Lord, who redeemed you and will lead you.

**PRAY:** Lord, let us never despise your word and refuse to hear it. Give us life according to your word. Amen.

**March 1**

**READ:** Isaiah 64:1-9 and Numbers 16-18

**MARK:** It was not only Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and the 250 men who stood with them who perished, but also “their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods.”

**LEARN:** Do children, in fact, pay for the sins of their fathers? Numbers 16 says “yes.” Numbers 14:18 says “yes.” Deuteronomy 24:16 says “no,” but that is speaking of man’s judgment against one another. As it turns out, sin is a much bigger category than we might like to admit. Sin is not just individual actions or non-actions (“…for what I have done and for what I have left undone…”). It is also the very condition of our being as fallen creatures. We are not sinners because we win; we sin because we are sinners. Particularly, this passage points out that our sin corrupts not only ourselves, but those around us, as well. Practically speaking, if your dad is an alcoholic, then you had better watch out because you might well be predisposed to alcoholism, too. We may speak of this in terms of genetics or psychology, but when it comes down to it, it is simply sin. Sin affects us as entire people. It corrodes our very minds and our very blood. It courses through us as a poison, and the same poison that runs through your blood will run through your children’s, as well. How great, therefore, are repentance and mercy! What could possibly break the natural downward spiral from generation to generation? What could rid us of this poison? What could restore us to be the sort of people we are supposed to be? Only the God-Man Jesus Christ. He has, and he will.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” This statement spoken at the imposition of ashes this evening shatters any delusions of grandeur that we might have about our lives. It places our lives within the larger context of the Fall, the cross, the resurrection—the entire biblical story. Similarly, Isaiah prophesies “We are the clay, and you are our potter; we are the work of your hand. Be not so terribly angry, O Lord, and remember not iniquity forever.” We must return to dust—yes, Lord. This is how it must be for us who have rebelled against you. But as you did not abandon your Son to Sheol (Acts 2:27), do not abandon us.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, do not abandon us; for if you do, we will quickly bring all to naught. Save us for the sake of your passion and your cross, which you owned for us, in order to own us. Amen.

**March 2**

**READ:** Psalm 85 and Numbers 19-21

**MARK:** “Restore us *again*, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us” (Ps. 85:4). The psalmist trusts in God’s mercy, for God has promised to be merciful to his people. He trusts even despite his difficult circumstances, which he believes are also directly from God.

**LEARN:** “For the wages of sin is death,” Saint Paul reminds us (Romans 6:23a). Death is staring God’s people in the face every time they would approach their holy God (Num. 19). Their sin and its chilling effects are laid out right before them. For an unholy people to meet their holy God, the unholy must literally die. Why, then, have the Temple sacrifices ceased? “…but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23b). The sacrifices of lambs and goats are no longer required, for “Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. Raised from the dead, he will never die again. Death has no more dominion over him” (NT Canticle). The old system of approaching God has been fulfilled; the death has been paid. The perfect, once-for-all sacrifice has been made on our behalf.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Because of what they did in Num. 20:8-13, God forbids Moses and Aaron from entering the Promised Land. It might seem a minor transgression, but when Moses hit the rock with his staff rather than simply commanding it to spring forth water as the Lord had commanded him, he demonstrated that he did not trust God at his Word. This is rather unwise, and the outcome for this sort of thing can be rather severe!

**PRAY:** Lord God, heavenly Father, by the power of your Holy Spirit, enable us to hear your Word and to respond in righteousness. Hear us for the sake of your Son; amen.

**March 3**

**READ:** Psalm 86 and Numbers 22-24

**MARK:** By what God does Balaam bless or curse? Although he is not an Israelite, he calls upon “the Lord my God!” (Num. 22:18).

**LEARN:** Balaam is one of those strange figures in the OT. Melchizedek, king of Salem (“peace”) was “a priest of God Most High” (Gen. 14:18); we do not know where his story begins and ends, nor how he came to know the Lord, but Hebrews draws a parallel between him and Christ (Heb. 7:1-3). Similarly, we do not know how Balaam came to know the Lord—he could easily know *of* the Lord because of the Israelites who were moving through the land, but that doesn’t necessarily explain how he became a *believer* in the Lord. Despite his origin, source of knowledge, and even his sin of greed and idolatry, still the Lord works through Balaam for the sake of his people. Oh the mystery and the wonders of God!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Though the nations—indeed, the world—have their own gods (e.g. government, karma, greed, the denial of God), the day will soon come when no one can deny that Jesus is the Lord; all will bow the knee to him.

**PRAY:** “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name;” amen (Ps. 86:11).

**March 4**

**READ:** Psalm 87 and Numbers 25-27

**MARK:** Zimri and Cozbi must have been quite close to one another for the spear to go through both of them (let the reader understand; Num. 25:7-8).

**LEARN:** If you have a Lutheran Study Bible, see the note on Num. 26:5-51. To summarize, we may compare this list and its numbers with that of Num. 1. We find that in two generations Manasseh increased 64%, 62% of Simeon’s male population died (quite possibly by the plague at Shittim, Num. 25), and Judah remains the strongest.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** As Ps. 87 demonstrates, the Lord calls those who are not his people to be his people. He calls the nations—the Gentiles; the pagans; those who are not his chosen, Jewish people—to himself and grants grace even to them. This is wonderful news for us who have received Christ, not by virtue of our Jewish heritage, but because of Christ’s ever-expanding kingdom within the world.

**PRAY:** Holy Spirit, continue to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify all the elect around the world, that Christ’s salvation may ever be proclaimed and his Church enlarged. Amen.

**March 5**

**READ:** Psalm 88 and Numbers 28-30

**MARK:** Even amid Psalm 88’s gloom and deep darkness, the psalmist still addresses the Lord as “God of my salvation.”

**LEARN:** “…[O]ne must bear in mind that, like all of the Bible, it [Psalm 88] comes to us from the Holy Spirit. If death is portrayed in this psalm as a very bad thing, then the Holy Spirit wants us to regard death as a very bad thing. One occasionally meets pagans and unbelievers who avow that they are not afraid to die. Well, this psalm suggests that maybe they should be. In line after line of Psalm [88], a writer under the guidance and impulse of the Holy Spirit says, in the sharpest terms, that death is a most terrifying prospect…

“…Jesus took on Himself, not our pristine, unfalled nature, but our nature as tainted at the ancient tree and throughout the rest of our history. So the fear of death expressed in this psalm is certainly a fear that Jesus felt. If, in addition, as Holy Scripture indicates in so many places, death is but the outward expression of sin and our alienation from God, then a deeper understanding of sin must surely imply a more profound understanding of death. And who understood sin more than Jesus? Likewise was His perception of death vastly more ample and accurate than our own. And, as He knew more about the power of death than any of the rest of us, there is every reason to believe that He felt this fear of death more than the rest of us possibly could” (Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “The Lamb, the Lamb, O Father, where’s the sacrifice? Faith sees, believes God will provide the Lamb of price! Worthy is the Lamb whose death makes me His own! The Lamb is reigning on His throne!” (*LSB* 547:1; cf. Num. 28:1-8)

**PRAY:** O Lord who prayed once in the Garden, “My Father, fi it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will,” you know what it is to despair and to fear death. By your resurrection you have conquered death for our sake. By your Holy Spirit create within us sure faith and trust in your salvation which extends far beyond the bitter end of this life, for in you we shall see God face to face. Amen.

**March 6**

**READ:** Psalm 89 and Numbers 31-33

**MARK:** Numbers 31 actually describes a “holy war” (in Arabic, “jihad”). However, unlike the so-called holy wars of later, and more recent, history, Numbers 31 describes a holy war which was actually commanded by the Lord himself. We dare not claim that same authority today apart from the Lord’s direct command (which he has not given in a very long time).

**LEARN:** Psalm 89 juxtaposes creation, God’s covenant and promise to the house of David, and the contemporary (at the time written) threats to that covenant. All of Scripture—indeed, all of history—is not to be taken as separate parts which have nothing to do with each other. 2017 is not a year isolated from creation, the time of the prophets, or the time of Jesus. The psalmist blends and links them all together, as should we. From the beginning of time, there has been only one God, one Lord, one faith. Our faith, our world with all its crises, and God’s historic dealings with his people are not three separate things, but a unified whole. We live in the story of God’s salvation—just as it always has been, from the very beginning.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The psalmist wrestles with this tension: God has made promises which he is bound, able, and willing to keep, and yet it appears as if God has abandoned his covenant with us, for the world is falling apart. Nevertheless, he trusts God’s promises over against God’s apparent rejection (much like the Canaanite woman in Mark 7:24-30).

**PRAY:** “How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? … What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?” (Ps. 89:46, 48). It is to you alone, O Lord, that we make our appeal. Remember your promises and save us. Forsake not your people, whom you have called by name and purified through the blood of your Son. Hear us for his sake. Amen.

**March 7**

**READ:** Psalm 90 and Numbers 34-36

**MARK:** Psalm 90 is one that we often speak at people’s deathbeds. “You return man to dust.” “The years of our life are seventy… they are soon gone, and we fly away.” “Teach us to number our days.” “Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants!”

**LEARN:** In Numbers 34, we see the boundaries of the Promised Land. Two features are particularly noteworthy. First, God does not give his people command of the whole earth. They are not to utterly destroy the nations. They are not to spread their tribes over the whole face of the earth. Likewise, secondly, this land is smack dab in the middle of several sizeable powers. Major trade routes go through the land, so outsiders will constantly be traveling through. Along with sojourners and merchants come their foreign ideas, their foreign gods, and their foreign sins. Israel will never be without negative influences, nor without enemies.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God gives his people this land, in part, to test them (in order to refine them, not in order to tempt them into sinning). They must always be dependent upon the Lord their God, for their enemies will always surround them. Nations will constantly arise and seek to control their major highways to ease their own travel and their fertile land to grow crops for their own people. God puts his people in such a place that they will always have to pray, “Lord, have mercy!” After all, this is what it means to be human: to realize one’s reliance upon God for all things.

**PRAY:** Father in heaven, the earth is yours and the fullness thereof. Thank you for creating all of this—and even us ourselves. By your Holy Spirit, help us to trust in you for all things, for you live and reign with the same Spirit and the Son, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**March 8**

**READ:** Psalm 91 and Deuteronomy 1-3

**MARK:** God’s promises from God’s perspective: Ps. 91:14-16.

**LEARN:** Satan knows the Bible. Satan quotes Scripture. Satan even admits that Jesus is the Holy One—the Son of God (after all, it’s simply the truth). However, Satan does not *trust* God for all things. Satan wants to *spoil* God’s will, not follow it. And so in Matthew 4:1-11, we see Satan tempting Jesus to bow down to him rather than to God. In doing so, he quotes Psalm 91:11-12. However, he leaves out an important line: “For he will command his angels concerning you *to guard you in all your ways*.” Satan tries to convince Jesus that this passage says that God will protect him no matter what, in any situation. However, he leaves out the specifics: God’s angels will protect his Servant as he carries out the Lord’s will (“in all your ways”). God’s angels would not, in fact, protect him from all evil; they would not save him from death. For God’s will was that Jesus should die for the sake of his people, in order that he might protect them from the same death.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** As Moses addresses God’s people (the second generation in the wilderness), he recalls their situation. God is leading them into the Promised Land. However, their parents forfeited this promise because of their stubbornness and hardness of hearts. Therefore, be better than your parents. Trust the Lord to come through and to fulfill his promises, and you shall receive them. This serves as a daily reminder for us, too, who remember our baptism anew every morning. God has promised you life and salvation, and he has guaranteed it by giving you his Holy Spirit. Trust the Lord to come through and to fulfill his promises, and you shall receive them.

**PRAY:** Give us wisdom and discernment, O Lord, that we may not be ensnared by the Evil One. Amen.

**March 9**

**READ:** Psalm 92 and Deuteronomy 4-6

**MARK:** Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is the great Shema Yisrael (“Hear, O Israel”). This prayer is a centerpiece of morning and evening worship in the Jewish tradition. Parents often quote this passage as the last words they say to their children when putting them to bed.

**LEARN:** In Deuteronomy 4:13, we find the origin of the name “Ten Commandments.” It is actually a rather unfortunate translation and a confusing name. Why “Ten”? Because Deuteronomy 4:13 says so. Why “Commandments”? Because we corrupt humans love to justify ourselves according to the Law. No, seriously. The word translated “commandments” is typically translated “words,” “statements,” or even “things.” “The Ten Statements” might be a much more fitting title, especially of the 13-or-so statements in the passage begin with the statement, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Is this a commandment? Certainly not. Should this be 1 of the 10? Well, we have to say that there are 10, since Deut. 4:13 says there are 10. Many Jews still say that “I am the Lord your God…” is the first of the Ten Statements. Luther says it’s the introduction.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget… Make them known to your children and your children’s children” (Deut. 4:9). Faith comes by hearing, and how else will they hear? Teach early, teach often.

**PRAY:** Lord, just as “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him,” I know this is true for all people. Have mercy upon us, Lord, and especially upon our children. Do not abandon them to destruction, but cause them to trust you and to flourish in righteousness. Amen.

**March 10**

**READ:** Psalm 93 and Deuteronomy 7-9

**MARK:** In Ps. 93, the Lord reigns *on high*, and all of creation gazes *up* at him in praise. He is, by definition, *exalted*.

**LEARN:** Why does the Lord command his people to utterly destroy the inhabitatnts of the land of Canaan? What’s the big deal? 1) They would lead you astray to serve other gods (Deut. 7:4). They would cause you to live a lie. The assumption here—which I believe to be a fair one—is that God’s people are weak and easily led astray. 2) The Lord has made you his holy, chosen, set apart people in order to show you his mercy. Do not rather invoke his holy wrath.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** When recounting the incedent with the golden calf (and, indeed, throughout Deuteronomy), Moses speaks as if the people to whom he is talking—the generation *after* the idolaters—were actually the idolaters themselves. Is this fair? Let me suggest that we cannot separate ourselves from our people. After all, the Lord repays the righteous and the unrighteous according to the righteousness of their fathers.

**PRAY:** Do not forever hold my people’s sins against me. Keep me this day from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please you. Amen.

**March 11**

**READ:** Psalm 94 and Deuteronomy 10-12

**MARK:** Ps. 94:7 is perhaps the most foolish statement ever uttered by a person: “The Lord does not see [my evil]; the God of Jacob does not perceive.”

**LEARN:** Keeping God’s Law is actually and always the Goal (Deut. 10:12-13). In fulfilling the Law, Christ did not make it something other than a summary of what is true, right, and good—even as the Law reflects who Christ the God-man is. The Law does not go away with Christ, though our place in relation to its demands changes.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “The psalmist pleads for God to take vengeance on His enemies. Jesus, however, says to pray for our enemies, even love them (Matthew 5:43–44). What are we to do? Final judgment will bring vengeance on those who arrogantly reject the Lord. Meanwhile, we pray that all will see the glory of God’s justice in Jesus on the cross, turn from their wicked ways, and join with us in the life of righteousness, which includes caring for and protecting widows, orphans, and others who are helpless and oppressed” (*The Lutheran Study Bible*)

**PRAY:** Gracious heavenly Father, who has planted the ear and formed the eye, who disciples the nations and teaches man knowledge: be our strength, our justice, or righteousness. Hold us up with your steadfast love. Amen.

**March 12**

**READ:** Psalm 95 and Deuteronomy 13-15

**MARK:** A delightful call to worship: “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!”

**LEARN:** In Deut. 13:1-3, we find that true faith does not rely upon signs and wonders. God will, at times, allow demons to exercise their temporal powers with the result that people will be led astray. Saint Paul encourages the Galatians, “Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). God does not desire that his people be led astray, but in his mysterious wisdom he has also not condemned all demons and false teachers yet. So we must discern, not just by what our eyes see, but by what our ears hear—both from people’s mouths and from God’s own Word, his trustworthy self-revelation.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ps. 95 begins with lofty encouragement, but it ends in outright threat. Hebrews 3, which cites this passage, connects both, as well. We have now come to share in Christ; let us therefore not forsake his ways.

**PRAY:** Father, in your great wisdom, make us wise. Jesus, as you are the Truth, let us recognize the truth. Spirit, grant us discernment and the eager pursuit of righteousness. Amen.

**March 13**

**READ:** Psalm 96 and Deuteronomy 16-18

**MARK:** “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me [Moses] from among you, from among your brothers” (Deut. 18:15). Peter and Stephen quote this as referring to Jesus in Acts 3:22; 7:37.

**LEARN:** Is it fair to say that Jesus is the new Moses? In a certain manner of speaking, yes. At Mount Horeb, God’s people begged for Moses to go face the Lord on their behalf; they, as sinners, were terrified of God. Jesus is God perfectly joined to our human flesh—yet without sin. He is our intermediary to God and God’s intermediary to us. On the mountain, Moses received God’s Law in order to give it to his people. Jesus is, in fact, a divine Law-giver: “You have heard that it was said… but I say to you…” (Matthew 5). However, Jesus is substantially greater than Moses, for “the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Moses did not usher in God’s ultimate salvation. The death of Moses merits nothing for you. Moses was not allowed to see God face to face.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Psalm 96 speaks of God as the King of Israel—indeed, the one to whom all of creation owes honor. This, of course, is true of Jesus, who said to Pilate, “You say rightly that I am king” (John 18:37). This king would not be ascribed glory. This king would not be ascribed the honor and strength due his name—not by rulers, his people, or even his disciples when the hour came for him to be betrayed and crucified. He did not bear a crown of gold, but of thorns.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, you are more than Moses, more than Elijah, more than the greatest of all other rulers who have graced the earth. You give righteous commandments, and you judge us rightly according to them. Let us find favor in your eyes, dear Lord, for the sake of your crown. Amen.

**March 14**

**READ:** Psalm 97 and Deuteronomy 19-21

**MARK:** How wise the Lord is, that he even establishes a way for his people to escape for their lives if they accidentally kill someone (Deut. 19:1-13).

**LEARN:** In Deut. 20:5-9, we see that the Lord excuses from battle just about anybody who wants to be excused: those who just bought a house, planted a vineyard, married a woman, or who fears battle. This is quite the opposite of any other world power. Most countries have a draft established, and many require men to serve in the armed forces for a certain number of years. Why does the Lord set up his army in such a weak way? Because the strength of his people is not in their number, nor in their skill, but in their God—the one true God who made the heavens and the earth. He fights for them, and he alone is their victory.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The righteousness of God: it is a terrible and wonderful thing. It frightens the conscience, for who is worthy to stand before this God before whom the mountains melt like wax? Who can endure his presence? And yet, God’s righteousness is also wonderful. God’s righteousness is not just God against evil; it is also God for the sake of his people. God’s righteousness is the righteousness which God freely gives to his people. For those who trust God, his righteousness does not burn us away, but rather “in [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous by faith shall live’” (Romans 1:17).

**PRAY:** Lord God, let your righteousness come upon us, not in wrath, but in mercy. Purify us through your righteousness, but please do not utterly destroy us. Clothe us with Christ’s righteousness. Make us right. Be our shield and our protection against the unrighteous. Amen.

**March 15**

**READ:** Psalm 98 and Deuteronomy 22-24

**MARK:** Note the refrain in Deut. 22, “So you shall purge the evil from your midst.”

**LEARN:** Deut. 24:1-4 contains the now-scandalous passage which Jesus references when he says, “Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery” (Matt. 19:9; see also 5:32). In Deut. 24, as in the gospels, *it is never suggested that a man should divorce his wife*. Rather, there are a number of conditional clauses (“*if* then she finds no favor… *if* she goes…”) followed by a conclusion (“*then* her former husband… may not take her again”). Jesus follows this line of thinking when he says, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19:6). The point? Marriage was instituted to be a lifelong commitment, and divorce is permitted in certain circumstances because we are all terrible people. Never does Scripture say that divorce is a good thing, though in this broken world we might, at times, find it to be the lesser evil of the two. It remains a sin of which we must repent and seek forgiveness, just like all the others.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The sea, the rivers, the fish—indeed all of creation (not just us humans) praise the Lord and yearn for Christ’s return (see also Romans 8:19).

**PRAY:** Lord, forgive us for our many sins, lead us to repentance, and teach us to praise you. Amen.

**March 16**

**READ:** Psalm 99 and Deuteronomy 25-27

**MARK:** The Lord provides protection for even the dead. When a married man dies without any children, his brother is to marry his wife and produce a child to carry on the dead man’s legacy (Dt. 25:5-6).

**LEARN:** The Lord demands back the firstfruits of all that he has given you (Dt. 26). In the agricultural society of early Judaism, he commanded that the first of the harvest crop be given to the Levitical priests. Now, the Levites did not own any land as the rest of God’s people did. They dwelt among the other tribes and served as priests. When people brought them an offering, they would offer it as a sacrifice to the Lord, and they would burn some of it and take the rest to sustain themselves and their families—all according to the Lord’s design. In Dt. 26, as elsewhere, we see a distinction between an offering and a tithe. A tithe is literally “a tenth” of one’s income—be it crops or cash. This tithe is to be dedicated to the Lord’s service—an offering of one’s firstfruits. An offering is given above and beyond that tenth for a particular reason—sin offerings, grain offerings, etc. The Church has historically kept this distinction and encouraged its members to give accordingly.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord actually hears and answers our prayers. He answered those of Moses, Aaron, and Samuel as recorded in the OT. He eagerly desires to hear and answer ours, as well (though the answer is not always “yes”).

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, you provide for us abundantly. All that we have is from your hand. And, what’s more, you invite us to ask you for whatever else we need, and you promise to hear us and answer us. Teach us to be generous in all that we say and do, and give us the things we need to sustain our own lives and the lives of those around us. Hear us for the sake of your Son who gave all he had for our greatest need. Amen.

**March 17**

**READ:** Psalm 100 and Deuteronomy 28-30

**MARK:** “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil” (Dt. 30:15).

**LEARN:** A proper response to reading Psalm 100 is to sing the common Doxology: “Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him, all creatures here below. Praise him above, ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.” (*LSB* 805)

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Is the glass half-full, or is it half-empty? In Dt. 28, do the blessings overshadow the curses, or is it vice versa? Is life usually harsh, and so the blessings stand out as a nice change of pace? Or is life usually A-OK, and so the curses seize your attention like a sudden nightmare? It is noteworthy that there are 14 verses of blessings and 54 of curses. What does that say about us, God’s people?

**PRAY:** Lord, you know our hearts, that they are utterly corrupt and produce all kinds of evil. By your Holy Spirit, choose life for us. You have clothed us with Christ’s righteousness; get us to pursue righteousness. Amen.

**March 18**

**READ:** Psalm 101 and Deuteronomy 31-34

**MARK:** The Lord appeared again in a cloud to affirm that Joshua was to take over for Moses (Dt. 31:14-15).

**LEARN:** “Not in my house!” Ps. 101 is offered from the perspective of David the king, for sure. But it also has the focus of David as the head of his household (the phrase “in my house” occurs twice). What sorts of things should one not allow in his house? What should he not allow to tarnish and infect himself and his family? Slander, haughtiness, arrogance, deceit, lies, and wickedness. May the Lord keep us and our households free from these evils, and may he enable us to counteract them and banish them.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Like all saints, Moses did not fully possess what God had promised him. He was only allowed to see the Promised Land, not enter it. Hebrews 11 outlines a number of these situations, and he concludes: “And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Heb. 11:39-40).

**PRAY:** Keep our lives free from sin, dear Lord, that we may live as your people—chosen and holy. Amen.

**March 19**

**READ:** Psalm 102 and Luke 1

**MARK:** The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) is a much better response to awe-inspiring news than Zechariah’s (Luke 1:18).

**LEARN:** Luke 1 records several wonderful speeches, many of them prophecies. When the fullness of time had come and the news was being delivered, people were almost ripping at the seams with the Spirit. The time is here, the time is now! This is the decisive moment in all of human history. The Christ is finally coming into the world!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “The tears, fever, lost appetite, despair, and doubt in this psalm [102] are eerily identical to what we go through when a personal crisis erupts in our life or a disaster rips through our town or nation. Yet it is written with confident hope because attention is turned to the God who listens to the pleas of the destitute. When you lament, turn your attention to God’s answer to these prayers: Jesus Christ. He stepped into our world and took on our groans and death, restoring confident hope at the appointed time on Easter morning” (*The Lutheran Study Bible*).

**PRAY:** Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word, O Lord. You say that Jesus is your beloved Son and that, through him, you have forgiven me of all my sins? I believe you. Amen: let it be so.

**March 20**

**READ:** Psalm 103 and Luke 2-3

**MARK:** Gloria: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14). Nunc Dimittis: “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace…” (Luke 2:29-32).

**LEARN:** The Lord is unjust. In a manner of speaking, that is. “He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103:10). That is simply not fair. Now, I’m not complaining; I benefit substantially from this one-sided deal. And yet, the Lord breaks the natural cause-effect relationship. He does so, not by simply dismissing our sins, but by placing them upon his Son. “This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:24-25).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** What sort of Christ did John the Baptist expect? “His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:17). It makes sense, then, that John would be confused when, four chapters later, Jesus still hadn’t brought the wrath of God to bear upon unbelievers (Luke 7:18-19).

**PRAY:** Holy Spirit, bear fruits within us, in keeping with repentance. Lead us not into your fiery wrath, O Christ, but save us by your baptism and your cross. Have mercy upon us, O God. Amen.

**March 21**

**READ:** Psalm 104 and Luke 4-5

**MARK:** Luther’s mealtime prayer is rooted in Ps. 104:27-28 (see parallel in Ps. 145:15-16). “The eyes of all look to You, O Lord, and You give them their food at the proper time [or, ‘in due season’]. You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these Your gifts which we receive from Your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

**LEARN:** When Jesus tells the people in his hometown that Isaiah’s prophecy is being fulfilled in him, they are thrilled (Lk. 4:16-22a). They are happy to be the people of God receiving the long-awaited fulfillment of God’s promises to his people. But then Jesus goes and gets all offensive. “Do y’all remember when God sent a drought on our people because of our sin, and he didn’t provide any relief for anyone except for that Gentile (read: pagan, outsider) widow? Yeah, his people are not all that special. And do you remember how the only leper the prophet Elisha healed was also an unbeliever? Yeah, the people of God are, in and of themselves, nothing to write home about. When God’s people go astray, he can, and has, and will go to the Gentiles instead.” This is so offensive that they try to kill him. The people of God aren’t all that special? Say what?! We’re the chosen people! We’re circumcised! We’re special! We’re better than everybody else, and God loves us! As it turns out, the Lord’s mercy extends to all people. Thanks be to God!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** When Satan claims that the authority and glory over all the kingdoms of the world has been delivered to him (Lk. 4:5-6), Jesus does not call him a liar. As it turns out, what Satan was saying is largely true. Jesus even calls Satan “the ruler of this world,” though in doing so he says this ruler “will be cast out” (John 12:31). As C.S. Lewis puts it, both Christ and Christians are behind enemy lines. Though God is ultimately in charge, Satan sure does seem to be the one in power much of the time.

Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. When you go to church you are really listening--in to the secret wireless from our friends: that is why the enemy is so anxious to prevent us from going. He does it by playing on our conceit and laziness and intellectual snobbery. I know someone will ask me, ‘Do you really mean, at this time of day, to re-introduce our old friend the devil—hoofs and horns and all?’ Well, what the time of day has to do with it I do not know. And I am not particular about the hoofs and horns. But in other respects my answer is ‘Yes, I do. I do not claim to know anything about his personal appearance. If anybody really wants to know him better I would say to that person. ‘Don’t worry. If you really want to, you will. Whether you’ll like it when you do is another question.’ (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

**PRAY:** Have mercy on me, a sinner. Amen.

**March 22**

**READ:** Psalm 105 and Luke 6-7

**MARK:** Jesus’ 12 disciples (Lk. 6:13-16; see also Matt. 10:1-4, Mark 3:16-19).

**LEARN:** Psalm 105 in a nutshell: Give thanks to the Lord! Why? Let me count the ways. Let me tell you what he has done for us. Here is who you are, who your people are, who your God is, and what he has done. Why should I give him thanks or trust him to be my salvation in my time of need? Look at his track record!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In Lk. 7:1-10, the most respectable people say that the Roman centurion “is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.” This Gentile was rather gracious to the people of God whom he policed. At the very least, he respected and supported them. However, even though he is an outsider (not part of the people of God; not a Jew), he exemplifies the humility and faith that Jesus has been looking for from his own people: “Lord… I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.” This is the faith that Jesus had failed to find among his own people (such as those in his hometown Nazareth who tried to kill him in yesterday’s reading. Awesome; people are getting it! Though it is not the people we might have expected…

**PRAY:** Lord, let your blessings come upon all who trust in you, no matter their race, their color, in what faith they were raised, or what sins they might have committed. Have mercy, O Lord. Amen.

**March 23**

**READ:** Psalm 106 and Luke 8-9

**MARK:** “You are the Christ.” “Yes, Peter, and that means I’m going to lay down my life” (Lk. 9:18-22).

**LEARN:** During his earthly ministry, most people have no idea who Jesus really is. However, the demons know exactly who he is (“Son of the Most High God”) and what he has come to do (torment them and send them to the abyss) (Lk. 8:26-33).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Jesus’ very being radiates the kingdom of God. Where Jesus goes, sickness, demons, and death flee. When a woman merely touches the fringe of his garment, she is healed. Come quickly, Lord, and set all things right.

**PRAY:** “Remember me, O Lord, when you show favor to your people; help me with you save them, that I may look upon the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may glory with your inheritance” (Ps. 106:4-5). Amen.

**March 24**

**READ:** Psalm 107 and Luke 10-11

**MARK:** The Lord gives and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord. Compare Job 1:21 and Psalm 107:33-38.

**LEARN:** The Lord Jesus Christ does *not* say, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore go and gather the harvest.” What does he say? “Pray… for the Lord to send out laborers into his harvest” (Lk. 10:2). But I want to go! I want to do! I want to be God’s special chosen servant. Well, then, do the will of God which is first and foremost to pray. The Lord may send someone else, and that’s ok. That’s good. It is the Lord’s harvest, after all, not your own.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In Lk. 10:19-20, Jesus plays the trump card and re-centers us on what’s important. Who we are in Christ is always the center, not whatever we might do in Christ’s name (though this is also good).

**PRAY:** “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation” (Lk. 11:2-4). Amen.

**March 25**

**READ:** Psalm 108 and Luke 12-13

**MARK:** Note how the Lord regards those who oppose him: “Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph” (Ps. 108:9).

**LEARN:** “Everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man will also acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God” (Lk. 12:8-9). See also Romans 10:9-10. How vital is our confession! We confess our faith with our mouths and our lives. What we say and do demonstrates who we are and what we believe.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** We are to live in eager expectation of the Lord’s return (Lk. 12:35-48).

**PRAY:** Lord, you bid us to ask, seek, and knock, and yet you tell us that many who seek to enter will not be able (Lk. 13:24). Grant us firm faith before the day of judgment, and continue to call out to the lost that they might also enter with us. Amen.

**March 26**

**READ:** Psalm 109 and Luke 14-15

**MARK:** Ps. 109:6-15 (especially v. 8) is fulfilled in Judas Iscariot (see Acts 1:20).

**LEARN:** Again and again, we see that the Lord helps those who *cannot* help themselves. It is the Holy Spirit who grants repentance, and he works through Word and Sacraments. Why did the prodigal son go back home? He remembered his father’s mercy. The Spirit calls to mind this Word of who God is and what he has made us, and he pushes us to go home. Who got to go to the great banquet? The poor, crippled, blind, and lame, and anyone else who would hear the servant’s message.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Is it lawful to *heal* on the Sabbath, or not?” “Umm…” “Ok, ok, guys, let me put this another way. If your son falls into a well on the Sabbath, is it a good idea for you to pull him out right away rather than waiting for the next day?” “Umm…” “Of course it is! Save your son from drowning! In the same way, I will save this man from his disease. You don’t get it at all, do you? The Sabbath is meant for your good, but you have turned it into a burden!” “Umm…”

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, you design all things for your glory and for our good. Guide us, that we may do your will, and defend and protect us in the same. And Lord, please have mercy upon us for our many, many failures. Amen.

**March 27**

**READ:** Psalm 110 and Luke 16-17

**MARK:** The reference to Melchizedek in Ps. 110:4 points back to Genesis 14:17-20. He is a priest of the Lord who is not a Levite, and the fact that this is possible gives us reason to believe that Jesus is also a priest without being descended from the Levites.

**LEARN:** Psalm 110 is quoted 17 times in the New Testament. In Matthew 22:44 / Mark 12:36 / Luke 20:42, Jesus quotes it to answer the question of his own identity: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” He is both David’s son and David’s Lord. He is David’s son and the Son of God. See also the other ways in which it is used in Mark 16:19; Acts 2:34 and following; Romans 8:34; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20, 22; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:12,13, 12:2, and perhaps 1 Peter 3:22.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “…and forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive those who trespass against us*.” For many, this is the part of the Lord’s Prayer that we mumble through while thinking about the people whom we don’t want to forgive. Why? Because holding a grudge is so much more fun. Because holding a grudge means that I am forever in the right and he is forever in the wrong. Because she will always owe me because she has sinned against me. Because if I forgive him, then what advantage do I have over him? Because it still hurts. But this is not the way that the Lord forgives. He gives you no conditions for receiving his love. He does not hold your sin against you. He has put it away. “I forgive you” means “Yeah, it hurt. But we’re good. I’m not going to hold it against you. Let’s move on.”

**PRAY:** “O God, You have trodden our iniquities underfoot and have cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You have forgotten as You have forgiven. The rising sun is not darkened by my dark yesterday; my hot rebellion of yesteryear has not dried this year’s compassionate rain or parched the teeming earth on which I walk. Oh, still this guilty memory of mine, this dark and unadmitted doubt of You, this questioning of Your forgiveness and Your forgetting. Oh, do not let them rise again to torment me, those harsh defacements of my fellowman, those words that flew, arrows fiery with my anger, those proud and brittle clashes of me against my neighbor, those ragged neglects of simple duty. Your Son’s cross stands empty against the sky. Your Son’s grave is opened wide. Your angels have spoken. And Your Son sits at Your right hand: for me, for me. Let me remember this; let me forget. Amen.” (Martin Franzmann, in *Pray for Joy*)

**March 28**

**READ:** Psalm 111 and Luke 18-19

**MARK:** “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!” (Ps. 111:10)

**LEARN:** This is an “Alleluia” psalm. Alleluia is a Hebrew word that literally means, “Praise the Lord!” Thus you might recall the old children’s song, “Allelu, allelu, allelu, alleluia. Praise ye the Lord!”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Another old children’s song (which I’m sure is no longer politically correct) goes, “Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. … Zacchaeus, you come down! For I’m going to your house today.” Ok, ok, this song covers the basic facts of the story. But what is the *point* of the story? It is a playing-out of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector: “And when they waw it, they all grumbled, ‘He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.’ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold. (That is, Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. I deserve nothing but wrath, for I have stolen. Spare me, please! Moreover, I know that this was wrong and that you are the Lord, and so I will do all I can to help the poor and those I have wronged.)”

**PRAY:** Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. I deserve nothing but wrath, for I have [stolen, lied, or whatever applies to you]. Spare me, please! Moreover, I know that this was wrong and that you are the Lord, and so I will do all I can to help the poor and those I have wronged. Free me from my guilt that I may serve you aright. Amen.

**March 29**

**READ:** Psalm 112 and Luke 20-21

**MARK:** The wicked seriously hate righteousness. The person described in Ps. 112:1-9 is wonderful, but the wicked gnashes his teeth because of him (v. 10).

**LEARN:** “Biblical ‘fear of the Lord,’ which is the beginning of wisdom, is not a psychological state marked by terror or timidity. Perhaps the correct idea is better conveyed by the word ‘reverence.’ Still, the fear of the Lord is far more than the cultivated sentiment of reverence. It is, rather, a resolved dedication of oneself to the accomplishing of God’s will through the industry of obedience. As the psalm says, it is something to be *practiced*. The wisdom promised in Holy Scripture is derived from reverent obedience to God…” (Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “…The deeper message of these psalms [111 and 112], however, is Christological before it is moral, for our righteousness is ever a sharing in the righteousness of Christ. That is to say, the wise man, who fears the Lord and greatly delights in His commandments, is, in the first place, Jesus the Savior. He it is, described here as generous and just and unshaken, as leaving a seed powerful on the earth, as being had in eternal remembrance” (Reardon).

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, you are our cornerstone. Be not a rock of offense to us and do not crush us, but be our sure foundation as you have promised; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**March 30**

**READ:** Psalm 113 and Luke 22

**MARK:** The cup of the new covenant through Jesus’ blood is juxtaposed right next to Jesus’ announcing his betrayer (Lk. 22:20-21).

**LEARN:** Ps. 113 shares a common theme with the Magnificat (Lk. 1:46-55). The high will be brought low, and the low will be made high. The Lord himself will do this. He transcends what we think we know, and he will make all things right. He does not judge by appearances, but by the heart. It is not strength that he desires, but faith. He is in charge, and he will do it.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ps. 94:7 may be the most foolish statement ever uttered by a person (see March 11), but Luke 20:14 is a close runner-up: “This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.” What?! Why on earth would the father give you the inheritance after you killed, not only his servants, but his son? Surely he would give it to literally anyone else, you foolish murderers!

**PRAY:** “Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised!” Amen.

**March 31**

**READ:** Isaiah 64:1-9 and Luke 23-24

**MARK:** Fitting words for a faithful death: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”

**LEARN:** Barabbas—the one who is released instead of Jesus—was a Zealot. This was a group of religious terrorists who so desired for Jerusalem to belong solely to God’s people that they schemed and attacked the Roman rulers, authorities, and guards. The people would rather have a terrorist set free than the Son of God.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** One can only pray Is. 64:1-2 if he believes himself to be on God’s side. Otherwise, the Lord rending the heavens is simply terrifying. But when everything is falling apart, we see our dire need, and we cry to the Lord of justice and mercy. It is fitting that v. 9 is part of this prayer.

**PRAY:** Enlighten us, Lord, by your Holy Spirit, that when we search the Scriptures we may find you, you alone, you for us, for you live and reign with the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**April 1**

**READ:** Isaiah 25:1-9 and Romans 1-3

**MARK:** Isaiah 25:8 – The Lord will swallow up death forever and wipe away tears from all faces. Romans 3:28 – we are justified by faith.

**LEARN:** Paul affirms three callings from God: he is called to be and apostle, the Romans are called to belong to Christ, and they are called to be saints. Paul was sent to the Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and foolish. The righteousness of God removes our shame and is the basis for life and salvation. We might not have committed some of the acts Paul condemns in Romans 1-3 but we all have sinned. We have exchanged God’s truth for human foolishness. When we pass judgment on another beyond that which we are given to do by the authority of Scripture we condemn ourselves (2:1). Paul’s teachings are clear: without God’s patience and forbearance, we would all be condemned. He warns against being praised by people but not by God (2:29). Pride desires recognition and praise from the world, but this may come in ways that are inconsistent with God’s will. Human sinfulness shows the radical difference between God’s holiness and humanity’s unrighteousness.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Seeing sin, we ought not to respond defensively but in confession. We know God’s response to sin: He sent His Son to die for sinners. Our priorities are misplaced when we seek the world’s acclaim. We are blessed when we place God first, knowing He loves and forgives us. He approves of us because of Jesus. That’s all the praise we will ever need. God made covenants with His people but we have broken our promises. How blessed we are that our unfaithfulness cannot nullify His faithfulness. He redeems us because He is gracious. Only when we see this are prepared for the Good News of what Christ has done for us.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, keep me from pride and foolishness and lead me in humility to confess my sins. Fill me with Your Spirit to know of Your love and forgiveness and grant me aid in the fight against sin. Amen.

**April 2**

**READ:** Psalm 114 and Romans 4-6

**MARK:** Romans 5 – Suffering produces hope, Christ died for the ungodly and Jesus is the second Adam. Romans 6:23 – sin brings death, Christ brings life.

**LEARN:** Having condemned human sinfulness, Paul unfolds the basis for our righteousness or justification using the story of Abraham. Abraham trusted that God was able to do what He promised, especially in sending him an heir through whom all nations would be blessed (Gn.12:3). Jesus is the source of our peace with God. He is the second Adam through whom all mankind is reconciled. God will use afflictions for good and to bless others. He will keep his promises and we will overcome our sufferings by faith. Adam’s sin brought guilt, the desire to sin, and mortality to all humans. He sent a Second Adam (Jesus Christ) to fulfill the law where the first Adam could not.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** We are alike in our corruption and fallenness. But all humanity has also been redeemed by Christ. We are constantly tempted to give our works a role in our salvation, but this detracts from God’s work. Christ saves us apart from our works, so anything we do responds to what He has already done for us. Trials and challenges may tempt us to doubt God’s promises but as He did with Abraham, God will strengthen our faith, assure us of His promises, and help us to trust, and fulfill all He said He would do. We naturally seek to avoid pain and suffering. Yet, there are times when suffering is unavoidable. Focused on Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection, we know that suffering is not the whole story. We continue to sin and deserve condemnation. Praise God, He did not stop with Adam. Christ was obedient to the Father, and He paid the penalty for our sin. One man—Christ—has redeemed us and changed humanity forever.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, by Your Spirit assure me of all that You have fulfilled on my behalf and strengthen my faith for the trials and challenges that are to come. Amen.

**April 3**

**READ:** Psalm 115 and Romans 7-9

**MARK:** Romans 7:15 – That which we do not wish to do, we do. Christ has rescued us.

**LEARN:** Faithless people may be driven to sin and despair by the law (7:5). Thanks be to God, in Christ we have died to the law (7:4). Our struggle with sin is not a past event; it is a present reality. We know God’s will and desire to serve Him but we cannot overcome sin by our own means. Because Christ justifies sinners, God’s life-giving Spirit dwells in believers. He frees us from the bondage of sin and death. The Holy Spirit leads us to trust confidently that we are heirs, privileged to call God “our Father” and to receive eternal glory at the end of our present suffering. The Holy Spirit ministers to God’s dear children by giving us hope in our suffering, help in our weakness, and assurance that all things work out to fulfill God’s eternal purposes in our lives. Christ’s death, resurrection, and exaltation at God’s right hand guarantees our victory over anything and everything that would separate us from His love.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Jesus came to serve us by giving His life on the cross and by rising for us. Freed from sin, we can now serve God. Only when we are “slaves” to God will we have freedom to be the people He created us to be. Now we need not live in bondage and fear, but in a new life in the Spirit. We cry out, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (7:24). There is only one answer: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:25). Jesus rescues us. Though we sin daily, He continues to forgive and restore us. Those who are preoccupied with satisfying their selfish desires often become angry with God and rebel against Him. God promises release from this deadly cycle and brings life and peace. The path to glory, however, is not an easy street, for it entails daily rejection of personal sins. When God’s judgment frightens us, the Spirit assures us that God loves us in Christ. When our hope in God dims, we easily succumb to impatience in distress. The Spirit helps us our frailty, assuring us of God’s steadfast love. When following Christ brings distress, we sometimes distance ourselves from Him. But Christ never draws back from us, in fact, during our distress, the Spirit works to draw us to Him.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, in times of distress and distraction, remain my faithful God and draw me by Your Spirit ever more near to You and Your abundant grace and mercy. Amen.

**April 4**

**READ:** Psalm 116 and Romans 10-13

**MARK:** Romans 12:9-21 -- Strive after these things.

**LEARN:** Those who refuse to accept God’s gracious invitation to share in the riches of His grace are accountable to Him for their unbelief. Paul, chosen by God’s grace revealed in Christ Jesus, is a living example that God has preserved for Himself a remnant in Israel. Paul warns the Gentile believers against pride and reminds them of their role in God’s mission to the Jewish unbelievers. In ways beyond our understanding, God has acted in mercy to bring salvation to Jews and Gentiles. Human beings cannot exchange roles with God, presuming to sit in judgment of Him. Paul urges us to present ourselves as living sacrifices because it is the proper response to “the mercies of God” (12:1). He repeatedly emphasizes the gracious gifts of God that are received in faith. Here is what a life of genuine love (12:9) looks like in specific detail. It is a life that follows Christ’s example and models His words from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God is the giver of righteousness to everyone who believes. However, Christ Jesus is always near to us in His Word. He stands ready to forgive and renew us. Those who become hardened and spiritually callous are in danger of God’s frightening judgment. Yet, through the suffering for sin that Christ endured, even the sin of unbelief is forgiven in those who trust in His grace. In goodness and kindness, God can restore to faith those who have fallen. But we in whom the Spirit dwells praise Him for His inexhaustible kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Keep Paul’s earlier words in mind as you study the last chapters of the book. On this side of heaven, we are not fully renewed but daily we are renewed by His Spirit through our Baptisms into Christ.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, by Your Spirit hold me ever in the faith and renew me day by day by Your Spirit working in me. Amen.

**April 5**

**READ:** Psalm 117 and Romans 14-16

**MARK:** Romans 14:8 – Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.

**LEARN:** Paul lays out he practice and scope of his mission work as well as his current travel plans. He greets 26 people by name and warns against those who cause divisions. Those who advocate as false Gospel are to be avoided entirely. Paul’s closing words encompass the entire Good News of God, from the prophetic Old Testament writings to the proclamation of Jesus Christ being made known to all nations. God’s eternal being, His wisdom, knowledge, and power, are all far beyond ours. He calls those of faith to respond in obedience to His will.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Apart from God’s intervention through servants such as Paul, we would not have seen, heard, or understood God’s grace. Christ’s servants are to respond to His calling and use their gifts in dedicated service as Paul did. Anything we do is simply “what Christ has accomplished through” us (15:18). It is all by grace and is sanctified and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Christ empowered Paul’s mission work and gave it the fullness of His blessing (15:19). He will give us joy, refreshment, and peace as well. Many believers have labored long and hard for Christ with Paul. They serve as examples and role models for us. Christ unites Jew and Gentile, male and female. He breaks through all other human bonds in His Church. He also establishes a committed and dear relationship among believers. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was entrusted to Paul and faithfully proclaimed among the nations in accordance with God’s will.

**PRAY:** Dear Father, lead me into Your Word, where I receive endurance, encouragement, and hope from You. Empower me then to welcome others, especially those weak in faith. Amen.

**April 6**

**READ:** Psalm 118 and 1 Corinthians 1-3

**MARK:** 1 Corinthians 1:23 – We preach Christ crucified.

**LEARN:** Paul highlights the strengths of the congregation, strengths God extends to all believers by His grace. In contrast, divisions in the Church are a denial of the one Baptism into Christ, who was crucified for all. We should avoid pride and boasting about what we do for God or for others. The Good News is conveyed not through eloquence, but through humble messengers testifying about the cross. The message of the cross is simple, but the spiritual wisdom that comes with it touches every area of life and faith. There is no ground for human pride in human achievement within Christ’s Church. Such an attitude undermines the very nature of His gifts of salvation and service. People despise God’s messenger because the Spirit’s power is concealed in lowly, suffering leaders like Paul. The crowd always yearns for flashy leadership and despises those who teach the basics and lead by example.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** We rejoice in our relationship to God: He has called us and sanctified us, and He will sustain us. His faithful servants preach the Gospel and are not to become objects of unhealthy devotion. The triune God alone is the object of our faith and hope. We bring nothing but sin into our relationship with God but receive all good things from Him. We look to the cross of Jesus for God’s power and rest in His wisdom. In view of the cross, we see unbelievers with new compassion, as people with no true spiritual comprehension. The Holy Spirit grant such understanding only through the Gospel. God accomplishes everything for our good, living in us by His Spirit. He sends us spiritual fathers to nurture us, entrusting to them both the Law and the Gospel for our spiritual good.

**PRAY:** Dear Lord, thank You for revealing Yourself to me by Your cross. Receive this weak sinner and strengthen me for service. Amen.

**April 7**

**READ:** Psalm 119:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 4-6

**MARK:** 1 Corinthians 6:12 – All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial.

**LEARN:** Sins such as sexual immorality are out of place among the people of God. Christ our Passover Lamb, has taken our sins upon Himself. Just as the old sinful nature rises to cause grievances between Christians, it also tempts us to seek satisfaction through secular processes. God calls churches to settle grievances through Law and Gospel before matters get out of hand. Because Christ has united us with Him and with one another, immorality has no place among us. Freedom to live in Christ excludes living in opposition to Him.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Through repentance and absolution, the Lord renews us as His undefiled creation, even against sins such as sexual immorality. The Lord has judged us “not guilty” in view of Jesus’ sacrifice, and He has washed us pure in Holy Baptism. When we fall into sin, we can repent of the disunity we have brought. Jesus Christ will restore and renew us as His very own.

**PRAY:** Spare us, Lord, from the temptation to resort to the ways of the world. Purify us, Holy Spirit, through the daily washing of repentance. Seat us, O God, in Your kingdom as people with true discernment. Amen.

**April 8**

**READ:** Psalm 119:9-16 and 1 Corinthians 7-9

**MARK:** 1 Corinthians 7:17 – lead the life the Lord has assigned you**.**

**LEARN:** Marriage brings obligations, but being in Christ forms a new being. The Lord transforms believers from our previous existence and makes us members of His household. In view of this, Paul outlines two blessed estates, that of marriage and that of celibacy. The rights and freedoms of the Gospel are wrongly promoted in the Corinthian church, leading believers to adopt too easily the behaviors and practices of the surrounding culture. No believer has the right or freedom to destroy the faith of others, especially those whom Paul describes as weak in the faith. Faith is not a private matter. As founder of the Corinthian church, and as an apostle, Paul is perceived to have more “rights” than anyone else. Yet he consistently sets and example for the Corinthians, encouraging them to put off their own rights in order to serve one another.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In marriage, Christians can encourage one another, non-Christians may be drawn to belief, and children can be brought up in the faith. Whatever our station in life, we now live out the new life in the station to which God has appointed us. Marriage remains unique among God’s blessings. It survived humanity’s fall into sin. There are also responsibilities with marriage, and it is particularly important for the Christian to consider these when sitting down to “count the cost” of discipleship (Lk 14:28). Faithful Christians will be zealous to pray for and carry out God’s will that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tm 2:3-4). How marvelously our Savior bears with our weaknesses! Most examples of Jesus Himself (Mk 10:45) urges us to set aside our own rights for the sake of others. His death and resurrection transform our lives so that we do not seek our own good but the good of others.

**PRAY:** Strengthen us, O Lord, to serve others in all things, so that all people might come to know the power of Your death and resurrection. Amen.

**April 9**

**READ:** Psalm 119:17-24 and 1 Corinthians 10-11

**MARK:** 1 Corinthians 10:16 – the Lord’s Supper is a participation in Christ.

**LEARN:** “Flee from idolatry” (10:4) summarizes this section. Even Israel, who had seen God’s mighty works throughout the exodus, acted as if God were not real, as if they could rely on gods of their own creation or even themselves to keep them save. In Western culture, Christians rarely have to deal with food sacrificed to other gods, through Christians in Asia and Africa must deal with these issues directly. In chapter 11, we see that the Corinthians have turned the Sacrament into a supper of their own making. As a result, the community of believers formed by the Gospel and the Sacrament is being harmed, and individuals are falling under God’s judgment. Recalling Christ’s own institution of the Supper, Paul reminds the Corinthians to recognize what God has offered in the Sacrament – the forgiveness of sins and unity in the body of Christ.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord has provided order in the family through faithful husbands and fathers and dedicated wives and mothers. When we seek to live in ways other than how He has called us to live, we move away from Him. Yet we are not abandoned to drift about in this world. God's Son loved us with a perfect love, sacrificing Himself on the cross for us. The forgiveness won for us there cleanses us from all our failures, even where we have failed those closest to us. Paul reminds the Corinthians to recognize what God has offered in the Sacrament: the body and blood of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and through them, the union of the Body of Christ, the Church, gathered around the altar. The Lord's Supper is never just a private matter, something only between God and oneself, but it is a celebration of the whole Body of Christ.

**PRAY:** Lord, may Thy body and Thy blood be for my soul the highest food. Amen (LSB 618; refrain)

**April 10**

**READ:** Psalm 119:25-32 and 1 Corinthians 12-14

**MARK:** 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 – Let there be no division either in suffering or in joy.

**LEARN:** God, who is one, unified and blessed the Corinthian congregation through His Spirit and gifts. Paul seeks to settle and unite the Corinthian congregation by emphasizing the order God established in creation and the priority of the Gospel. By so completely describing and advocating love's divine qualities, Paul reveals the Corinthians' immaturity. He sharply rebukes all noisy, clanging boasts of superiority. Yet, he alludes to the fact that the Father who knows His children all too well still loves them. Some Corinthians showed a lack of love by pursuing their own edification to the neglect of those around them. For example, issues of worship practice divided the Corinthians. Though Paul tolerates the Corinthians' personal interests, he insists that such interests have no place in congregational gatherings, which should clearly teach God's Word for all.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Like the congregation at Corinth, we also suffer from divisions and party spirit, which undermine God's work among us. Yet the Lord still leads us to true confession through Jesus, our Savior, and the Spirit works among us. The sin of arrogance plaguing the Corinthians still disrupts congregations today when roles of service are not clearly defined or valued. Yet also today, Christ unites us in Baptism and makes us His very Body. Though wounded and afflicted, His Body can never be destroyed but carries out God's loving purposes. In love, God calls us together for mutual edification in His Word, which always richly applies to the mature as well as the immature. Through the Word, God is really among us, giving His Spirit, faith in Christ, and all blessings of salvation. The "God of peace" (Rm 15:33) has established our salvation and life in the cross of His dear Son, our only Savior, who makes us one and strengthens us in the one true faith.

**PRAY:** Dearest Jesus, grant me the maturity to desire the edification of my brothers and sisters to pursue gifts that build them up in Your love, so that our congregation may confess you with one voice in one Spirit. Amen.

**April 11**

**READ:** Psalm 119:33-40 and 1 Corinthians 15-16

**MARK:** 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 – Because the victory is yours already, your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

**LEARN:**  Because of zeal for more knowledge, the Corinthians have neglected what has first importance: the simple truths and application of the Gospel. They take pride in their wisdom, but Paul tears apart their arguments with basic logic and rhetoric defending the doctrine of the bodily resurrection. Logic, rhetoric, and even sarcasm have their uses in preaching and teaching the Gospel. Yet all our powers and wisdom must remain subject to the Lord, who is "all in all" (v 28). The body corrupted by sin declines, decays, and dies. Humanly speaking, we can extend our lives only by having children, whom we likewise corrupt with our inherited sin. The justification Jesus provided is our resurrection hope against sin, death, and the Law's condemnation. Jesus delivers us from death's jaws. Compassion leads the early Christian congregations to treasure up and distribute support for fellow Christians and ministries in need. As Paul closes the letter, he also clears the way for future work and for the work of his colleague Timothy. Paul urges the leaders at Corinth to recognize the service, calling, and authority of one another and to see themselves as part of a larger team. Paul's bittersweet conclusion illustrates his passion for the Gospel and for the congregation.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** When we learn of brothers and sisters in need, God's Word leads us to demonstrate the bond of fellowship created by the Gospel. Christ treasured us by freely giving His life for us, and He grants us generous hearts. That work is vital because faith, life, and salvation come only through the Lord's Word. No matter how or where you serve the Lord, you, too, are part of a larger team. Respect your fellow workers by listening to them and coordinating efforts with them. Our Savior's strong, firm love and leadership preserves the unity of His dear Church, for which He gave His life. He calls us to passionate service and love. Jesus, too, forcefully denounced those who abused God's Word (Mt 23:1-36); yet He poured out His love for all sinners so that all might know His grace.

**PRAY:** Dear Jesus, fill me with a sincere passion for sharing the Gospel with those who have not yet heard of or believed in Your grace. Amen.

**April 12**

**READ:** Psalm 119:41-48 and 2 Corinthians 1-4

**MARK:** 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 – Do not lose heart. Focus on eternal realities.

**LEARN:** Paul puts suffering in the context of God's grace. Sharing the Gospel in the midst of a sinful world means that opposition is bound to come (Jn 15:20) and may even overwhelm God's people as they share the Good News with others. Paul defends his ministry to the Corinthians, not according to the standards of the world, but according to the gracious character of God's message delivered through self-sacrificing servants. Since the goal of church discipline is the restoration of the person, Paul calls the Corinthians, who have been diligent in punishment, to be even more diligent in forgiveness. Paul's spirit is restless and overwhelmed in the circumstances of his ministry. Nonetheless, he is confident that Christ will accomplish His work for the Corinthians. He describes the sufficiency, competency, and hope of the new covenant, which is the fulfillment of the old covenant.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Like the Corinthians, we must also admit and repent of our misuse and neglect of the ministry of the Word. Too often, we trust in our own wisdom and strength to the detriment of our walk with God. Christ Jesus promises that in the midst of carrying crosses, burdens, and even the abuses and persecutions of others, His burden will be light (Mt 11:28-30). Sharing the Gospel message often exposes us as unworthy servants. In the midst of the hardships that Gospel ministry brings in a sinful world, the confidence of Christ, His encouraging, sustaining, forgiving presence, is a constant blessing for those who trust Him (1:20-21). When disciplining another, we often are tempted to do so legalistically, as if the person has to earn our forgiveness. Such an attitude actually destroys grace, both in the repentant believer and in us. To the one who is truly sorry for sin, we are to forgive as Christ forgives us and to remember the sin no more. As Christians, we often feel the very real weight of representing Christ to others. Our worries, sins, and frailties can overwhelm us. Our confidence and competency come from Christ, whose ministry truly gives life by the power of the Spirit. Therefore, we can be even bolder than Moses, the great prophet of the old covenant, as we proclaim Jesus, the one whom Moses yearned to see.

**PRAY:** Lord, show me Your purpose in the struggles and in the victories of my life. Amen.

**April 13**

**READ:** Psalm 119:49-56 and 2 Corinthians 5-7

**MARK:** 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 – We have been given the ministry of reconciliation.

**LEARN:** Christ's love compels Paul to persevere through all hardships in order to make God's offer of forgiveness and reconciliation plain to the people at Corinth. Our relationship with Jesus is intimate because we, as believers, are "the temple of the living God" (6:16). Paul also shares the ups and downs of ministry and his great joy in hearing that the Corinthians' faith in Christ was solid again.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Too often we mute the Gospel's power because of our pride, our carelessness, or our lack of concern for others. No greater honor can be given us than to be His ambassadors, His spokespeople. He not only saves us but also works through us. Our faith calls us to break from those things that would compromise our life with Jesus. The good news is that God's promises are sure even when we are unfaithful. God calls us to claim the promises of His gracious presence again and again through repentance and forgiveness. God has loved us with an everlasting love through Jesus Christ. To open up our hearts to others, to let them know of Christ's love, is to experience again the joy of that great love of God for all.

**PRAY:** Lord, teach us daily how great, how long, how wide, and how deep is Your love for us and for every person in this world. Teach us the joy of seeing others come to faith. Amen.

**April 14**

**READ:** Psalm 119:57-64 and 2 Corinthians 8-10

**MARK:** 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 – God loves a cheerful giver.

**LEARN:** The Macedonians forgot themselves as they gave to others as though there would be no tomorrow. God also calls us to give generously, because He endows us with earthly things for our neighbors' benefit. As Paul leads this great money-gathering effort, he takes care that clergy and laity work together to ensure that the Church's financial dealings are untainted by scandal. Because good intentions sometimes do not get acted on, Paul sends three representatives to Corinth to offer gentle encouragement to deliver what was promised. Paul urges the Corinthians to follow the example of God's self-giving in Christ by giving themselves to others so that the downward and outward movement of grace comes full circle in an ascending symphony of thanksgiving. Paul's opponents cut him to ribbons and paint themselves in glowing colors, but he presses forward in spiritual warfare, winning souls for Christ against all odds, rejoicing that the Lord prospers his work and opens doors for his ministry, giving all glory to Christ.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God's Son, the wealthiest of princes, became the most abject of slaves and gave His all to enrich poor sinners as His royal Bride. In our churches, we should honor those who undertake such servant tasks. Thanks be to God for His gift of willing servants, who distribute the life-giving Gospel in all their service in Christ. The Lord has representatives to encourage us today as well. For example, we should listen to those who gently remind us to keep our baptismal vows. We open our hands to receive from God and extend them to give to our neighbor. We marvel that in Jesus it is always more and never less and rejoice that God's gifts multiply as we receive and share them.

**PRAY:** Lord. Grant us to die to self and live to You, and to be instruments of Your mission, not obstacles in its way. Amen.

**April 15**

**READ:** Psalm 119:65-72 and 2 Corinthians 11-13

**MARK:** 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 – His power is made perfect in weakness.

**LEARN:** Paul went over the top in real ministry to bring the true Christ and the true Church to the Corinthians. He now grieves that they are falling for fake ministers who push a fake Christ. Paul gives sensitive personal information to prove that a genuine servant of Christ carries his Master's cross and drinks His cup. Like scarcely any other person before or since, Paul tasted the powers and bliss of heaven, but at the same time suffered bitterly under the curse of sin. The Corinthians should not have sat on their hands while the intruders tore Paul apart. The apostle wants to return for another visit, his heart and arms open wide with love, but he is also prepared to be firm if necessary. He will bind sins and excommunicate the unrepentant on his next visit. Yet he hopes an examination of consciences will show the Corinthians that they hold the Lord's doctrine and that they forsake the way of death to cling to the Lord of life. If Christ dwells in them, then Paul will come in gentleness, for the Gospel will hold sway. Confident that God's Word will do its work, Paul utters no more stern demand or harsh rebuke. He moves through gentle appeal to end on a triumphant note.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Believers must wake up to the fact that pure doctrine, right worship, and genuine pastors cannot be taken for granted. Although Christ knew many would cast aside His mercy, He still bore the cross and He still sends out true shepherds with the genuine Gospel. We, too, must suffer with Christ now in order to reign with Him later. The Lord and His angels protect and accompany His servants even when they seem to have forsaken us. Remember your vows to God concerning one another, and keep them well. The Lord still comes into our troubled lives with His heart set to do His proper work of mercy. The blessed Trinity is not a dry theory but the God of love in whom we have life now and forever.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, may Your coming to us in grace not be in vain, but for our good. Amen.

**April 16**

**READ:** Psalm 119:73-80 and Galatians 1-3

**MARK:** Galatians 2:20 – Christ lives in me.

**LEARN:** Paul's greeting anticipates the letter's central argument. According to His Father's will, Christ has graciously given Himself for our sins and delivered us from this present evil age; therefore, works of the Law are not necessary for salvation. Galatians begins not with an expression of thanksgiving but with a stern warning against defection from the one true Gospel. Selecting key facts from his personal history, Paul proves that his apostleship comes from God, independent of human sources. For by divine revelation, Paul went to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus to visit Church leaders who, despite some opposition in their midst, approved of his message and mission to the Gentiles. Also, for the sake of the truth of the Gospel, Paul publicly rebuked Peter for his hypocritical conduct, which communicated that the Gentiles must keep Jewish laws. With this incident, Paul presented Galatians' core theological argument: justification is by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Today, enemies of God's Church continue to question the divine origin of the Christian message, causing doubts and confusion among many believers in Christ. Christians continually face threats to the freedom they have in Christ, even from their own sinful flesh. The Word of God condemns hypocrisy (Mt 23:28; Lk 12:1; 1Pt 2:1; Lk 20:20). Yet this history shows that God is true to His promise of mercy toward sinners (1Co 1:9; 1Jn 1:9). The Gospel comes from God and thus cannot be deprived of its power to set us free. Those who appeal to the Law in addition to Christ as a means of salvation make His death meaningless-worse still, null and void. God's Son loves us and gave Himself for us to free us from the Law's condemnation.

**PRAY:** O Holy Spirit, continue to strengthen us in the new life of faith begun in our Baptism. Amen.

**April 17**

**READ:** Psalm 119:81-88 and Galatians 4-6

**MARK:** Galatians 6:1-2 – We bear each other's burdens.

**LEARN:** Paul appeals to the Galatians as a pastor with affection and tenderness, genuinely desiring to restore their friendship and especially the freedom in Christ they once so gladly embraced. He reverses the Judaizers' definition of Abraham's true children. Paul specifically argues that the acceptance of circumcision in principle violates Christian freedom and endangers a person's relation­ ship to Christ. Christian freedom means walking (conducting oneself) by the Holy Spirit's power and leading. Members of God's family restore the erring, bear one another's burdens, support their teachers, and do good to all, especially to fellow Christians. In a handwritten postscript, Paul leaves us with an interpretive lens through which to evaluate all Christian teaching and life: the message of the cross.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Congregational strife often arises when issues in the area of Christian freedom are elevated to the level of biblical doctrine. Christ Jesus loved us to the end so that He might lift the burden of guilt that troubles our consciences. Our sinful flesh, consumed by self-importance, instinctively looks down on others and inevitably causes interpersonal tensions. At Baptism, we were united with Christ, who died to set us free from sin and the way of the Law. Nonetheless, the Son of God "loved me and gave Himself for me" (2:20), that I may be free to serve Him and my neighbor in need. Against all self-righteous pride in spiritual accomplishments, the cross speaks a word of judgment. Yet to those who believe, the cross is God's power to make all things new.

**PRAY:** Lord, teach me to be patient with others so that I may not grow tired of doing good. Restore me with unfailing mercy. Amen.

**April 18**

**READ:** Psalm 119:89-96 and Ephesians 1-3

**MARK:** Ephesians 2:8-10 – We are saved by Grace!

**LEARN:** Paul directs the Ephesians away from themselves, teaching them to trust in God's promises in Christ. He gives thanks for God's power at work in the Ephesians, whom God had chosen from the foundation of the world. Judaizers threatened most early Christian communities, teaching that Gentiles had to obey the Old Testament Law in addition to having faith in Christ. But Paul insists that God saves both Jews and Gentiles by grace through faith, apart from any works. Christ has made us to be His one Body. Paul then defends his call as an apostle by emphasizing its basis in the Gospel. As He considers God's wisdom, grace, and love, he breaks out in prayer and praise.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Pride tempts us to trust in our commitment to God; doubt makes us worry that we are not committed enough. God's power is not automatically good news. It terrifies sinners, but it comforts us who know His love for us in Christ. Jesus blesses us spiritually by leading us to repent of sinful pride by the Law and calming our worried hearts through the Gospel. Today's self-help culture tempts us to try to do it all ourselves. Though our personal credentials are important, our service in the church is based on God's gifts and calling, which stem from the Gospel. Study of God's Word naturally combines with prayer and praise in the Divine Service, where Christ's gifts are given out, and we receive them with thanksgiving.

**PRAY:** Lord, forgive me for my prejudices and teach me to see Your Son in every Christian. Amen.

**April 19**

**READ:** Psalm 119:97-104 and Ephesians 4-6

**MARK:** Ephesians 5:1-2 – Walk in love.

**LEARN:** Paul highlights the gifts of Christ that make us His Body; as one Body, we are protected from the dangers of our times. He describes the new life that results from the Gospel. Yet, the Law also continues to apply because of our sinful nature. We are confronted every day by a world rebelling against God's way. Paul teaches that the husband is the “head” in a marriage and the wife is the “body.” Both are necessary for life. He briefly describes the Christian life and gives common examples of vocations, or callings, in life. He exposes the demonic forces that battle against us, and he encourages us with the divine weapons that protect us. Paul concludes the letter by emphasizing prayer and by greeting the brethren briefly.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** We are inclined today to view our marriages selfishly: what can I get out of it? Instead, we should consider what we can offer to our spouse and see behind each action a picture of the Gospel itself. Today, God calls us to serve Him and other people selflessly, lovingly, and conscious of our relationship to Christ. We should examine our lives and our callings. The Lord will forgive our shortcomings and strengthen us to be Christlike. In the modern world, the spiritual dimension of life is often overlooked. We view our problems and try to solve them in purely human terms. But the Lord works in us by His Word and Spirit.

**PRAY:** Father, may our marriages always be living pictures of Christ’s love and forgiveness. Amen.

**April 20**

**READ:** Psalm 119:105-112 and Philippians 1-2

**MARK:** Philippians 1:6 – He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.

**LEARN:** Paul demonstrates that his imprisonment does not defeat the Gospel, as some had feared. He turns his attention from the question of whether he will live or die to a more important issue: what it means to live in this world. Paul couples the imperatives of a Christian life with a description of Christ, who makes that life possible. His exhortation flows from the previous section, revealing the significance of Jesus' life and sacrifice. Paul takes a moment to inform the Philippians about the significance and well-being of two close associates, Timothy and Epaphroditus. These men provide remarkable examples of devotion to the Lord's mission and to His missionary Paul.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** We are certainly not lords, nor have we any excuse for refusing to honor Jesus Christ as Lord. Yet the fulfillment of the imperative to live like Christ is supported by all that Christ gives freely: the encouragement, comfort, love, and mind of Christ, along with the participation of the Spirit. Like Paul, our labor would be meaningless and of no use to others if we lived crookedly and perversely as the world around us lives. But God is at work in us, moving us to hold fast to His Word of life, by which He extends His image and kingdom to others.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, by Your mercy, make us faithful servants, looking after the welfare of Your fellow servants. Amen.

**April 21**

**READ:** Psalm 119:113-120 and Philippians 3-4

**MARK:** Philippians 4:6-7 – Pray and don’t be anxious. The peace of God will guard you.

**LEARN:** Paul reflects on his heritage and contrasts its value with the blessing of knowing Jesus, who sets us free to invest our lives in the lives of others. He holds out before us our upward calling, his example, and the promise of our transformation in the resurrection. As Paul concludes this letter, he uses imperative language to urge the reader to adopt practices of living that are in harmony with the Creator's will. Paul cannot end this letter without a vibrant expression of gratitude toward God and the service of the Philippians. His last words in the letter are greetings and blessings.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** We often focus on earthly comforts, worldly examples of success, and maintaining a youthful appearance for this life. While doing this, we starve our souls. Only the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has the power to truly set us free to experience life to the fullest. Our citizenship is in heaven! Our life is in Christ, who reigns over all things in heaven and earth. The strength and clarity of Paul's exhortation reminds us that we often are to set our minds on God's will and the promises of God's blessing on our behalf. Paul's outpouring of appreciation contrasts sharply with feelings of neglect, resentfulness, and even anger that can arise when we lack the privileges and comforts we expect. He invites us to see the blessings and fullness of God that are present in every situation. Christ multiplies those blessings by His grace. The grace of the Lord Jesus is so abundant that it flows over from Paul to us through this very Word and has the power to overflow from our lives into the lives of others so that we genuinely greet others and then extend God's grace to them.

**PRAY:** Dear Lord Jesus, forgive our ingratitude. Turn our minds to dwell on the fullness of life in Your Holy Word. Amen.

**April 22**

**READ:** Psalm 119:121-128 and Colossians 1-2

**MARK:** Colossians 1:9-14 – We pray for and bless one another.

**LEARN:** Faithful Epaphras established a tiny foothold for the kingdom of God at Colossae and nearby cities. Now this young church is threatened by false belief, which directs people away from Christ and His work to them­ selves. But God does not give up. He uses Paul, Timothy, and other faithful servants to establish the truth and love of Christ in their hearts. Paul cares very much for these new Christians, and he knows that God cares for them even more. Unfortunately, false teachings that lead people to look to themselves instead of looking to God compete for the Colossians' attention. Paul says we have the assurance that Christ's work reconciles us to God because of who Christ is: the image of the invisible God, the Creator, the one who is preeminent over all things. All people suffer because of the fallen nature of the world. But Christians are called to a special form of suffering for the sake of Christ: rejection, ridicule, and persecution. False teaching has infiltrated the Colossian Church, and it is not the teaching of Jesus Christ. Seeking guidance and security from creation rather than from the Creator will end in disaster. The Christian faith cannot be replaced by man-made religion.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** What else would you look to for assurance? To an angel? To yourself? No, look to God Himself in Christ. Since we have all been tempted to look to other things instead of Jesus for our salvation, God is the only one who can overcome this evil. God does not give up on us when we or those we love are tempted by false teachings. No one likes suffering. Nevertheless, the tears of Christian suffering reflect the glory of the cross of Christ. We can be drawn away from Christ by all sorts of attractive thoughts and words. Eventually, Christless or Christ-lite teachings will separate us from God and from one another. But the treasures of Christ's wisdom and knowledge overcome all temptation and defeat all deception. In Baptism, we have been raised up as a new creation. The waves of man-made religion always end up breaking apart upon God's truth in Jesus, who "is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8).

**PRAY:** Thank You, O God, for your patience and persistence to save us through Your beloved Son. Amen.

**April 23**

**READ:** Psalm 119:129-136 and Colossians 3-4

**MARK:** Colossians 3:1-2 – Set your mind on things above.

**LEARN:** What is the good life? Prosperity, popularity, pleasure? No, it is the life we receive from Jesus, including gifts that we cannot make or purchase: forgiveness, love, peace, and thankfulness. People have to work together, but the heart of the old nature is to seek personal advantage, which causes frustration, resentment, and violence. Paul urges us to resist this temptation. He presents to the Colossians and to us a beautiful explanation of Christ's person and work**.**

**INWARDLY DIGEST:**  Jesus' life fills us with virtues rather than vices and enables us to be a blessing rather than a bane to others no matter what our calling in life may be. We live by faith "in the Son of God, who loved [us] and gave Himself for [us]" (Gal 2:20). In Christ, we know that we will not miss out on anything. We do not need to turn to ourselves, to angels, or to anything else. Jesus is our true God and Savior. Paul's "grocery list" of concluding instructions shows that the Gospel is not an abstract idea. It is the essential truth that transforms individual lives, such as those mentioned here, and continues to transform one person after another.

**PRAY:** Lord, lead us to spend our lives in loving service for You and others, for You have so dearly loved us. Amen.

**April 24**

**READ:** Psalm 119:137-144 and 1 Thessalonians 1-3

**MARK:** Psalm 119:144 – Life comes through God’s Word.

**LEARN:** Paul's experience, inner being, motives, and love toward the Christians is laid bare. He speaks about how he conducted himself (2:9-12). He commends the Thessalonians for receiving the Gospel preached by him as the Word of God and for enduring persecution for its sake (2:13-16). Paul is interested in the well-being of the Thessalonians, whether they stand firm in the Gospel or yield due to pressure from the opponents. When he can no more bear the lack of news, he decides to send Timothy, his co-worker and helper. Then Paul gives thanks and prays for the Thessalonians when he hears the good report from Timothy that they are standing in their faith and have the same kind of love for him as he has for them.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord wants us to share His Gospel boldly, even if there is suffering or conflict in our path. We should please God and be faithful to His message rather than speak what is pleasing for people to hear. Let us not make the lack of financial resources an excuse. Pastors and leaders in God's Church need to follow up on their members. They should take practical steps to know how they are. The Lord seeks and wants to save and strengthen us through His servants, even in the midst of our problems. We are the apple of His eye. The Lord, who has promised to be with us until the end of time, will keep us in His faith and kindle His love in our hearts so that we may love Him and one another.

**PRAY:** We praise You, O God, because the gates of hell cannot prevent the sown seed of Your Word from growing. Amen.

**April 25**

**READ:** Psalm 119:145-152 and 1 Thessalonians 4-5

**MARK:** 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – Pray without ceasing.

**LEARN:** Paul gives advice on some practical matters dealing with sanctification so that their witness for the Lord may go forward blamelessly. He comforts the Thessalonians, saying that the dead in Christ will be the first to taste the resurrection and come with the risen Christ. At the second coming, we will all be together once more. After describing the future glory of those who have died in Christ, Paul now proceeds to tell the Thessalonians about the coming Day of Judgment in which the Lord will give His final verdict. He gives both his final instruction about leadership and a benediction**.**

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** We Christians must lead a sexually pure life so that we may not grieve the Holy Spirit. Our love to one another should not be superficial but honest and from the heart. We should live by our labor without improperly depending on others for support. What is more, Christians grieve over the death of loved ones but not as those who have no hope. The resurrection of our Lord, and the victory we have over death through Him gives us a living hope, despite the fact that death separates us from loved ones and causes great pain. Let us walk in holiness and righteousness so that we may not be ashamed when our Lord appears to judge our work. The Lord who has chosen us for salvation and died for us will be on our side on the final Day of Judgment. Christians should support and encourage one another. We should, therefore, respect the elders and leaders of our congregations because of their work for the Lord and the whole people of God. The Lord Jesus, by humbling Himself to the point of washing His disciples' feet, showed to us the love He has for all believers.

**PRAY:** Lord, give us You heart and mind so that our live may be blameless, respecting and loving others. Amen.

**April 26**

**READ:** Psalm 119:153-160 and 2 Thessalonians 1-3

**MARK:** 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 – Stand firm and hold to what you were taught.

**LEARN:** Paul gives thanks for God's grace at work among the Thessalonians, by which He has created faith and love in them. He points to the persecuted Thessalonians as examples for other Christians of their time and ours. God's judgment will be carried out by the Lord Jesus at His second coming on the Last Day. Paul warns the Thessalonians not to be misled regarding the second coming of Christ, thinking that the day of the Lord has already come. He describes those apocalyptic events yet to take place before the return of Jesus, specifically the revelation of the man of lawlessness. He also calls on the Thessalonians to stand firm in the faith the Lord has given them. He reminds them that both their calling and comfort have God as the source.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** We must be on guard against deception. There is much false teaching, especially regarding the end times. Our only protection against falsehood is to cling to the Word of God: read the Bible, pray based on the Word, and continue to hear the Word in the communion of saints. The God who has elected us unto salvation keeps us steadfast in the faith (1Th 5:23-24). The doctrine of election is a doctrine of the Gospel, by which we know that our salvation is guaranteed (Eph 1:14) because it depends on God alone as He has chosen us before the foundation of the world (Rm 8:28; 9:11).

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, keep us from idleness and the works of darkness. Enliven us by Your Spirit toward good works for others. Amen.

**April 27**

**READ:** Psalm 119:161-168 and 1 Timothy 1-3

**MARK:** 1 Timothy 2: 1-4 – Pray for all people. It is the Lord’s desire for all people to be saved.

**LEARN:** The work of the Gospel ministry carried out by Paul and Timothy flows from God's command. The words they speak are His words, not their own. Their competence for ministry comes from God, who called them to His service. Paul writes this Epistle to stop the teaching of false doctrine among the Ephesian churches and to promote the teaching of sound doctrine. God's patience and mercy are at work to save all sinners, whether they are blinded by ignorance (like Paul was) or have actively rejected the faith (like Hymenaeus and Alexander). The Gospel affirms the unique vocations God assigned to men and women at creation. Only qualified men may serve as pastors of God's flock. Deacons were faithful men, entrusted with special responsibilities for service to their fellow Christians.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Our sinful nature may sometimes bristle at the roles and responsibilities God has given us, causing us to fail to see that God has given us His divine design for male and female because He loves us and always wants what is best for us. We must always be on guard against this kind of sin, especially as we are gathered for public worship. Jesus faithfully fulfilled the divine role assigned to Him as the one mediator between God and all people. He willingly submitted Himself to death as the sacred substitute for sinners. Through faith in Him, we receive forgiveness of sins, and we rejoice to serve Him in earthly vocations characterized by thanksgiving, modesty, and self-control.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, as You so wonderfully serve us with the rich treasures of Your redeeming grace, inspire us by that grace joyfully to serve others in Your name. Amen.

**April 28**

**READ:** Psalm 119:169-176 and 1 Timothy 4-6

**MARK:** 1 Timothy 4:16 – Pastor’s must keep watch over themselves and the teaching.

**LEARN:** Paul describes how to work respectfully with other members of the congregation. When Christians interact with one another in ways that are honorable and pure, they beautifully reflect God and the faith they confess. But the Church is burdened and liable to be reviled by unbelievers when honor and purity are lacking. Rather than being content with what we have, we by nature covet the things we do not have. Those who covet often see money as a solution to all of life's problems. But those who love money are in grave danger; they risk losing their faith in Christ. As a true man of God, Timothy is to flee every corrupting influence and keep God's command, faithfully guarding that which has been deposited with him.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:**  Our dear Lord Jesus has made every Christian worthy of eternal honor by His sacrificial death and resurrection. Through faith in Him, even dishonorable sinners are regarded as God's pure and beloved children. Nothing can separate us from His love. As He tenderly cares for us through His Word of promise, we are able to enjoy lives of godliness with contentment. All that we can take with us when we leave this world is the life and immortality that Jesus has given us through faith and that is more than enough!

**PRAY:** Father in heaven, teach us to recognize Your gifts in every realm of life. Lead us always to receive them with thanksgiving. Amen.

**April 29**

READ: Psalm 120 and 2 Timothy 1-2

**MARK:** 2 Timothy 2:9 – The Word of God is not bound.

**LEARN:** Paul addresses Timothy tenderly, referring to him as his "beloved child" and speaking God's grace, mercy, and peace to him. Alone in prison and abandoned by many of his friends, Paul fondly remembers the encouragement he received from Timothy's sincere faith. Exhorting Timothy never to be ashamed of the faith he has been given, Paul exults in the promise of Christ, for whose sake he is imprisoned.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** As you speak to others, especially your fellow Christians, season what you say with God's Word. Remind them of the grace that is theirs in Christ (e.g., "The Lord be with you"; "God's peace to you"). Instead of feeling self-conscious about being Christian, we must share in Paul's forthright confession: "I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed" (v 12). Our Lord Jesus Christ will never let us go.

**PRAY:** Guard my tongue, O Lord, that it may be an instrument of Your praise. Amen.

**April 30**

**READ:** Isaiah 25:1-9 and 2 Timothy 3-4

**MARK:** 2 Timothy 4:1-5 Preach the word and not to satisfy itching ears.

**LEARN:** Using several comparisons (soldier, athlete, and farmer), Paul calls Timothy to find other faithful men who are able to share in the pastoral office. He reminds Timothy that he and his fellow pastors must remain focused on their task of proclaiming God's Word. They must not get bogged down in quarrels or give in to the temptations of the flesh (such as temper), but be generous and kind to all. Although Paul writes these words specifically about temptations that attack the pastoral office, they clearly apply to all Christians. Men such as Jannes and Jambres allowed themselves to be enticed, and in so doing they disqualified themselves regarding the faith. Paul points to himself as an example for Timothy. He speaks about the great work the Gospel has produced within him. Faced with the thought of his imminent death, Paul impresses upon Timothy the importance of carrying on where Paul will leave off, preaching the Word faithfully.

**INWARDLY DIGEST: C**hristians, including pastors, need one another in bearing one another's burdens. When God's Word is front and center in our minds and on our tongues, it acts powerfully to create ongoing repentance and faith. God's baptismal gift of the Holy Spirit creates within us an ongoing desire for repentance and forgiveness. Although we may regularly fall into sin (such falls are easy for all Christians), God calls us to faith again through His Word, reminding us of the forgiveness and cleansing that are ours in Christ Jesus. Our fellow Christians want to learn the faith from us, and they watch us in the same way that Timothy watched Paul. God's Word sometimes cuts like a knife when it exposes our sin. But after the Law comes the Gospel of peace, binding up the wounds inflicted by the Law with the sweet Gospel, which proclaims Christ's forgiveness for all our sins.

**PRAY:** Thank You, Lord, for my fellow Christians whom I name before You in my prayers. Amen.

**May 1**

**READ:** 1 Samuel 2:1-10, Titus, and Philemon

**MARK:** “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives…” (Titus 2:11-12).

**LEARN:** Hannah’s prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10) sounds an awful lot like Mary’s song of praise (Luke 1:46-56): “He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted the lowly.” The barren and the virgin alike rejoice in the Lord’s blessing them with a son—the turning upside-down of even the order of creation.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** I’ve asked some Roman Catholic seminary students about the whole celibacy thing, especially in light of passages like Titus 1:6. They acknowledge the struggle—desiring to have a family and yet desiring the “higher calling” (as they understand it) of priesthood. In fact, they tell me that, in general, priests *should* live in that tension—they should, to some degree, always desire a family. If a priest is to be the head of a body of believers, he should have some desire to be the head of his own family.

**PRAY:** Lord, by your grace you have saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Help us to live and grow in our baptismal grace and faith in Christ. Amen.

**May 2**

**READ:** Psalm 121 and Hebrews 1-4

**MARK:** “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb. 1:1-2).

**LEARN:** The writer to the Hebrews, like Jesus himself, avidly quotes the Psalms to demonstrate that Jesus is the Lord. After all, the entirety of Scripture is about Jesus (see John 5:39; Luke 24:27). God foretold through the prophets what would happen when he sent the Messiah/Christ, and Jesus readily fulfills the Father’s prophecies (see Matthew 11:4-6; Isaiah 35:5-6).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In Psalm 121:1, the hills are often thought to be awe-inspiring signs of God’s wondrous creation. One would see these hills on their path up to Jerusalem, and they would serve as positive signs for meditation and worship. I would like to suggest an alternative interpretation. Throughout much of Israel’s history, the hills were places of pagan worship: “For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree” (1 Kings 14:23; see also, for example, 2 Kings 16:4; 17:10; and Isaiah 57:5). As one would journey toward Jerusalem to worship *the one true God*, the hills would be a constant *negative* sign of the people and ways that surrounded him. I find this a more fitting context as the question is raised: “From where does my help come? From the Lord.” The psalmist does not see the hills (the wondrous creation) reaffirming the source of his help; the hills create a need for him to call out for help to the one true God.

**PRAY:** What is man, that you are mindful of him, O Lord? And yet you sent your only-begotten Son into our flesh, not to lower him eternally but to raise us up eternally. We praise you for your mysterious divine mercy. Amen.

**May 3**

**READ:** Psalm 122 and Hebrews 5-7

**MARK:** “The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever” (Hebrews 7:23-24).

**LEARN:** Remember Melchizedek from Genesis 14:18-20? He is a character who literally comes out of nowhere and then is never heard from again after he blesses Abram. He was “priest of God Most High”—that is, a legitimate priest of the Lord before the Levitical priesthood was ever established. The author to the Hebrews references Melchizedek to show that, even in the Old Testament, not all legitimate priests were Levites. Thus, even though Jesus was not a Levite (rather, he was a Judahite), he could still be a legitimate priest of the Lord.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “How should we understand this ‘peace of Jerusalem’ for which we pray [in Psalm 122]? Two senses seem intended. The most obvious is to understand Jerusalem as the beneficiary of this peace, meaning ‘pray that Jerusalem will have peace,’ pray that the Church on earth will enjoy tranquility, in which to serve God with an undisturbed and quiet mind. … [In addition,] to ‘pray for the peace of Jerusalem’ means to pray that, even now, we may enjoy, in measure, the peace of eternal life. This prayer, too is most appropriate to make. Truly, we pray it first. Even before praying for the peace of the whole world and the good estate of the holy churches of God, we are careful to pray ‘for the peace from above and for the salvation of our souls.’ For the one is the wellspring of the other. The peace for which we pray is not that which the world gives (or, more often, fails to give). It is the peace with which the risen Lord greets us when, ever again, He enters through the locked doors, and breathes His Holy Spirit upon us, and tells us to touch our fingers to the everlasting wounds” (Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*).

**PRAY:** Lord God, heavenly Father, even as we pray to you your Son intercedes to you on our behalf. Hear us, not in the weakness and frailty of our prayers, but in the urgency and sincerity of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit are one God, now and forever. Amen.

**May 4**

**READ:** Psalm 123 and Hebrews 8-10

**MARK:** “…so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28).

**LEARN:** Hebrews 10:19-25 is worth memorizing. It eloquently weaves together worship in the Old Testament and the New: the blood of sacrifices, the blood of Jesus; the curtain between God and man, the flesh of Christ; the promise, for faith, of the OT, and the promise, of faith, of the NT. This passage also naturally flows from worship into daily life: since this is true, therefore we should stir up one another to good works.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The author to the Hebrews says that the Tabernacle and its sacrifices were “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (8:5). But the meaning here is not entirely negative; God himself directed Moses to build the Tabernacle and offer right sacrifices. It is not as if the Tabernacle was all bad, for God himself dwelt there. It is not as if the Old Testament sacrifices were all bad, for God himself instituted them. Similarly, if not all who attend worship will, in the end, be saved (for some will fall away, as we see today), it is not that church is bad or worship is bad. They still have value. God still works through them. We cannot let our hardness of heart cast a shadow on God’s good gifts to us.

**PRAY:** To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens! Have mercy upon your servants who eagerly wait for your direction and your provision, O God of our salvation. Amen.

**May 5**

**READ:** Psalm 124 and Hebrews 11-13

**MARK:** “And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:39-40).

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

**LEARN:** The Old Testament is not simply one of Law. It is not OT: “do this” and NT: “never mind, it’s already done.” In the OT and NT alike, the Lord is a God of promise and fulfillment. He makes outrageous promises to his people (e.g. you’re really old, but I’m going to give you innumerable offspring and the whole world will be blessed through you; I’m going to rinse you off, and thereby give you eternal life). God’s OT people were waiting for the final fulfillment of God’s promises to them (see Heb. 11:39-40), and so are we as we await Jesus’ triumphal return.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Why can we trust God to save us from the torrents, the snare, the evils that surround us? He has saved us in the past (Ps. 124:1-7). Plus, he made everything and remains in control (Ps. 124:8).

**PRAY:** O God, our fathers looked to you, and you kept your promises. Please send your Son soon, that we may see their final fulfillment. Amen.

**May 6**

**READ:** Psalm 125 and James 1-3

**MARK:** “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17).

**LEARN:** James is not Paul. It sounds obvious, but it is worth noting. Each is firmly Christian. Each is an apostle. Each has his own role in establishing and nurturing the early Church. But we should not expect James to be thoroughly analytical, logical, or sin-and-grace focused in the same way the Paul is. James is writing to Christians who are in danger of spiritual apathy or a disconnect between faith and life. When Saint John writes to churches in similar situations, he says similar things (Revelation chps. 2-3).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Is our justification in Christ, in fact, lacking until we do enough good—are the Roman Catholics right, after all? Not quite. “You see that faith was *active* *along with* his works, and faith was *completed by* his works” (James 2:22). If your so-called “faith” never yields the fruit of true faith, then it should be called into question. However, know that the fruit of faith is not perfection, but repentance. Repentance is wanting to do better, or even wanting to want to do better. Repentance is never completed; it is never-ending. Repentance is a way of life—a blessed, enduring gift of the Holy Spirit.

**PRAY:** “As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore.” Surround us, we pray, that we might succumb neither to apathy or self-justification. Protect us from the snares of the evil one. Amen.

**May 7**

**READ:** Psalm 126 and James 4-5

**MARK:** “You do not know what tomorrow will bring… Instead you ought to say, ‘*If the Lord wills,* we will live and do this or that’” (James 4:14-15).

**LEARN:** James is not Paul (see yesterday’s excursus). “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (4:8) is not about conversion; it is not about what it takes to become a Christian. Rather, James is writing to people who are already Christians. In this passage he urges Christians to repent of their pride and double-mindedness.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord turns things topsy-turvy. The regular order of things is at his command, not the other way around. “Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:5-6). “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). The note from May 1 still rings clearly: Hannah’s prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10) sounds an awful lot like Mary’s song of praise (Luke 1:46-56): “He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted the lowly.” Jesus himself keeps this pattern, as well: “The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:11-12; compare James 4:10). “So the last will be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16).

**PRAY:** Keep us from boasting and pride, O Lord. Do not let our sin consume us. Renew us in Christ, who makes all things right. Amen.

**May 8**

**READ:** Psalm 127 and 1 Peter 1-2

**MARK:** “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

**LEARN:** “For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly” (1 Peter 2:19). Christians should not simply have a persecution complex. Just because we suffer doesn’t mean that it’s what Peter is talking about here. He’s talking about suffering for doing what is *right*—not simply suffering. We can suffer from the consequences of our actions all we want; that is not righteous suffering any more than it is religious persecution. Peter’s point: it’s all well and good if people hate you for living as a Christian and you therefore suffer, but don’t suffer for suffering’s sake and don’t get bent out of shape when you suffer because of your own sins.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God” (1 Peter 2:16). Be free, but be servants. It sounds like an oxymoron. Yet, if our definition of freedom means that we cannot be servants, then our definition of freedom must be wrong (according to the Word of God, which gets to be right). If I may quote my sermon on Romans 8:2, this is directly related to the issue of freedom and boundaries:

Let’s say there’s a playground in the middle of New York City. Busy streets surround it on all sides, and the sounds of brakes, horns, and foot traffic drown out even the laughter and yells of the kids running around. Now, what if this playground didn’t have a fence around it? What if the kids were free to roam around the edges unsupervised, kicking the soccer ball as high as they could and chasing it wherever it goes? Does that seem like a good idea? Why not—isn’t that letting these little people roam free? Isn’t that just letting them live their lives without any overbearing restrictions imposed on them? If you don’t want anyone to tell you what to do, why should it be any different for the kids? If you don’t want God to be firm when he condemns your pride, your greed, your anger, your gossip, and all the rest, then why should we be firm about any other rules that we just make up as we go along? Boundaries are good. Boundaries define your freedom. They clear up any muddy water. With a fence put up, the children are free to run around and play all sorts of games in relative safety. With a fence put up, we are free to have all sorts of adventures without getting into dangerous territory or the horrors of doing whatever we want.

**PRAY:** Unless you built the house, O Lord, it is built in vain. You are our rock, our fortress, our protector. Defend us, Lord. Give us rest and fruitfulness from our labors. Hear us for the sake of your Son. Amen.

**May 9**

**READ:** Psalm 128 and 1 Peter 3-5

**MARK:** “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). “Baptism… now saves you” (1 Peter 3:21).

**LEARN:** Martin Luther on 1 Peter 3:21: “You are not kept and saved by washing away the filth of the flesh, so that the body may be clean, as was the practice of the Jews; such purification has no further value. But you are kept by ‘the covenant of a good conscience toward God.’ That is, you feel your conscience to be rightfully at peace within you, because it stands in covenant with God and can say: He has promised to me that which he will fulfill, for he cannot lie. If you shall rely upon and cleave to his Word, then shall you be preserved. Faith alone is ‘the covenant’ by which we shall be kept; no outward work which you can do will suffice.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 1:7). And not only is it the beginning of wisdom, it is also the foundation of things simply working as they’re supposed to (Psalm 128). When you are “like a tree planted by streams of water,” that is, when your “delight is in the law of the Lord” (Psalm 1), the Lord blesses you. Now, this doesn’t mean your life will be easy, nor that you will see blessings in the short-term. This is about the big picture. This blessing isn’t like winning the lottery, but like having a faithful wife and many faithful children. It is long-term: “May you see your children’s children!” So rejoice, dear Christians. We are built upon the foundation of Christ. His Holy Spirit instills in us the fear of the Lord. Don’t willingly stray into foolishness; that would be dumb.

**PRAY:** Teach us to fear you, O Lord, that we may gain a heart of wisdom and a blessed life. Teach us to honor you, O Lord, that we may always be prepared to proclaim our hope in Christ’s resurrection and return. Amen.

**May 10**

**READ:** Psalm 129 and 2 Peter

**MARK:** “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:2-9). “One day is as a thousand years” does not mean whatever we might want it to mean, nor is it an obscure promise that things will simply work out one day. It is an image used to show that God is patient in dealing with us according to our sin. It is the hope that, where we might only wait one day for a person to repent before we forgive him, the Lord is infinitely more patient with us.

**LEARN:** 2 Peter speaks of the Last Day in this way: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved… the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn” (3:10, 12). This is a unique view within Scripture; nowhere else is judgment day described as burning away earth and heaven. When we read Scripture, we read unclear passages in light of clear ones and poorly-attested passages (i.e. from books not well-accepted by the early Church) in light of well-attested ones. Early Church Fathers, Luther, and others tended to give 2 Peter, along with James, 2-3 John, Jude, and Revelation a lower place within the canon of Scripture. That is, when we read 2 Peter and the others, we always read them in light of the rest of Scripture, not the other way around. So when James speaks in terms that could be understood as works-righteousness, we hold fast to justification by grace through faith in Christ as the “solid thing” and interpret James in light of that. When we read 2 Peter’s burning away of earth and heaven, we place more weight on the other images Scripture uses for the Last Day: Christ descending from heaven, judging the living and the dead, and making all things new. We shouldn’t be too focused on the “fire and brimstone” of 2 Peter because, well, the historic Church hasn’t done so. Rather, we focus on what is clear in Scripture: Christ’s return, judgment, and recreation. We hope in these rather than fearing Peter’s fire.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Through remembering, we hope. Through remembering God’s justice and deliverance (2 Peter 2:4-8), we hope for his future, final justice and deliverance (v. 9-10).

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, we are greatly afflicted as we wait for your justice. Send your Son once more, that he may make all things right. Amen.

**May 11**

**READ:** Psalm 130 and 1 John 1-3

**MARK:** “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared” (Ps. 130:3-4). “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

**LEARN:** “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 Jn. 2:3). Not to belabor the point, but St. John is not St. Paul, either; he doesn’t share Paul’s way of thinking exactly. St. John is *not* saying that Christians should be able to look at their lives and find no sin (see 1 Jn. 1:8—2:2). Rather, John is pointing out that a good tree bears good fruit, and so those moments in which we examine ourselves and see how the Spirit (see 4:13) has been transforming us can be quite encouraging. Nevertheless, the goal is clearly that we should not sin.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** What if every time you sin the Lord updates his list. How long might it be until his hand got cramped, as it were, or he ran out of pages? “But with you there is forgiveness.” To forgive is to put away sin—to tear out the pages, crumple them up, and throw them in the waste basket. Through the blood of Jesus, the Lord forgives you.

**PRAY:** O God, You have trodden our iniquities underfoot and have cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You have forgotten as You have forgiven. The rising sun is not darkened by my dark yesterday; my hot rebellion of yesteryear has not dried this year’s compassionate rain or parched the teeming earth on which I walk. Oh, still this guilty memory of mine, this dark and unadmitted doubt of You, this questioning of Your forgiveness and Your forgetting. Oh, do not let them rise again to torment me, those harsh defacements of my fellowman, those words that flew, arrows fiery with my anger, those proud and brittle clashes of my against my neighbor, those ragged neglects of simple duty. Your Son’s cross stands empty against the sky. Your Son’s grave is opened wide. Your angels have spoken. And Your Son sits at Your right hand for me, for me. Let me remember this; let me forget. Amen. –Martin Franzmann

**May 12**

**READ:** Psalm 131 and 1 John 4-5

**MARK:** “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:10-11).

**LEARN:** There are two major motivations for doing what is right—for keeping God’s commandments. These are fear and love (see 1 Jn. 4:18-21). Fear can drive us for a while. You don’t lie on your taxes for fear of the IRS. You don’t speed for fear of getting a ticket (especially at night, for fear of the unseen, unknown police officer). In this way, fear appropriately drives even non-Christians. But Christians also have an entirely different motivation: love. This love does not come from us, though it does spring up within us: “We love because he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Love is the chief motivation of John’s entire epistle. Take a moment to ponder 1 Jn. 1:3; 2:4-6, 10, 15; 3:1, 16-18, 23; 4:7-8, 16-18; 5:1-3.

**PRAY:** O God who is love incomprehensible, teach us to love as you love us. Amen.

**May 13**

**READ:** Psalm 132, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude

**MARK:**

**LEARN:** All 3 of today’s epistles are poorly attested—even the Early Church had their doubts about including them in the Bible (see May 10). Luther says the following of Jude’s epistle:

The authorship of this epistle is attributed to the holy apostle Jude—the brother of the two apostles James the Less and Simon. They were his brothers by the sister of the mother of Christ, who is called Mary (the wife) of James and Cleopas, as we read in Mark 6:3; 16:1. However, this epistles does not seem to be from one of the first apostles; for in it the author speaks of the apostles, as if he were their junior, having lived long after them (v. 17-18). It is nothing special except it refers to the Second Epistle of Peter from which it has taken nearly all its words, and on the whole it is nothing else than an epistle against our clergy, bishops, priests and monks.

Because these epistles are poorly attested, we should regard them as secondary—to be interpreted and understood by looking at other Scripture. We shouldn’t use them to proof text anything. I’d love to go into a long excursus on canonization, but I’ll save that for a Bible study sometime (or just ask me).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ps. 132 is one of the songs of Ascent; it was prayed by God’s people as they journeyed to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices. May God be present and gracious in the places where he has promised to be present and gracious—even as we drive to church on Sunday morning.

**PRAY:** “Arise, O Lord, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy.” Amen.

**May 14**

**READ:** Psalm 133 and John 1-2

**MARK:** “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

**LEARN:** John’s early relationship with Jesus was quite strange. They were related (Mary was Elizabeth’s relative, see Luke 1:36), so they probably grew up racing toy camels or something. Mary and Elizabeth both knew what the angels had told them: that John would prepare the way for the Lord, that Jesus would save God’s people from their sins, etc. Nevertheless, John did not know that Jesus is the Messiah (“Christ” or “Anointed One”). That is, not until he baptized Jesus and saw the Spirit remain on him (Jn. 1:33-34). From this point on, John is always pointing to Jesus: “Behold, the Lamb of God!” (Jn. 1:36).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** With one of his first public actions as the Christ, Jesus foretells his death and resurrection (2:19). His entire ministry is focused on it.

**PRAY:** *Martin Franzmann’s prayer for men in protest, that they would find unity and charity:* O furious Cleanser of the house of God, O Blaster of the fruitless tree, look in mercy on these men whose love compels them to spell out in act their anguished impatience at the sloth of law, their no to legal illegalities, their militant compassion for the wronged and all the nameless, faceless poor and dispossessed. Keep them from intoxication with their rightness. Give them charity toward those who cannot be as militant as they, who walk down other, longer roads toward the same goal. Preserve them from driving the wedge of power so deep into the grain of structured equity that all goes crashing. Bid them guard with care the flame that breaks so quickly into a fire that makes an indifferent holocaust of all the works of Your judicial hand. Lord, give us all a heart of quick compassion, wisdom to plan and execute before the too-late of our action breeds the swarms of scorpions whose sting shall make us all long for death we cannot find. Amen.

**May 15**

**READ:** Psalm 134 and John 3-4

**MARK:** John 3:16 (“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”) cannot properly be understood apart from v. 17-21 (“Whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” “People loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed”).

**LEARN:** Nicodemus approaches the Lord “at night.” He comes on behalf of the darkened world (“Rabbi, *we* know…”). He is in the dark, grasping at straws, failing to comprehend the light and life whom he has approached. He misunderstands being “born from above” (grasping only an earthly concept of being “born again”). He questions the teacher: “How can these things be?” He is one of the darkened souls who “is condemned already” and who apparently “loved the darkness rather than the light because [his] works are evil.” Contrast this with the Samaritan woman at the well. She, too, misunderstood Jesus. However, this conversation takes place at noon, she recognizes Jesus to be more than a teacher—but the giver of living water—and her response is to leave her bucket (her source of temporal water) and testify to the source of living water.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Psalm 134 teaches us that blessing is bidirectional. We bless the Lord; we praise him and exalt him (lift him up in our minds and with our words), all of which is only appropriate. But the Lord also blesses us. He doesn’t praise us in the way that we do him, for there is nothing praiseworthy within us that is not his alone. But the God of heaven and earth does lift us up—he blesses the otherwise futile work of our hands and he gives us far better than we deserve.

**PRAY:** “O God, O Lord of heaven and earth, Thy ancient finger never wrote that life should be an aimless mote, a deathward drift from futile birth. Thy Word meant life triumphant hurled in splendor through Thy broken world. Since light awoke and life began, Thou hast desired Thy life for man” (*LSB* 834). Grant us this life always. Amen.

**May 16**

**READ:** Psalm 135 and John 5-6

**MARK:** “The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands… Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them” (Psalm 135:15, 18). “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:48-51).

**LEARN:** The healing of the invalid at the Pool of Bethesda is an early, tragic example of Christ’s judgment. The man is basically looking for a magical answer.[[2]](#footnote-2) What he gets is the God-man healing him with a word and sending him home. When the Jews judge him for working on the Sabbath, he passes the condemnation onto his Healer instead.

“The man’s persistent sin is his unresponsiveness to Jesus, and Jesus warns him that by continuing in unbelief he will encounter something worse than a reprimand for a Sabbath violation. Carrying his mat brought him under the judgment of the Jewish authorities, but unbelief will bring him under the judgment of God. The encounter led to no change in the man’s character, however, for he simply reported his healer to the authorities, who began persecuting Jesus (5:15-16)” (Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him” (John 6:66). People hate divine monergism—that God must do the whole work of saving us. The cause-and-effect world we see around us makes much more sense than believing that we’re helpless. After all, if I’m truly helpless—if I’m actually *the worst* and can’t even do anything about it—how can I live with myself? But to those who are granted faith through the Spirit working through the Word of Christ, we are helpless to respond in any way other than, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” We can do no other.

**PRAY:** O Living Bread from heaven, please feed us your flesh and blood that we may partake in you and have life. Amen.

**May 17**

**READ:** Psalm 136 and John 7-8

**MARK:** “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever” (Psalm 136:1). “Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34).

**LEARN:** If someone argues that Jesus never claims to be God (or equal with God), show them John 8:58-59 and ask them why the Jews got so angry with Jesus for saying this. Then point to Exodus 3:13-14 where God describes himself as fundamentally being I am who I am. Then hope over to Isaiah 43:10 where God calls upon himself, his servant/son, and his hearers to ask as his witnesses, in order that people may “know and believe me and understand that I Am.” See also the “I Am” statements in John 8:24, 28). Jesus is the one in whom God is revealed.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Once again, Jesus makes a bold claim: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). In the OT, God’s Law is what enabled his people to walk in light while in the midst of darkness, e.g. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). In John’s gospel, Jesus redefines darkness and light: walking in darkness means persisting in unbelief, and walking in the light means living by faith in Jesus. Jesus himself is the Word—now made flesh and dwelling among us.

**PRAY:** Lord of light, enlighten us by your Spirit that we may ever walk the path of righteousness. Amen.

**May 18**

**READ:** Psalm 137 and John 9-10

**MARK:** “’Rabbi, who sinned, this may or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him’” (John 9:2-3). “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

**LEARN:** “Who sinned?” (John 9:2). Well, no one’s particular sins caused his blindness. And yet everyone sins. He did and his parents both did. But, Jesus tells us, we cannot exactly link every way in which we suffer to a precise sin which we have committed. Sin is not just an action; it’s a condition. We are conceived and born in such a way that our very flesh—everything about us—is fundamentally falling apart. Thanks be to God that his Son came to reverse all of this—not only our failing actions, but our failing bodies and minds, too. And so he reverses part of the curse of this man’s sinfulness, giving us just a glimpse of the final reversal at the resurrection of all flesh to purity and cleanness, without any corruption.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!” (Psalm 137:9). Other than the Gospel message, this is probably the most offensive part of the Bible. How can God’s people wish the gruesome, violent death of babies—even if they are the children of your enemies?! Consider the context. God’s people in Judah (the Southern Kingdom) forsook their God and his promises to the Davidic line. God used the Babylonians to remove them from the land and carry them far away. Now, God’s people are reflecting upon this reality as the Babylonians tease them, “Sing us a song of your ‘holy’ God—the one we overpowered by stealing you away!” O that the Lord would have mercy upon us and restore us to freedom in his land! O that the Lord would bring justice upon these foreigners who mock the living God! It is but a moderate step to get to the dashing of babies against the rock—the destroying of Babylon and any would-be future generations. As with much of Scripture (especially the OT), we cannot simply regard this prayer as morally upright (just as we should not take Abram’s example in lying, saying our wife is really just our sister). However, this is a very real plea of God’s nearly-forsaken people. May the Lord have mercy upon us and withhold from us the depth of divine justice.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, when our world is crumbling apart and we see more and more of the corruption of our flesh and the world around us, grant us faith in your Son the great physician—the healer of body and soul who will finally and fully finish the job when he returns. Amen.

**May 19**

**READ:** Psalm 138 and John 11-12

**MARK:** “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

**LEARN:** “Jesus’ claim to be the resurrection and the life takes people as whole beings in relation to God. When Jesus says that he is the resurrection, he indicates that those who believe in him will experience physical death. He does not distinguish the body that dies from the soul that does not die, but simply speaks of the believer dying and being brought back to life. He treats the person as a whole, acknowledging that for the believer death is real but not final, and promising that through resurrection the faithful will be brought into life everlasting. The raising of Lazarus is a sign that demonstrates the truth of this promise, because ‘Lazarus is dead’ and Jesus comes to ‘awaken him’ by calling him out of the tomb (11:1, 14), just as in the future ‘all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out’ (5:28-29)” (Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “The house has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (John 12:23). When does this happen—at Jesus’ resurrection, when Jesus rises in glory from the earth? No, it is at his betrayal and death, when Jesus is lifted in shame from the earth.

**PRAY:** Do not forsake the work of your hands, O Lord. Though we die, yes shall we live; this you have promised us. Forsake us not in our moment of temptation. Forsake us not in our moment of death. Revive us once more with your life-giving Spirit. Amen.

**May 20**

**READ:** Psalm 139 and John 13-14

**MARK:** “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me” (John 13:20). “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34).

**LEARN:** “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). If “no one comes to the Father” apart from Christ, then everyone is, by default, separated from the Father until they take the way of Christ. The way of Christ was the way of betrayal, death, and resurrection. For whom did Christ go this way? “According to John’s Gospel, Jesus went the way of the cross for all people, not just for some people. In the opening chapter John the Baptist announces ‘the way of the Lord’ (1:23) by pointing to ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (1:29). Using the term ‘world’ emphasizes the scope of Christ’s mission. Christ sacrificed himself for all because sin, which separates [all] people from God, is part of the human condition. And the conviction that Christ dies for the sake of the world is underscored by the sign above the cross, which proclaims Christ’s identity in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek for all the world to see (19:20)” (Koester, *The Word of Life*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Where can you go to get away from God? Where can you flee from his presence? How can you get him to leave you alone? Psalm 139 can be one of either the most comforting, or the most terrifying, passages in Scripture in times of spiritual distress. You cannot get away from God; that is either a blessing or a curse, depending on how God feels about you. Either you cannot get God off your back—you cannot get him to stop causing all your woes—or you cannot be brought so high or so low that he cannot remain faithful to you.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, you have shown us the way. You have taken the way. You are the way—the one and only. Lead us always in this way of faith, that we might ever hold fast the confession that you alone are Lord, Christ, and Savior. Amen.

**May 21**

**READ:** Psalm 140 and John 15-16

**MARK:** “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

**LEARN:** The Helper—the Holy Spirit—will “bear witness about me [Jesus]. And you will also bear witness…” (John 15:26-27). What is this witness? “Witnessing means voicing one’s convictions in contexts where truth is not obvious. In a formal sense witness might be given in a courtroom, where the arguments proffered by the prosecution and defense collide. But witness also occurs wherever people must testify to what they believe, despite claims to the contrary. Jesus tells the disciples that the world will hate and persecute them. Such opposition does not call for withdrawal but for witness, for truth-telling” (Koester, *The Word of Life*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** It strikes me that I do not know how to pray the imprecatory psalms (e.g. Ps. 140). I am simply not aware of any ferocious person who counts me his enemy. How can I pray for the Lord to deliver me from that which I don’t believe to be a problem? Then I am reminded that the Psalms—like the rest of Scripture and the rest of life—are not about me. I do not need to know how to pray these psalms; Jesus does. He most certainly prayed them when his enemies surrounded him. He prayed them as he headed to the cross, as he knew all along that Judas would betray him, as he walked straight into the Jewish leaders’ trap. Despite his treacherous surroundings, he still prayed, “I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and will execute justice for the needy” (Ps. 140:12) as he waited for the Lord’s salvation.

**PRAY:** “Lord, you keep constant guard over your faithful people. Protect us from hidden snares, deliver us from those who would seek to do us harm, and make us holy; that we may praise and bless your name and live in righteousness before you now and forever. Amen” (*For All the Saints*).

**May 22**

**READ:** Psalm 141 and John 17-18

**MARK:** “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:18).

**LEARN:** Knowledge is more than power; knowledge is life: “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). How does this knowledge come? How have even we 21st century Americans come to know Jesus? Through the Church, and particularly through her being united around him and centered on him. “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20-21). Divisions in the Church are deadly in many ways—not only that the saved may be lost to error, but also that the lost may fail to see the truth because of our divisiveness. Lord, have mercy and heal us.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by safely” (Ps. 141:10). Ironic justice: this is what the psalmist desires for his enemies. This is exactly “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”—fairly limited retribution. The wicked would ensnare the righteous? Let them fall into their own trap! This is justice. Nevertheless, Jesus himself demands a higher response, and he himself gives that higher response: love. “But I say to you… if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39).

**PRAY:** “O God, almighty and all-merciful, once chaos gave way before Your command, and Your creation stood forth structured, wonderful, to call forth melody from all the singing stars. Our wild rebellion shivered and blackened all that, called a chaos down more fearful than the first; and You have spoken a Word more powerful, Your Word of love, Your Son, and You have made us—ah, gift intolerable—the firstfruits of Your new and righteous world. You have made us sons. Ah, gift intolerable—how shall we show forth the splendor of the world to come, the home of righteousness which shall one say live here unbroken and entire? We cannot—but Your Word can. Oh, let it work in us, that Word implanted in our midst, Your creative Word, and let us bring forth summer fruits for You. Amen” (Martin Franzmann)

**May 23**

**READ:** Psalm 142 and John 19

**MARK:** “Woman, behold your son… Behold, your mother!” (John 19:26-27). “It is finished” (John 19:30).

**LEARN:** Why did Jesus die? For our sins, yes. But looking at the most immediate causes, Roman soldiers hung him on a cross at the order of Pilate. Pilate gave the order because he feared the Jews. He feared the Jews because they threatened to report him to Caesar as being insolent, because he would have let this king—perhaps even a rival to Caesar!—live. As with many of God’s other prophets, Jesus died at the hands of the Jews. As with many of the other would-be kings, Jesus died at the hands of the Romans.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Even at the hour of Jesus’ death, his chief concern is still for his people. He even uses this time to make sure someone (John) would take care of his mother for him (John 19:26-27).

**PRAY:** “Lord Jesus, hanging on the cross and left alone by your disciples, you called on your Father with a mighty cry as you gave up your spirit. Deliver us from the prison of affliction, and be yourself our inheritance in the land of the living, where with the Father and the Holy Spirit you are blessed now and forever. Amen” (*For All the Saints*).

**May 24**

**READ:** Psalm 143 and John 20-21

**MARK:** “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld’” (John 20:21-23). “Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:28). “These [things] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

**LEARN:** “John understands Jesus’ death as the consummate expression of divine love, but recognizes that this is only apparent in retrospect, from the vantage point of the resurrection… The action of the risen Jesus is what brings people to the faith through which his life and death can be understood. The resurrection is essential for authentic faith because faith is a relationship with a living being. According to John, the crucifixion communicates the divine love that is the basis for a relationship with Jesus, and the resurrection means that this relationship is more than a remembering of one who has died. Faith is an active trust in a Jesus who is unseen yet alive. Finally, the resurrection of Jesus defines hope for the future. The followers of Jesus face the prospect of a death that is as real as the death of Jesus himself. The message of resurrection is that the relationship with Jesus that begins now, in faith, has a future through the believer’s own resurrection” (Koester, *The Word of Life*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** *The Learn section leaves plenty to be digested for today.*

**PRAY:** O God, through the glorious resurrection of your Son you have opened to us the way to everlasting life. You have unsealed the tomb, lifted the grave, and set your foot on death’s neck. When That Day comes—according to your own gracious and perfect timing—deliver us finally from this enemy who has claimed nearly every life. Your claim over us is surer. Amen.

**May 25**

**READ:** Psalm 144 and Acts 1-2

**MARK:** “O Lord, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow” (Ps. 144:3-4). “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself’” (Acts 2:38-39).

**LEARN:** The Tower of Babel is finally reversed at Pentecost. The people had tried to build themselves up to heaven, but God confused their language and scattered them. Now, people from many nations and languages gather in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths, and the apostles speak such that each person hears in his own native language and is built up by God.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** What is the overall force of the first post-resurrection sermon in Acts 2? Take a minute to look it over again. It is not, “Christ is risen! Alleluia! (Praise the Lord!)” Rather, it’s, “Christ is risen! Repent! He is risen indeed! Really, really repent!” We did not jump back into Lent; repentance is a proper Easter theme. This is especially true for unbelievers, for “You killed him, but God raised him from the dead” is terrifying news. “God has made him both Lord (King) and Christ (the Coming one, the Messiah)”? Oh no! What shall we do? Repent and be baptized; be forgiven.

**PRAY:** “O Lord, we are men of flickering faith; we do not have the courage to put You to the test, to take You at Your word, to give You what is Yours, that You may open the windows of heaven and pour down on us Your overflowing blessing; we doubt that Your heart is as great and good as Your strong Word would make us believe, that the riches of Your glory in Christ Jesus will supply our every need. O Lord, we are men of half faith, of cloven faith, half given to You, half saved up for ourselves, faith that would tempt You, experiment with You, use You, to entrench us in our ways, to serve our ends, to give us greater greatness than You have given us when You made us sons of God. Forgive us, Lord. Teach us, O Lord. Let Your Spirit blow and make our faith burn steady and clear, a flame upon Your altar; let Your Spirit make our believing whole and wholly sane, a monomania of trust in You, merely suspended from Your high sustaining Word. Teach us to walk as Your Son walked on the earth through ministry to death, through death to life and glory at Your right hand. Through Him we pray. Amen” (Martin Franzmann).

**May 26**

**READ:** Psalm 145 and Acts 3-4

**MARK:** “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts” (Ps. 145:4). “The eyes of all look to you, and you give their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing” (Ps. 145:15-16). “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

**LEARN:** Since Peter can heal people just like Jesus did, then we should be able to, too, right? Listen to your inner Lutheran and join me in saying, “Not so fast.” You are not an apostle. Jesus did not tell you to do these things, nor did he promise that you’d be successful. Moreover, Saint Paul repeatedly encourages Christians not to rely upon signs and wonders but to seek God and his working where he has promised to be and to work: his Word and his Sacrament—the means by which he bestows his grace and mercy upon us. We may be healed, or we may not. If we are, thanks be to God; if we aren’t, thanks be to God, and Lord have mercy.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Our God, who is perfectly capable of feeding all animals, gives them what they need at the proper time. So it is with us. Our Father invites us to approach him and ask for all that we need to sustain this body and life, and he gives us what we need at the proper time.

**PRAY:** Luther’s prayer for blessing a meal: “The eyes of all look to You, O Lord, and You give them their food at the proper time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing… Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these Your gifts which we receive from Your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

**May 27**

**READ:** Psalm 146 and Acts 5-6

**MARK:** “And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give us preaching the word of God to serve tables’” (Acts 6:2).

**LEARN:** What was Ananias’ and Sapphira’s sin? It was not that they kept money for themselves; the Lord only asks for our firstfruits, not for the whole thing. They could have kept half—or even all—of the money without sin. Rather, their sin was that they lied to God for the praise of men. They sold the field for, say, $120,000. That’s all well and good, and they were free to give any or none of it to the Church. But when they gave the Church, say, $80,000, they said that was the whole sale price—as if they were giving away the entire proceeds and keeping nothing for themselves. Thus their charity to the Lord’s work was rooted in deceit, and God will not have this in his Church.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men’” (Acts 5:29). In Christian ethics—the art of living righteously in a sinful world—there is such a thing as 2 moral laws being set at odds with each other. Here, Peter was faced with two divine laws (obey God; and obey your rulers, who have been established by God) which were, in this case, mutually exclusive. He could not keep both of them, so he discerned the higher law and kept it. There are times when we, too, have no “right choice” available to us. At those times, we try to discern the higher law, keep it, and keep praying, “Lord have mercy on me for breaking your other law.”

**PRAY:** “God of glory and power, happy indeed are those who have put their trust in you. Shine the brightness of your light upon us, that we may love you always with a pure heart and praise you forever; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen” (*For All the Saints*).

**May 28**

**READ:** Psalm 147 and Acts 7-8

**MARK:** “His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love” (Ps. 147:10-11). Note also Acts 7:51-60.

**LEARN:** By what means does the Lord send snow, frost, and hail upon the earth? By what means does he drive away the winter? How does he command his people? He does it all by his Word: “He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly” (Ps. 147:15). This Word does not return to him void, but accomplishes that for which he sends it (Isaiah 55:10-11). This Word is scattered immeasurably and bountifully (Matthew 13:1-9). It is by his Word that he sustains his people.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Which of the prophets did your fathers *not* persecute?” (Acts 7:52). By default, everybody lashes out against the revealed Word of God. No one seeks God’s truth if it does not equal God’s favor. No one seeks God’s justice if they themselves are to be condemned. And yet, this is why the Word became flesh and came into the world. This is why the Word was murdered—a slanderous sacrifice to the Father. The people of God tell it like it is, and the corrupted world lashes out against them. Even so, the Father receives us; we are honored in him even as he is honored in us.

**PRAY:** “Give us lips to sing Thy glory, Tongues Thy mercy to proclaim, Throats that shout the hope that fills us, Mouths to speak Thy holy name. Alleluia, alleluia! May the light which Thou dost send Fill our songs with alleluias, Alleluias without end!” (*LSB* 578:5).

**May 29**

**READ:** Psalm 148 and Acts 9-10

**MARK:** “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name’” (Acts 9:15-16). “And there came a voice to him: ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat… What God has made clean, do not call common’” (Acts 10:13, 15).

**LEARN:** These two chapters in Acts present us with one of the major turning points in the history of God’s salvation. Here we find perhaps the chief source of disagreement among the first Christians. What is this fundamental shift? It is not just the Jews—God’s people of the Old Testament—who are to be God’s people. The Gentiles will be saved, too. In the Old Testament, it was clear what people-group was the Lord’s chosen people: you could see the people whom he was literally leading through the wilderness. It was to the Jews that God revealed himself—to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and others. Even Peter, James, John, the other disciples, and even Saul/Paul were Jewish. It was to the Jews that God gave the Ten Commandments, the sacrificial system, and concrete promises of salvation. Anyone outside the Jewish faith was necessarily estranged from the one true God. But Christ died for all who would believe—not just for the Jews, for many of them, in fact, rejected him. The risen Christ commands his disciples to make disciples of “all nations” (or among “all Gentiles”). Paul becomes an apostle to the Gentiles. The Spirit falls on the Gentiles before Peter’s eyes. This is wonderful news, because now we Germans/Americans can be saved, too.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ananias’ conversation with God closely resembles that of Jonah: “Are you sure you want to call *that guy* to repentance and salvation? Don’t you know what he’s done to your people?!”

**PRAY:** “God Most High, by your Word you created a wondrous universe, and through your Spirit you breathed into it the breath of life. Accept creation’s hymn of praise, and let the praise that is sung in heaven resound in the heart of every creature on earth, to the glory of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen” (*For All the Saints*).

**May 30**

**READ:** Psalm 149 and Acts 11-12

**MARK:** “If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:17).

**LEARN:** The John Mark named in Acts 12:12 (among other places) is traditionally held to be the author of the Gospel according to Saint Mark. He followed Peter and learned from him. Mark heard Peter tell the gospel narrative over and over again to various people, and eventually he wrote it all down and further passed it on that way.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Jesus said to his apostles, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Their ministry begins in Jerusalem (think Pentecost). But it moves out quickly, both as the apostles and other witnesses do mission work, and as they are persecuted and essentially forced to leave their homes and go elsewhere. The never stopped sharing the gospel. In fact, the Church often thrives when it is most persecuted.

**PRAY:** O Lord, let your people rejoice in you and acknowledge you as creator, redeemer, and sanctifier. In your lovingkindness, embrace us now, that we may proclaim your salvation with your saints in glory. Amen.

**May 31**

**READ:** 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and Acts 13-14

**MARK:** “There is none holy like the Lord: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God” (1 Samuel 2:2).

**LEARN:** Antioch would become the center of Christianity among Gentiles. They would send Paul and others on missionary journeys all around the known world. We can already see the beginnings of this in Acts 13:48-49.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Paul repeatedly argues that God had allowed the Gentiles (essentially pagans) to “walk in their own ways”—to live without the light and knowledge of the Truth (see Acts 14:16; 17:30). But now that the Gospel is going into the world, the king is being announced and it’s time to repent.

**PRAY:** Lord, there are many who walk in the darkness of sin and stumbling. Let the light of Christ shine upon them that they may see and know you truly; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**June 1**

**READ:** Isaiah 12:1-6 and Acts 15-16

**MARK:** Acts 16:25 – In prison, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns.

**LEARN:** The Jerusalem council in chapter 15 resolved the critical issue of who God’s chosen people are and affirmed that the Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace alone. A sharp disagreement arose between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark but now two missionary teams are sent out. Barnabas and John Mark and sailed to Cyprus and Paul wen with Silas and Timothy. Through them, God continues to reach out with His message, using people as His messengers.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God promises to work all things for good, even amid our faults and failings (Romans 8:28). Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement over John Mark, yet through the disagreement, the good of two missionary teams ensued. Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into the inner prison and, by God’s grace, aided in the conversion of the jailer and his entire household.

In 1993, LCMS missionaries traveled to the Russian Far East to proclaim the Gospel. Their plane ran out of fuel on the way back to Alaska and crashed in the Bering Sea. Adrift and floating on empty gas cans, they prayed and sang hymns amid the icy swells of the sea. The water temperature was about 36 degrees and life expectancy in such cold temperatures is between 5 and 15 minutes. The final passenger was rescued 65 minutes after the plane went down. All seven passengers lived to tell the story. You can find out more by going to www.thefellowship.com.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, continue to send workers into Your harvest field. Enable missionaries, evangelists, and pastors to always see their ministry as a calling from You. Amen.

**June 2**

**READ:** Psalm 150 and Acts 17-18

**MARK:** Acts 17:22-31 -- Paul preaches in the Areopagus and makes known to the God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**LEARN:** Paul reaches out to the Athenians who do not know the scriptures. He uses teachings from their own philosophies and literature to point them to the true God of creation, who sent His Son, Jesus. In Corinth, Paul converts the ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, and he and his entire household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth believed and were baptized. Scripture makes no distinction such as the “age of accountability” or “believer’s baptism”. Twice in three chapters Luke mentions that the head of the house believed and so did the entire household thereafter. Both narratives include baptism with no evidence against infant baptism, rather a strong case that **all** in the household were baptized (Acts 16:33-34; 18:8-9).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The culture of Athens was one of philosophic striving for knowledge and truth. On one hand there were the Epicureans who sought a pleasurable life, though not in the hedonistic way. They sought to live modestly in order to attain a state of tranquility, freedom from fear, an absence from bodily pain. Stoicism taught the development of self-control and fortitude as a means of overcoming destructive emotions. Paul walked into the midst of the Areopagus (the city council meeting) and began to reveal to them the knowledge of this “unknown god” to which they had erected an altar. He told them the account of salvation. He called them to repent. Some believed, some did not, but he was invited back to speak again. May we likewise be so bold to speak of our salvation.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, move all people to seek You through repentance and to come to the true knowledge that You have already reached out to them in Christ. Amen.

**June 3**

**READ:** Psalm 1 and Acts 19-20

**MARK:** Acts 2:27-28 – Paul boldly preaches the whole counsel of God and bids the elders in Ephesus to watch over the flock.

**LEARN:** The Holy Spirit is working overtime with Paul in Ephesus. He is working in ordinary ways such as through Holy Baptism (Acts 19:5) and in ***extra***ordinary ways such as through handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched his skin (Acts 19:11-12). We should never expect the extraordinary to become the ordinary. We should not seek a second baptism of the Holy Spirt if we have been baptized by the water and the Word of God. The result of the Holy Spirit’s working is that the phony workers of their own glory (the seven sons of Sceva) were exposed both literally and figuratively and that the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled (Acts 19:17). A riot ensues in Ephesus because of spiritual reasons masquerading as economic ones. The devil likes his business. Calmer minds prevailed as the town clerk spoke sense into the crowd.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** What lesson can be learned from the death of Eutychus? Even if the preaching of God’s Word causes you to die (as some youth so believe in catechism class), by His grace, those who die in faith will be raised to eternal life. Contemplate the love the Paul had for the saints in Ephesus that he spent the whole night conversing with them in the account of Eutychus or how he bids them to remember how he did not cease day or night to admonish them with tears. Chapter 20 was his final farewell. Would your last farewell to those you love be a similar word?

**PRAY:** Dear Jesus, thank You for Your resurrection from the dead, which guarantees our resurrection. Through Your Holy Spirit, grant us faith always to remember that physical death is not the end of true life with You. Amen.

**June 4**

**READ:** Psalm 2 and Acts 21-22

**MARK:** Acts 21:13-14 – Paul boldly heads off to Jerusalem, the place where they kill the prophets and stone those sent to them.

**LEARN:** Paul goes to Jerusalem and visits with James, the half-brother of Jesus, who is now the bishop of the church in Jerusalem. James came to faith after Jesus’ resurrection and boldly led the persecuted in church in Jerusalem until he was thrown down from the temple to his death. Paul addresses the mob in Jerusalem and witnesses to them of how the Lord Jesus Christ personally converted him along the way to Damascus. He does all of this in order to witness to the Gospel at great sacrifice to his own well-being.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Paul’s address to the crowd does not avert the crowd’s anger toward him. However, as a Roman citizen, he receives help from a Roman Tribune. God has established the governing authorities to being a degree of peace and civil righteousness to our troubled world. Our ultimate hope is in the Lord. Christ’s Gospel brings eternal peace and righteousness before the highest court in heaven. From a worldly perspective Paul appears to be a crazy man. He is warned time and again not to go to Jerusalem because they will want to kill him there for the message that he will proclaim. Yet that does not dissuade him. Paul was ready to be imprisoned and die in Jerusalem for the sake of the name of the Lord. May we be so bold!

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, thank You for giving me righteousness before God. Teach me to forgive those who falsely accuse me. Help me also not to accuse anyone falsely. Amen.

**June 5**

**READ:** Psalm 3 and Acts 23-24

**MARK:** Acts 24:15-16 – Paul incessantly spoke of the resurrection and proclaimed the full council of God to have a clear conscience.

**LEARN:** Paul defends himself before the Roman governor, Felix. He claims to follow what is written in the Scriptures, focusing especially on the resurrection of the dead. Paul uses this opportunity to bear witness concerning Jesus, who has given him new life. Although Felix listens as Paul proclaims God’s Word, Felix is most interested in a bribe knowing that Paul came to Jerusalem with a large sum of money for the benefit of the church in Jerusalem.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** See how the Spirit led Paul to proclaim the Gospel to the Council in Jerusalem. Some of the Pharisees even defended Paul against the uproar of the Sadducees. He went on to proclaim the Gospel to Felix, the Roman governor of Judea and his Jewish wife, Drusilla. The rage that Paul often meets against is none other than rage against the sharp judgments of the Law. We don’t want to hear that we have erred, that we in the wrong, that we have sinned. Even just a flicker of faith that acknowledges sin and repents of it is faith to save in the Name and work of Jesus Christ. May we repent and proclaim His mercy for all – for murderers like Paul and for sinners like you and me.

**PRAY:** Lord, forgive us for wrongful speech, and give us a clear conscience toward You and our fellow man. Help us always to believe in Your unchanging Word and to hope in the resurrection. Amen.

**June 6**

**READ:** Psalm 4 and Acts 25-26

**MARK:** Acts 26: 29 – Paul wishes the King Agrippa and all who hear him would become as him except for his chains.

**LEARN:** The lack of justice continues in Paul’s trial under Festus, who moves Paul to appeal to Ceasar’s court. Festus brings Paul’s case before King Agrippa and Bernice so they may formulate charges to send with Paul to Rome. Festus fails to set Paul free, even though he knows Paul is innocent. Paul makes his defense before King Agrippa and all in the court wishing that they all would become like him except for the chains. These events transpired in 66-67 AD before Paul was sent to Rome. Both Peter and Paul were martyred there under the reign and rule of Emperor Nero in 68 AD, shortly before Nero committed suicide.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Again Paul uses his imprisonment to proclaim the Gospel to King Agrippa and Bernice. As bold as Paul was in his days as Saul, capturing, persecuting, and participating in the murder of followers of the Way, even more so is Paul now bold to speak of the hope that he has within. Paul cannot open his mouth without proclaiming that Christ is risen from the dead. He has no fear of death whatsoever because he knows that his body will be raised again on the last day. For us too, as Christians who have been blessed with the knowledge of the Word made flesh and baptism into His name, we have nothing to fear – not even death itself.

**PRAY:** Jesus, that You for bearing my sin. Let me see others with the love You have for them, and empower me to share the Gospel of Your love with them. Amen.

**June 7**

**READ:** Psalm 5 and Acts 27-28

**MARK:** Acts 28:31 – Paul continued to proclaim the kingdom of God for two years under house-arrest.

**LEARN:** Grave difficulties beset Paul’s journey to Rome, yet the Lord assures Paul that he will reach his journey’s goal. After a harrowing storm, the ship carrying Paul wrecks on the island of Malta and heals everyone on the island of their diseases. Difficulties beset Paul’s journey to Rome, yet the Lord assures Paul that he will reach his journey’s goal.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Have you ever blamed God for the problems in your life? Have you forgotten that even through hardships, God is working for your good (Rm 8:28)? When the trials of life weigh us down, it is easy for us to lose hope and stop trusting God. Yet God promises He will never leave us or forsake us. By God’s miraculous power in Christ, He rescues His people from sin, death, and ignorance. Pray that the Lord would break the hardness of your heart. Rejoice in the message of forgiveness and life through Jesus Christ that is for all people, including you.

**PRAY:** Lord, through Your eternal Word, soften, my heart. Grant me Your salvation so I may be counted among Your faithful people and proclaim Your name. Amen.

**June 8**

**READ:** Psalm 6 and Joshua 1-5

**MARK:** Joshua 1:9 – Be strong and courageous.

**LEARN:** After the death of Moses the leadership of the people of Israel transfers to Joshua. Rahab houses the spies and literally covers them for retreat back to Joshua. The prostitute, Rahab, falls in the line and lineage of King David and our Lord Jesus (Mt 1:5). The Jordan River stops flowing for the people of Israel as they cross into the Promised Land. Again the cross on dry ground. A memorial is put up. Those not circumcised were. They celebrated the Passover and ate of the produce of the land. Chapter 5:13ff thematically go with chapter 6 but we will discuss it here. The commander of the army of the Lord appeared to Joshua and Joshua worshiped him. This commander, sword in hand, was no less than the pre-incarnate Christ.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Joshua is time and again encouraged to “be strong and courageous.” However, it is not a strength that he is to conjure up within himself, by himself, but a strength of courage knowing who it is that leads him and the people – the One who appears to him in chapter 5:13 – the Lord of hosts. This Commander of the Lord’s army can come and do two things to Joshua and the people of Israel. He could wipe them out or he could fight for them. In the Promised Land, they kept the word of the Lord by being circumcised and celebrating the Passover. They worship the Lord and now he fights for them for no one can stand against him with his heavenly and earthly forces. Can the peoples of the Land of Canaan stand against him? Can the gates of hell or all the combined powers of darkness? Christians here are reminded of the great New Testament truth: “If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . We are more than conquerors through him who loved us,” (Rom 8:31, 37).

**PRAY:** With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected; But for us fights the valiant One, whom God himself elected. Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, of sabaoth [“hosts”] Lord, and there’s none other God; He holds the field forever. Amen. (LSB 656:2)

**June 9**

**READ:** Psalm 7 and Joshua 6-8

**MARK:** Joshua 6:12 – the Ark of the Covenant goes before the people of Israel at Jericho.

**LEARN:** Jericho falls at the sound of the trumpets and the shout of the people. Rahab’s family is spared but nothing else from the city is spared. Both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, donkeys – all were devoted to destruction and put to the sword. Only the silver and gold, bronze and iron of the city were spared. Everything else was burned with fire. Now this may seem awfully extreme and it was! But so was the depravity of the people within the city who practiced child sacrifice, ritual prostitution, and refused to repent.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** As one reads the accounts of Achan’s sin and its consequences and the manner in which Ai was conquered, one can’t help but see how serious Yahweh takes sin and unrighteousness. The decimation meted out by his judgment is complete. So too is the complete judgment of the Father’s wrath that our Lord Jesus Christ endured upon the cross. The Son took on the complete wrath of the Father for all the sins of the world to in turn give to the world grace, mercy and peace through his blood. The Father doesn’t operate in the “partly’s and maybe’s” toward his creation but in the full and complete. This gives us certainty in the victory won for us by the perfect blood of the Son.

**PRAY:** Dear Lord, etch your word more deeply into my heart and life, so that I might live in Jesus Christ – the Word who is life. Amen.

**June 10**

**READ:** Psalm 8 and Joshua 9-11

**MARK:** Joshua 10:13-14 – The sun stood still for Joshua to fight against the Ammorites.

**LEARN:** Gibeon is shrewd in their dealing with Israel and Joshua. They know they are no match for the Israelites so they seek a rather creative and deceptive way to preserve their lives. The deceive Joshua and end up as wood cutters and water drawers, but make Israel their ally. When the kings in Canaan set out to destroy Gibeon for its covenant with Israel, Joshua honors that covenant and God delivers Gibeon. The sun stands still at Gibeon and Joshua and the Israelites defeat the Amorite kings.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The initial conquest of the land under the leadership of Joshua is completed. Joshua, by the hand of God, gives the Israelites the land as their inheritance. The Lord has said to not be afraid. Fear should not affect our faithfulness to the will and direction of the Lord. Jesus, by his faithfulness and his own hand, gives us the promised land of the new heavens and new earth as our eternal inheritance.

**PRAY:** Gracious Lord, grant us faith in Your faithfulness, and accomplish Your service in and through us. Amen.

**June 11**

**READ:** Psalm 9 and Joshua 12-16

**MARK:** Joshua 14:8 – Caleb was one of the twelve spies who trusted the Lord.

**LEARN:** Joshua was a five-star general. Throughout his years as the leader of the people of Israel, he defeated thirty-one kings yet there were still more lands to conquer. Nine of the sons of Israel received land in west of the Jordan and Gad, Ruben, and the half-tribe of Manasseh received land in the Transjordan. In total eleven tribes received some portion of land as an inheritance. The tribe of Levi received no inheritance but the Lord God of Israel as their inheritance.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The first allotment begins with Caleb for the tribe of Judah. Caleb’s faithfulness to the Lord was praised and Caleb praised the Lord for granting him forty-five years of service since Moses spoke to him assuring him of his portion in the Promised Land. Throughout it all Caleb shows that the Lord is the strength of the faithful.

**PRAY:** Lord, grant me faith to receive the promises you have laid before me for the sake of Your Son, Help me also to be faithful to those promises until they are fulfilled completely in heaven. Amen.

**June 12**

**READ:** Psalm 10 and Joshua 17-21

**MARK:** Joshua 20:6 – The Lord provides cities of refuge for manslayers and grants the grace of a temporal stay.

**LEARN:** Families sometimes dispute over land. Here in the Promised Land are the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel) and it is time for the land to be allotted. Instead of long applications, disputes and protests, lots were cast and Joshua apportioned the land to the people of Israel (Jos 18:10). The replacement disciple for Judas among the twelve was decided by casting lots and Mathias was chosen. Some decisions in the church are very appropriately made by means of prayer and the casting of lots.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Settling the land of Canaan was not an overnight event. God’s servant, Joshua, needed to remind, encourage, and direct the people in this matter, lest they become negligent in following God’s promises to their completion. Take heart! God will not let his promised blessing go unused or unclaimed.

**PRAY:** When we receive abundantly from you, O Lord, help us to realize the fullness of your blessings. Fill our borders with the peace and protection your mercy provides through your Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

**June 13**

**READ:** Psalm 11 and Joshua 22-24

**MARK:** Joshua 24:15 – But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

**LEARN:** As the book nears its end and the death of Joshua approaches, their begins a sort of thematic refrain “Only be careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,” (Jos 22:5). A dispute arose between the tribes east of the Jordan and those to the west over an altar of witness erected in the Transjordan. The book ends with the familiar bid to remain faithful.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The death of Joshua brings the Exodus story to a close. Jacob’s children have returned to the Promised Land and it has been made their inheritance. They have multiplied and they are settled. The bones of Joseph have returned to be buried in the land of his fathers’. Joseph, Joshua, and the High Priest Eleazar all now rest in the peace of the Lord fulfilling his promises to them. May we likewise rest in peace knowing that our Lord fulfills his promises toward us.

**PRAY:** We praise you, dear Lord, that when we lie buried in the ground, we also lie buried in your sure promises of the resurrection to eternal life, through Jesus, the new Joshua. He lived, died, and rose so that after we die, we might be raised and live with him forever. Amen.

**June 14**

**READ:** Psalm 12 and Judges 1-3

**MARK:** Judges 3:31 – Shamgar would soon to be a popular name for sons if parents would read the book of Judges.

**LEARN:** After the death of Joshua the Judges of Israel ruled. In this Theocracy they didn’t need multiple branches of government with miles of red tape to ensure proper governance. They simply needed the people of Israel to follow the words of the Lord as Moses and Joseph instructed them to. When they didn’t and “whored after other gods and bowed down to them,” (Ju 2:17) or “forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth,” (Ju 3:7) the Lord chastised them through other nations. The judges called them back to the Lord their God and acted valiantly to save them.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In quick succession do some of the people of Israel move from worshiping the Lord God Almighty to whoring after the gods of the Canaanites that they did not drive out completely. It must have been tempting and an oddly vogue thing to join in the worship of Canaanite gods of wood and stone. Baal and Ashtoreth were the gods of their slaves. Nonetheless the temptation was great as the temptation is great yet today. Our Lord demands temperance and self-denial of carnal cravings while the Baals and the Ashoreths taunted the fleshly cravings with great indulgence. I guess not much has changed in the world around the people of God. May we strive to remain holy as the Holy Spirit has born us to be.

**PRAY:** Merciful Father, assure in your faithfulness so that we live by faith in our Savior. Amen.

**June 15**

**READ:** Psalm 13 and Judges 4-6

**MARK:** Judges 4:17-21 – Jael is soon to be a popular name for girls whose parents read Judges.

**LEARN:** The Lord uses women to do his great and marvelous works. The judge Deborah judges wisely and faithfully. Sisera is killed by Jael, a very bold and God-fearing woman. Again and again the Israelites do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. Gideon is raised up as a Judge to fight for the Lord.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** You should notice that these Judges don’t raise themselves up to these positions of power and leadership. They are raised up by the Lord to do his work. Gideon wasn’t especially strong in character nor bold in leadership but the Lord lead him to be just that. The Lord often chooses leaders for his people who aren’t necessarily appear outwardly fit for the work and office. Moses was slow of speech. Deborah a woman and not a Shamgar-like warrior. Gideon was timid. But all these and more did wonders for the Lord simply because they trusted him at his word – that he would fight for them.

**PRAY:** Help us, Lord, to believe your promises, seek your will, and act in the courage you alone give. Amen.

**June 16**

**READ:** Psalm 14 and Judges 7-9

**MARK:** Judges 8:23 – The Lord is the ruler over all.

**LEARN:** Gideon whittles down the number of warriors against Midian to three hundred. They attack at night and send the Midianites into confusion and the ‘friendly fire’ does away with most of the Midianite army. “For the Lord and for Gideon,” was their war cry (Ju 7:18). Note how the newly freed men of Israel want to put up Gideon as their ruler just as the nations around have kings. But Gideon would have none of that. The Lord was to rule over his people.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** You likely notice a decline in the morality and faithfulness of the Israelites in the generations after Moses and Joshua. Very quickly a people and family can be swayed by the culture and world around them to go the way of their neighbors. Even when God’s word and grace return as happened with Gideon, good intentions and hopes for faithfulness quickly go awry. Abimelech was the polar opposite of his father Gideon.

**PRAY:** Lord, let us never fall victim to our own wishes or devices, but keep us humble, as was Jesus, who took the form of a servant and became obedient unto death on a cross to forgive our pride. Amen.

**June 17**

**READ:** Psalm 15 and Judges 10-12

**MARK:** Judges 12:6 – Distinctions in dialects can be deadly.

**LEARN:** Jephthah was born the son of a prostitute, likely a cult prostitute in the worship of the Baals and Ashoreths (Ju 11:1). He makes a tragic vow to the Lord to sacrifice the first thing that comes out his door if he returns from battle victorious. This was utter foolishness. His only child, his daughter comes out of the house dancing with tambourine to greet her victorious father. She asks for two months in the hill country to mourn her virginity with her friends and he grants that. Afterwards he follows through with his vow.

Child sacrifice was common among the pagans so it is possible that Jephthah mixed pagan practices with worship of the true God. It is also possible that Jephthah did not sacrifice her but instead dedicated her to service in the Tabernacle where she would remain a virgin. This option makes sense as she bewails her virginity and not her impending death. Early church history, however, holds that she was killed for Jepthah’s rash vow.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Bargaining with God isn’t a wise thing to do. He’s not a tradesman at the Art’s Festival that you can haggle with. If you make a vow to him you’d best be keeping it. Confirmation and marriage vows are prime examples. Jephthah’s momentary lapse in judgement cost him his only child and any form of ancestral heritage. God our Father gave up his only Son but in so doing gained for us a heritage in heaven with him. The deals that God makes with us are always superior to the deals we make with him.

**PRAY:** O Lord, make me faithful in my everyday callings. May I ever cling to your word, appreciate your daily blessings, and call on you in every need. Amen.

**June 18**

**READ:** Psalm 16 and Judges 13-15

**MARK:** Judges 14:14 – Samson’s riddle.

**LEARN:** Samson’s parents, Manoah and his wife were faithful in the sight of the Lord. Like Sarah, Hannah, and Elizabeth were barren so was Manoah’s wife until the angel of the Lord appeared and proclaimed to her that she will conceive and bear a son. Her child was to be a Nazirite and will begin save Israel from the hand of the Philistines. Samson judges Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Samson’s repeated downfall is his weakness toward women. He marries a Philistine woman which was inappropriate. He disobeys and disrespects his parents which again was wrong. Yet despite his sinfulness the Spirit of the Lord still comes upon him and uses him to work justice and freedom for the people of Israel. Our Lord works through sinful human beings to bring about his will and blessing. We should emulate the holiness and godly character of those who lead well but never those things which go against the clear words of the Lord.

**PRAY:** Father, forgive my sin and fill me with your Holy Spirit that I might serve your greater purposes. Amen.

**June 19**

**READ:** Psalm 17 and Judges 16-18

**MARK:** Judges 16:16 – Samson’s soul is vexed to death.

**LEARN:** Samson falls in love with a woman named Delilah who was propositioned by the Philistines to find the source of Samson’s great strength. Eventually she wears him down and calls a man to shave off his hair while he slept. Later on he brings down the house of Dagon, the half-fish, half-man god of the sea going Philistines. He brought down more Philistines in his death than he did during the time of his life. A rather odd account of Micah and the Levite continues on in chapter 17 and 18 where both Micah, a wandering Ephriamite and men from the tribe of Dan seek to take the easy way out. Micah, at the request of his mother, makes a shrine to the Lord by making a graven image and makes one of his son’s priest. This was a violation of the second commandment and the command to have only the tribe of Levi be priests. The Danites then took city of Laish in the far north to be their own even though that was not part of their inheritance. They set up Micah’s carved image for themselves and began worship on their own, apart from the rest of their tribe and apart from the rest of the people of Israel. The Micah of Judges 17 and 18 is not Micah the minor prophet.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Our Lord sets forth order and expectations for our own good. We may not see it as such in the moment, but in hindsight, his wisdom is supreme. If Samson would have resisted temptation toward lust he would have kept his sight and his life. If the Danites would have remained in their allotted land, they wouldn’t have been the first city taken away in the captivity. The lesson here is that it is always better to follow the Lord’s word and wisdom than the wisdom and desires of man. If you think of doing something that is only right in your own eyes and that is in conflict with the word of God – don’t do it.

**PRAY:** O Lord, I, too, often substitute m own will for yours. Forgive my self-chosen theologies, my selfish cruelty to others, and my lack of trust. Grant me refuge in your word and in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**June 20**

**READ:** Psalm 18 and Judges 19-21

**MARK:** Judges 19:22 – The men of Gibeah wanted to have homosexual relations with the Levite traveler.

**LEARN:** The Levite gives over his concubine to the drunken mob at Gibeah and she is returned dead in the morning. This is a horrid atrocity. But it gets worse. The Levite cuts up her body and sends it to the twelve territories of Israel and a civil war begins. The Benjamites were strong warriors and they route the forces of Israel for two days. The casualties were atrocious. The book ends with a synopsis of life in Israel after Samson, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Chaos reigned.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** When everyone does what is right in his own eyes, it is absolutely inevitable that people will not remain peaceful. Societies and peoples when they forget the word of the Lord will end up in war and destruction. There was little morality left in the tribes of Israel by this time. It’s hard to imagine a society so depraved like that of which we read in Judges 19-21. The moral agreement and peace that we have enjoyed in the United States since the Civil War is a grace from God. May we, as a people, remain founded on the moral principles of our Creator and his word and keep from doing what is only right in our own eyes.

**PRAY:** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and glory forever and ever. Amen.

**June 21**

**READ:** Psalm 19 and Ruth

**MARK:** Ruth 1:16 – Ruth vows to go with Naomi wherever she goes.

**LEARN:** Naomi is in a very difficult position. Her husband has died and so have her two sons. She is a very short step away from becoming a beggar. Amazingly Ruth chooses to go with Naomi back to her homeland but there is no definite promise that anyone will care for Naomi. Her husband, Elimelech, sold the harvest rights of his land to move to another land which would have meant punishment or condemnation for the one who had no regard for the Promised Land the Lord gave. It was risky for Naomi to return, but Boaz had compassion on these two widows. The rightful redeemer would not redeem Naomi because it would have cost him too much to work the land of Naomi and give the harvest away to Elimelech’s heir. He wasn’t willing to sacrifice the work and investment for his family, but Boaz was willing. Ruth showed much grace and humility and for her graces, both she and Naomi were rewarded with peace and security.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The nuclear family is always in danger. If the security of family life isn’t jeopardized by sickness and death, it is jeopardized by divorce and addition today. For whatever reason families fall apart, someone has to step in and give aid. In this account it is Boaz. In our society it is often the government doing what the church and extended family once did more commonly. Many families have taken in nieces and nephews in need or cared for an ailing aunt. That’s what families are properly supposed to do. May we always be our brother’s keeper.

**PRAY:** Thanks be to God the he puts us first and made us family through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who crossed heaven and earth to save us. Amen.

**June 22**

**READ:** Psalm 20 and 1 Samuel 1-3

**MARK:** 1 Samuel 3:10 – When the Lord speaks, we do well to listen.

**LEARN:** Samuel is born to Elkanah and Hannah. Elkanah had another wife, Peninnah, who would provoke and irritate Hannah for being childless. The Lord never instructed a man to take more than one wife, but permitted it as a concession for necessary provisions. Samuel is dedicated to service in to the Lord with the Priest Eli. Eli had two worthless sons who stole the sacrificial food and lay with the women serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Hophni and Phinehas were flirting with disaster. Judgement would soon come down upon their heads.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Hannah and Samuel both act in great faith. Eli would suffer because he did not restrain his rebellious sons in their indecency. Samuel is raised up as the prophet of God and restores hope in the Lord. The abuses that Hophni and Phinehas committed were much in line with the abuses that Martin Luther encountered on his trip to Rome. Priests gorging themselves, indulging their flesh, and stealing from those they serve. Luther wasn’t a prophet as Samuel by any means but, by God’s grace, he saw to it that none of the Lord’s words fell to the ground by translating scripture into the common German language, preaching incessantly and writing prolifically.

**PRAY:** Lord, give us humility to receive and speak your word without fear of those who oppose you. Amen.

**June 23**

**READ:** Psalm 21 and 1 Samuel 4-6

**MARK:** 1 Samuel 4:11 – The Ark of the Covenant was captured along with Hophni and Phinehas who then died.

**LEARN:** Hophni and Phinehas die. Eli falls over backward, breaks his neck, and dies when he hears that the Ark is captured and his sons are dead. Phinehas’s wife dies after childbirth but before she does names her son, Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel.” The Philistines take the Ark and set it before their fish-god, Dagon, who literally falls to pieces before the Ark of God.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Ark is returned to the men of Beth-shemesh but they look upon the Ark, or probably into the Ark of God and are struck by the wrath of God. They treated this very holy thing irreverently and they were not consecrated to handle this holy thing. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:1, that the ministers that follow the Apostles are “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” They are to handle the holy things of God – the word and the sacrament. This instruction is given so that all might be provided for properly and in good order.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, thank you for being present with us to heal us, to forgive us, and to strengthen us in love for one another. Amen.

**June 24**

**READ:** Psalm 22 and 1 Samuel 7-9

**MARK:** 1 Samuel 7:12 – Ebenezer means, “Till now the Lord has helped us.”

**LEARN:** The people of Israel are constantly in some level of rebellion and unfaithfulness toward Yahweh, but he remains ever faithful toward them. He gives them Samuel as a judge over them and Samuel judges forty years but he would be the last of the judges. The elders of the people say to Samuel that he is old and his son’s don’t walk in honest ways and they tell him to appoint over them a king like the nations around them. The Lord says they have not rejected Samuel but they have rejected the Lord as king over them. Samuel warns them of the cost of having a king and Saul is chosen.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ebenezer is a sign of encouragement that the Lord has helped in the past and so he will help in the future. The words 1 Samuel 8:7 are strikingly similar to the words of Jesus in Luke 10:16 where Jesus says, ““The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” When people reject the message of the word of God, they don’t reject the messenger, but God himself.

**PRAY:** Lord God, be merciful to us, for we have sinned against you. Give us your peace, we ask, in Jesus name. Amen.

**June 25**

**READ:** Psalm 23 and 1 Samuel 10-12

**MARK:** 1 Samuel 12:24-25 – Samuel’s bids the people fear the Lord, serve him faithfully and remember what great things he has done in the past.

**LEARN:** Saul’s kingship was privately announced at Ramah, solemnized at Mizpah and officially affirmed with peace offerings at Gilgal, which means “turning.” The people gave offerings in recognition of the monarchy as a continuation of the theocracy. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Saul and he musters the men of Israel to fight. They go out and route the Ammonites.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In the last 125 years many century long monarchies have come to end. They have been replaced by democracies and republics. The monarchy of England is still tied closely to the Church of England recognizes that it rules under the headship of the Almighty God for the benefit of the people. This is why the coronation of Queen Elizabeth was held in the Westminster Abbey and she was crowned as queen there not by elected officials but by the clergy. She rules under God for the people not under the people for the people. The queen, the one who is crowned, rules as God’s representative.

**PRAY:** Lord, gracious Father, thank you for the blessings I have received from you, particularly the forgiveness of sins. Bless all those who stand as your representatives in my life that they may be faithful too. In Jesus name. Amen.

**June 26**

**READ:** Psalm 24 and 1 Samuel 13-15

**MARK:** 1 Samuel 15:22 – To obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.

**LEARN:** Earthly kingships are but temporary. Though the Lord gave Saul great victories over the Philistines by sending them in confusion to kill themselves and the Lord helped him defeat the Amalekites, Saul did not strictly follow the instruction of the Lord. He over-stepped his bounds as king and he admitted his sin (1 Sa 15:24). But Saul doesn’t take full responsibility and shifts the blame because he says that he feared the people and listened to their voice. A king cannot have divided interests so Samuel informs him that as the Saul rejected the word of the Lord, so Saul would be rejected as king.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** It isn’t easy being the king. Saul shows his weakness of impatience and imprudence. To man’s eyes it would seem entirely rational to keep the best of the spoil from a conquered land, but that was not what the Lord instructed. Saul makes rash vows and in general rules unwisely. All throughout our lives we are pushed either from within or from without to compromise on the word of the Lord and do what is rash due to an “emergency” or do that which is wise in the eyes of the world. “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen better than the fat of rams,” (1 Sa 15:22).

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, forgive us for the times we have not followed your word completely. We can never thank you enough for the sacrifice of your Son for our sins. Renew in us daily the will and ability to live for him who died for us. Amen.

**June 27**

**READ:** Psalm 25 and 1 Samuel 16-18

**MARK:** 1 Samuel 17:45-47 – David confronts Goliath for his mockery of the Lord most high.

**LEARN:** David is anointed as king at Ramah by Samuel but he is not yet crowned as king. He is still young and Saul is still ruling. David defeats Goliath and the Philistines are routed. Saul is pleased but not for long. The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and an evil spirit afflicted him. Meanwhile the Spirit of the Lord rested upon David who was now in the service of Saul the king. David takes Michal, the younger daughter of Saul as his wife at the cost of two hundred dead Philistines.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Spirit of the Lord departed Saul and rested on David and an evil spirit entered into Saul. Saul had rejected and pushed out the Spirit that was put upon him by continually doing things his own way and having no regard for the word of the Lord. When pride and power take hold, beware, lest you fall. We should always be on our guard not to push away the Spirit of the Lord who works in us my means of the word and sacrament. Let that Spirit that was given us in our baptisms ever rule and reign over us.

**PRAY:** Lord, when I feel insecure, let me cast my cares on you, knowing that you care for me. Amen.

**June 28**

**READ:** Psalm 26 and 1 Samuel 19-21

**MARK:** 1 Samuel 21:6 – David and his men eat the bread of the presence.

**LEARN:** Saul is out to kill David but David is saved by his wife, Michal, and by his friend, Jonathan. David yet must flee the insane wrath of King Saul. The friendship between David and Jonathan was an extraordinary sort of friendship and bond. They had fought together and served together under King Saul. They were truly best of friends and in the scene from 1 Samuel 20, they wept for each other knowing that they would never meet again because of King Saul’s wrath. Many recent theologians use the relationship of Jonathan and David to “prove” that homosexual relationships are normal and blessed by God because scripture says that their hearts were knit together and they kissed one another. This is to be rejected for many reasons. No kind of homosexual behavior is ever endorsed or even permitted among God’s holy people. The kiss of David and Jonathan would have been weeping upon the neck. The kiss was a formal way to greet and a formal way to say good-bye in this culture. This was most assuredly a tearful good-bye.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** See how the Lord protects David through all of this. The one’s God has chosen to do his will he protects in body and soul. The Lord provides a way of escape numerous times and provides holy nourishment for David and his men. You are chosen too! You have been chosen by your baptism into Christ to be part of his holy house and made to be royal priests. What you do in your prayers and service to God within your vocation is a great and glorious thing. The Lord promises to protect and feed those whom he calls to serve him – that’s you!

**PRAY:** Continue to nourish your people and arm them against evil, dear Lord. Grant them wisdom and honesty. Amen.

**June 29**

**READ:** Psalm 27 and 1 Samuel 22-24

**MARK:** 1 Samuel 24:11 – David cuts off the corner of Saul’s robe in the cave.

**LEARN:** Saul is taken captive by evil and his rage against David as he attempts to protect his throne. Saul goes to great lengths to try to keep his position of power but it is all for naught. He fights against the Lord, whom he has turned his back on. Saul hears that the priest Ahimelech aided David and his men so Saul orders that they be killed by the sword. The servants of the king would not do it, but Doeg, the Edomite did and on that day killed eighty-five priests. Saul had no regard for the Lord God Almighty. David is given the chance to kill Saul in the cave while he relieved himself, but David would not harm the Lord’s anointed king. His action stayed Saul’s pursuit.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Vengeance is mine,” says the Lord (De 32:35). David knew that and David followed the word of the Lord. Contrast Saul’s disregard for the priests that the Lord had set up for his people in Saul’s ordering their unjust slaughter and David’s regard for Saul’s kingship as the Lord’s anointed. Saul is his enemy and enemies we typically deride and seek to harm, but not David. David still honored his position as king by addressing him as, “My father,” (1 Sa 24:11). This is an acknowledgment of God’s honor and authority as exhibited through the office of king. David will not disrespect the office he is about to enter.

**PRAY:** Gracious Lord, thank you for sending me your true and Anointed One to bring mercy to me while I was your enemy. Amen.

**June 30**

**READ:** Isaiah 12:1-6 and 1 Samuel 25-27

**MARK:** 1 Samuel 26:23-25 – Saul blesses David for sparing his life once again.

**LEARN:** Abigail spares her life and her household by her generosity as a hostess to David and his men in light of her husband’s arrogant refusal. David spares Saul’s life again by sneaking into his camp and taking Saul’s spear and water jar. David again will not allow anyone of his men to lift his hand against the Lord’s anointed and for his actions receives a blessing from Saul. David and his men move to the land of the Philistines for just over a year and covertly raid and pillage the towns of the Philistines.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The actions that David and his men took toward the Philistine towns were not commanded by God and thus shouldn’t be used as an example to take advantage of or extort worldly goods from unbelievers. Remember the new command that our Lord Jesus gave to love our neighbors as ourselves and to pray for our enemies and those who persecute us. In the church today, we are not called to take up the sword as Samuel did but take up the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God and go to battle in prayer.

**PRAY:** Dearest Jesus, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Grant us patience with our neighbors and brothers and sisters. Amen.

**July 1**

**READ:** Deuteronomy 32:1-4 and 1 Samuel 28-31

**MARK:** “And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. Then Saul said to his servants, ‘Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.’ And his servants said to him, ‘Behold, there is a medium at En-dor’” (Deut. 28:6-7).

**LEARN:** What was Saul supposed to do?! The Lord wasn’t answering him. Was he just supposed to ride out to what he expected to be his certain death? If this Scripture is true and accurate (which I believe it is), then we can learn 3 major things. First, demons are real, and they work through mediums and necromancers (as well as witches, magicians (in the OT sense, at least), false prophets, and even idols carved from wood or stone—or, for us now, Ouija boards). Scripture shows that they have actual powers in the world (e.g. the ability to communicate with the dead). Second, people don’t worship false gods for no reason. Saul didn’t turn to a medium because he thought it was the best idea; he did it because the Lord wouldn’t answer him, and he felt he really needed an answer. Likewise, if Baal has some power over the weather and the Lord isn’t sending rain for your crops… Finally, even though demons can, in a sense, help us temporally (though always furthering their own evil plans), we should have nothing to do with them. They belong to the Father of Lies, and they will destroy you if you allow them to.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Saul forfeits his divine blessings by compromising God’s Word, and he dies a brutal death at the hands of the very enemy he was chosen to defeat. There is no greater tragedy than when God’s people compromise His Word, no greater blessing than when they steadfastly receive it. Learn by the examples of Saul and David. By promises and blessings, the King of heaven provides life for you in His Son, Jesus” (*TLSB* (*The Lutheran Study Bible*)).

**PRAY:** Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; Curb those who by deceit or sword Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son And bring to naught all He has done.” Amen. –*LSB* 665:1

**July 2**

**READ:** Psalm 28 and 2 Samuel 1-3

**MARK:** “How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?” (2 Sam. 1:14).

**LEARN:** Abner, Saul’s cousin and the commander of his army, initially rejects David’s claim to kingship and installs Saul’s son Ish-bosheth as king of Israel. 2 Sam. 2:12-32 recounts a period of bitter war between these two houses. Ultimately, the rivals call a temporary truce, and peace is restored in Israel.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** At what point is it OK to take someone’s life? If they ask us to? If they are suffering? If they have no remaining “quality of life”? What does Christianity have to say about euthanasia? In 2 Samuel 1, David takes extremely seriously the inherent dignity of the life of King Saul. Saul was begging this soldier to kill him before his enemies got to him and did terrible things to him. He wanted a quick and easy death. But, according to David, not even this frantic request was enough of a reason to kill the king. His life was still inherently valuable, and no one should take his life from him. This is from King David, and King David gets to be right, because he “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord” (except for that whole Bathsheba thing). It is always wrong to take someone’s life (though doing so may be within the scope of your God-given vocation, as with executioners and soldiers, but that topic will require more explanation than I can give here; ask me sometime).

**PRAY:** Lord God, you have created all life, and you have given us your human creatures a special dignity. Guard and defend us in our lives, we pray, and lead us and the world around us to value human people as you value them. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom you gave human life. Amen.

**July 3**

**READ:** Psalm 29 and 2 Samuel 4-6

**MARK:** “…Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God” (2 Sam. 6:6-7). The Lord had commanded the ark to be carried by Levites using long poles. They did not follow God’s command, and it cost Uzzah his life.

**LEARN:** “How impressive the closing words of this psalm! They are arched as a rainbow above it. The beginning of the psalm shows us that the heavens open and the throne of God in the midst of angelic songs of praise, and the close of the psalm shows us on earth, in the midst of the angry voices of Jehovah shaking all things, His people victorious and blessed with peace. ‘Glory in the highest’ is the beginning, and ‘Peace on earth’ is the end” (Delitzsch).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “People think: If I could hear God speaking in His own Person, I would run so fast to hear Him that my feet would bleed.… If in former times someone had said: I know of a place in the world where God speaks, and when you arrive there, you hear God Himself talking; and if I had come there, had seen a poor preacher baptize and preach, and people had said: This is the place; there God is speaking through the preacher: he is teaching God’s Word—then I no doubt would have said: Ha! I have taken pains to come here, and I see only a minister! We should like to have God speak with us in His majesty; but I advise you: Do not go there. So experience certainly teaches. If He were to speak in His majesty, you would see what a running would begin, as there at Mount Sinai, where, after all, only the angels spoke; yet the mountain smoked and trembled. But now you have the Word of God in church, in books, in your home; and this is as certainly God’s Word as if God Himself were speaking” (Luther on Ps. 29).

**PRAY:** God of glory and strength, you sit enthroned in the heavens, and your voice lays bare the earth. Do not treat us according to what we deserve, O Lord, for we cannot stand in your presence for fear of our lives. Look upon us as you look upon your Son. In his name we pray, amen.

**July 4**

**READ:** Psalm 30 and 2 Samuel 7-9

**MARK:** “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam. 7:12-13).

**LEARN:** “In 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21, David took a census of all men capable of fighting, indicating a reliance on human power over God’s strength. As a consequence for this rebellion, a plague came on Israel, and 70,000 men died. In repentance, David bought land, built an altar, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord. This psalm [30] was likely written to dedicate this land, the place where God’s temple would later be built.” (*TLSB*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** David has a good desire to provide a house fit for the Lord (2 Sam. 7:2). However, the Lord recounts his own mighty deeds on David’s and Israel’s behalf, and he even promises that *he* will make *David* a house—a lineage with an eternal kingdom (2 Sam. 7:11-16). When it comes to showing mercy, the Lord is a 1-upper.

**PRAY:** O Great High King, you have established your Son’s throne forever as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In your mercy, grant us to live in his kingdom forever. Amen.

**July 5**

**READ:** Psalm 31 and 2 Samuel 10-12

**MARK:** “Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God” (Ps. 31:5). “You are the man!” (2 Sam. 12:7).

**LEARN:** Oh, David’s most famous sin! Thousands of years later, God’s people still use it as a primary example of adultery. But it was not only adultery. It began with lust there on the roof, moved to adultery, involved scheming and cover-up, and ended tragically in murder. My, how sin snowballs! It begins in the mind, moves to the body, demands cover-up in lieu of confession, and violently silences anyone who would reveal its now great depth. Dear Christians, never be far from Confession & Absolution. Nip sin in the bud before it has a chance to grow out of control.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “You are the man! You are the worst!” “It is true; I dare no longer hide it. I am exposed: naked and ashamed before the all-knowing, almighty God. Bathsheba I took advantage of and Uriah I killed, but it is the Lord’s Law that I have transgressed. It is his death penalty that I deserve. I am a poor, miserable sinner, indeed, and I deserve nothing but his present and eternal punishment.” “This is true. This is what you have done, and it is what you deserve. You have forsaken your God, but he has not forsaken you. The Lord has put away your sin. It will still bear its marks in the world—Uriah will not be revived, nor will the child conceived in your sin live. But your transgression has been forgiven. You need not fear God’s eternal wrath; you remain his.”

**PRAY:** Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. –Ps. 51:1-4, 7-12

**July 6**

**READ:** Psalm 32 and 2 Samuel 13-15

**MARK:** “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Ps. 32:1). “I said, ‘I will confess my transgression to the Lord,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Ps. 32:5).

**LEARN:** Back in 1 Samuel 12:6, David’s judgment against the man in Nathan’s lamb parable is that “he shall restore the lamb fourfold.” Likewise, the Lord brings a fourfold judgment upon David: four of David’s sons die unnaturally, three of them killed by men. The child created by his adultery dies. After Amnon rapes his half-sister, Absalom murders him. After Absalom publicly takes David’s wives (see 2 Sam. 12:11), he flees, gets his hair caught in some branches, and is killed by Joab. As David is about to die, Adonijah dies in competition for the throne.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** You know that feeling—the one deep in your gut and chest, heavy upon your shoulders and neck—that guilt which tackles you to the ground yet somehow leaves you standing? The psalmist sure knows it: “For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long” (Ps. 32:3). Will time heal this wound? Will a salve of good works do the trick? No, for this is a burden given you by the Lord (v. 4). The only way to relieve this pressure is to outright acknowledge what it is you did that gave you this burden, to admit your fault, and to receive the healing salve of the grace of God delivered in the absolution of Jesus Christ. Only then will your sin—and the guilt that goes with it—be put away (v. 5).

**PRAY:** Lord God, you desired to keep from us your wrath and so did not spare your holy servant Jesus Christ, who was wounded for our sins. We are your prodigal children, but we come back to you confessing our sins. Embrace us, that we may rejoice in your mercy together with your beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**July 7**

**READ:** Psalm 33 and 2 Samuel 16-18

**MARK:** “The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength” (Ps. 33:16). “Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and our shield” (Ps. 33:20).

**LEARN:** “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord…” (Ps. 33:12a) is not first and foremost a cry to make America Christian. After all, the psalmist continues “…the people whom he has chosen as his heritage” (Ps. 33:12b). After God’s people forfeited the land of Israel and were exiled into Assyria and Babylon, and especially after the spread of Christianity (the religion of God’s people now that Christ has come), the land of Israel and the people of God are no longer essentially synonymous. Insofar as Ps. 33:12 applies to us, it effectively reads, “Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord…”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** See how much chaos was raised because of David’s many wives and concubines! Scripture speaks of men who had multiple wives, but it is never portrayed as a good situation (see also Rachel, Leah, and their maidservants competing to give Jacob children).

**PRAY:** Almighty God, You have ordained the authorities that are; You have clothed them in a majesty that is higher and stronger than the given facts of their history, a majesty that wakens fear in us and claims honor from us. O God, remember in Your mercy the men who bear the burden of this majesty, men like us, easily bent by the pressure of temptation, by the impact of expediency. Remember them and strengthen them when they are moved to shade the truth to their own ends, to withhold what should be told, to distort what must be told, to disclose what does not serve our common weal. Keep intact their honor and credibility. Purge us, O God, of cynical distrust, of party passion, of the deafness of our rebellious bent. Teach us, O Lord, the meekness that would rather be deceived than be encrusted with perpetual distrust. Teach the charity that will interpret all uncertainties toward the side of goodness. Create in our world an air in which the truth can freely breathe, a sea on which the ships of truth can sail, an earth on which the feet of truth can walk unhurt. Your Son, our Lord, would not speak ill of Caesar even when Caesar’s power nailed Him to the cross. Give us the Spirit of Your Son. Amen. –Martin Franzmann, “For Charity Toward Men in Office”

**July 8**

**READ:** Psalm 34 and 2 Samuel 19-21

**MARK:** “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!” (Ps. 34:8).

**LEARN:** At the beginning of 2 Sam. 19, David is mourning so deeply that his soldiers and servants are grieved. Shouldn’t David be glad that his soldiers took the life of his enemy? Shouldn’t he appreciate their service? They want David to rise as king and lead them, but in his grief he appears weak.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “The Lord turns His countenance of favor toward His children, saves them, and blesses them. The Lord turns His countenance away from the wicked and condemns them to eternal death, though His will is to save all people by grace through faith in Christ” (*TLSB*).

**PRAY:** Dear heavenly Father, blessed are those who hear Your Word and fear You, for they seek Your grace and righteousness. Move us to praise and worship You with joyful hearts because of Your Word, Jesus, that we might inherit life everlasting. Amen. –*TLSB*

**July 9**

**READ:** Psalm 35 and 2 Samuel 22-24

**MARK:** “For does not my house stand so with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure” (1 Sam. 23:5).

**LEARN:** “If you take a glimpse at history, it will seem to you that God has forgotten His covenant and not kept it.… After Messiah came, His kingdom, the church, when viewed externally, impresses one as more desolate and disordered.… [But] there always has been and always is a people that honors the name of Christ, that has His Word, Baptism, the Sacrament, the Office of the Keys, and the Spirit against all the gates of hell” (Luther).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In his last moments, David recounts, not his struggles nor his victories, but God’s promises to him. May we all have the wisdom and clarity to do the same!

**PRAY:** O Lord, who is like you, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him, the poor and needy from him who robs him? Guard and defend those who suffer without just cause. Keep them steadfast in your Word, that they might rejoice in Christ’s victory. Amen.

**July 10**

**READ:** Psalm 36 and 1 Kings 1-2

**MARK:** “When David’s time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, 2 “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, 3 and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses…” (1 Ki. 2:1-3).

**LEARN:** Psalm 36 presents two opposites: the curse of the wicked to estrangement from God and the blessing of the righteous to fellowship with him. Note just how opposite Ps. 36:4 and Deuteronomy 6:4-7 are: “He plots trouble while on his bed, he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not reject evil,” versus “…You shall teach [the Lord’s commandments] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” By and large, Scripture portrays every person as heading in 1 of 2 directions. Repentance is a matter of turning back toward God—not necessarily making it all the way to him, but pursuing him and his ways.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** When Adonijah fails to usurp the throne, he flees to the enduring place of mercy: the altar of the Lord. In Exodus 21:12-13, God allowed those guilty of manslaughter to do this same thing and live; Adonijah hopes for the same mercy. Solomon, a servant of the Lord and the rightful king, grants him this grace. So, too, are the lives of those today who flee for mercy to God’s altar spared.

**PRAY:** Lord God, you granted David the grace and wisdom to teach your ways to his son Solomon. Grant us this same grace and wisdom, that we might teach your Word to our children and others we influence, that your Word might take root and sprout forth faith in their lives. Amen.

**July 11**

**READ:** Psalm 37 and 1 Kings 3-6

**MARK:** “And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in… Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” (1 Ki. 3:7, 9).

**LEARN:** Solomon’s early reign was the golden period of Israelite rule. The kingdom was still united. The Temple was being built. Israel was wealthy, and it was a world power, especially as Solomon made peace treaties with the surrounding nations, taking their princesses to be some of his many wives (see 1 Ki. 3:1). However, these foreign wives would also become his chief problem. Since they were so close to him, they greatly influenced him. He chased after their foreign gods and forsook the Lord. This would be the leading cause of his downfall and of the split between the 12 tribes of Israel.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Psalm 37 portrays two opposites: the apparent flourishing of the wicked, and the suffering of the righteous at their hand. But these opposites also have a hidden nature that the psalmist reveals. Though the wicked would rule by power and might, the Lord is mightier still. “The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord.” The Lord’s people are often those who are so knocked down that he is their only hope of salvation—and he delivers them!

**PRAY:** Almighty and merciful Father in heaven, look with mercy upon your people. As you gave Solomon wisdom beyond measure, please bless us, too, with wisdom, that we might better serve you and bless the people around us. Keep us from his folly and from the tempter’s grasp. Amen.

**July 12**

**READ:** Psalm 38 and 1 Kings 7-8

**MARK:** “Do not forsake me, O Lord! O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!” (Ps. 38:21-22).

**LEARN:** In 1 Ki. 8:22-26, Solomon asks the Lord to keep the promises he made to David his father. Similarly, while we ask the Lord in prayer for things that we need and desire, we especially focus on what God has actually promised to give us. For example, we pray for him to keep his word by keeping us and those we love in our baptismal faith, blessing his Word as it goes forth, and sending Christ back down to earth to make all things right—all of this, just as he has promised.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Even though the psalmist is fully aware of his sin and the wrath that he justly deserves from God, he nevertheless pleads to God to have mercy on him and save him. So it is with all who are saved by grace through faith in Christ.

**PRAY:** Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**July 13**

**READ:** Psalm 39 and 1 Kings 9-11

**MARK:** “And his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father” (1 Ki. 11:3-4).

**LEARN:** *TLSB* on 1 Ki. 9:1-9: “God appears to Solomon a second time to emphasize the promises and the demands of the covenant with David’s house. God’s promises of blessing and threats of powerful judgment proclaim the Law and the Gospel. The Law and Gospel still apply to us today. The Law calls us to repentance and faithfulness; the Gospel calls us to true faith, blessing, and comfort for now and for eternity.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** 1 Ki. 11 outlines the tragic fall of King Solomon. His pagan wives brought their pagan gods, and his heart turned away from the Lord. In particular, the text mentions Chemosh and Molech—two idols (read: demons) who were known, in part, for a particularly wicked method of worshipping and appeasing them: child sacrifice. Things got really bad. The Lord had good reason to be angry with him and punish him, because worshipping false gods—even our idols today of possessions and supposed intelligence (read: atheism) which supersedes “religion”—is no small matter; it is giving yourself away to a lie which will poison you and the world around you.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, almighty God, your power and mercy are known throughout the world—even by those who do not acknowledge you. Grant us wisdom and faithfulness that we might not be torn away to chase our heart’s natural desire. By your Holy Spirit, create in us a new, pure desire to trust in you for all things. For you live and reign with the Son and the same Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**July 14**

**READ:** Psalm 40 and 1 Kings 12-14

**MARK:** When the kingdom splits, the Temple is in the southern kingdom. Jeroboam doesn’t want his people to go down there to worship, so he sets up 2 altars and put on each a golden calf (1 Ki. 12:25-33; see also Exodus 32).

**LEARN:** Solomon had conscripted the Israelites—especially from the northern part of the Promised Land—to use every third month to work on his many building projects. This became a heavy burden, especially for those in the north. Rehoboam had the opportunity to reverse his father’s harshness and win the favor of all the people. However, he listened to his fellow whippersnappers instead. The northern 10 tribes rejected Rehoboam and God’s promise of the eternal Davidic line, and they went back to live on their own, apart from the land of Judah (which contained Jerusalem) and Benjamin. Thus the kingdom divided—the southern kingdom was dubbed “Judah”, and the northern “Israel”.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Saint Augustine on Ps. 40:12: “Who is there can calculate the number of the hairs of his head? Much less can he tell the number of his sins… You have guarded against great ones; you do not now commit adultery, or murder; you do not plunder the property of others; you do not blaspheme; and do not bear false witness; those are the weightier kind of sins. You have guarded against great sins, what are you doing about your smaller ones?”

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, you became obedient to death and your name was exalted above all others. Teach us always to do the Father’s will, so that, made holy by your obedience and united to your sacrifice, we can know your great love in times of sorrow and sing a new song to our God now and forever. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**July 15**

**READ:** Psalm 41 and 1 Kings 15-17

**MARK:** “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and amen” (Ps. 41:13).

**LEARN:** In 1 Ki. 15:4-5, it is *for David’s sake* that the Lord bears with and blesses the worthless Abijam. This will be a recurring theme in the southern kingdom (Judah; hereafter SK)—the kingdom of David’s lineage. There is a sense in which the SK is blessed because 1) the kings are of David’s line (which bears God’s promise of an eternal kingdom), and 2) they worship at the Temple. They will tend to be more humble, but more stable, than the northern kingdom (Israel; hereafter NK). They are humbled because their land is not as fertile, nor do they have the port cities and trade routes of the NK. The NK has better soil and trade points, but they are much more tribal than the SK (they are made up of 10 somewhat competing tribes). The NK is also less orthodox because they typically worship at the altars set up by Jeroboam and other high places.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord raises up Elijah to be one of his foremost prophets of his day. As with many other OT figures, Elijah is a type of Messiah/Christ—many of the things he did pointed to the coming Messiah, e.g. remaining faithful to God’s Word and performing miracles, even raising a boy from the dead. Elijah, too, was called to difficult and dangerous tasks, as we’ll see tomorrow.

**PRAY:** O Lord, make us steadfast in your Word, and by the Spirit working through it equip us to do your bidding; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**July 16**

**READ:** Psalm 42 and 1 Kings 18-20

**MARK:** “And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened’” (1 Ki. 18:27).

**LEARN:** Why might people of Elijah’s time turned to other gods? Demons (masked as false gods or idols) actually have powers in the world. Scripture shows how they can possess people and cause them to cut themselves, throw themselves into water to drown themselves, etc. It is also quite possible that demons actually can bring rain, make a woman fertile, etc. If the Lord isn’t giving you what you want/need, why not try this other God?

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “We are to trust in God alone and look to him and expect from Him nothing but good, as from one who gives us body, life, food, drink, nourishment, health, protection, peace, and all necessities of both temporal and eternal things. He also preserves us from misfortune. And if any evil befalls us, he delivers and rescues us. So it is God alone from whom we receive all good and by whom we are delivered from all evil” (*Luther’s Large Catechism*).

**PRAY:** Lord God, never-failing fountain of life, through the saving waters of baptism you called us from the depth of sin to the depths of mercy. Do not forget the trials of our exile, but from the wellspring of your Word satisfy our thirst for you, so that we may come rejoicing to your holy mountain, where you live and reign now and forever. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**July 17**

**READ:** Psalm 43 and 1 Kings 21-22

**MARK:** “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God” (Ps. 43:5).

**LEARN:** “But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate” (1 Ki. 22:34). But of course nothing about this was random. The Lord prophesied through Elijah, and the Lord made good on his word.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Throughout Israel’s terrible history—through countless generations of apostasy—the Lord did not simply abandon his people. He constantly called them to repent and return to him.

**PRAY:** Vindicate our cause, dear Lord, as we seek to serve you. Do not simply prove us to be in the right; prove us to be yours. Amen.

**July 18**

**READ:** Psalm 44 and 2 Kings 1-3

**MARK:** “[Elisha] went up from there to Bethel, and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, ‘Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!’ And he turned around, and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the Lord. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys” (2 Ki. 2:23-24).

**LEARN:** In Romans 8:36 Saint Paul references Ps. 44:22 (though the whole psalm is applicable to his point) in order to demonstrate the surpassing strength of faith. Faith arises from one’s own weakness as he is enabled to rest in God’s strength. Israel was afflicted and was being slaughtered, and God’s deliverance was nowhere to be seen. Nevertheless they trusted him, comforted in the awesome deeds of the Lord which their fathers had passed down to them (Ps. 44:1-3).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “When the Lord takes Elijah to heaven, He also bestows Elijah’s office and authority on Elisha, his chief disciple. The burning desire to serve God and His people through faithful leadership is proper (see also 1 Timothy 3:1). If you set your heart on such noble service, walk and talk with the Lord’s servants to learn from them His Word and wisdom, by which the Lord will prepare you for your calling. The heavenly Father will send His Spirit to embolden and uplift you, through Jesus, His Son” (*TLSB*).

**PRAY:** God of the prophets, bless the prophets’ sons; Elijah’s mantle o’er Elisha cast. Each age its solemn task may claim but once; Make each one nobler, stronger than the last. –*LSB* 682:1

**July 19**

**READ:** Psalm 45 and 2 Kings 4-6

**MARK:** “[Elisha] said, ‘Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ Then Elisha prayed and said, “O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2 Ki. 6:6-7).

**LEARN, INWARDLY DIGEST:** “When we consider all the exclusions that happen—ritual, medical, or otherwise—to keep us clean from contamination, it is striking that the one to bring a word of hope to the leprous warrior Naaman is an Israelite slave girl. Overcoming such exclusions means crossing lines. And this is the first line to be crossed: that a slave girl, of all people, would have enough courage to offer the cure to the noble commander of the king’s court.

“The second line is crossed when ‘Elisha the man of God’ interferes in international diplomacy with an audacity belonging only to prophets: “Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel” (v. 8). But one detail cannot be forgotten. Elisha does not come out to meet the unclean Naaman. He only sends out a word, a divine word of power, promise, and healing. As it turns out, it is the only word that Naaman will need.

“The third line is Naaman’s to cross, and it is two-fold. First, to believe the word, and second, to do what the word says. ‘Go, wash in the Jordan seven times…and you shall be clean’ (v. 10). He refuses the word at first. There are clearer waters in Aram. But his servants, who perhaps are taking their cue from the daring of the slave girl, convince him otherwise. As he steps into the muddy waters of the Jordan River, the word of promise does its work. The water washes off the dread death of the disease, ‘and he was clean’ (v. 14)” (Rev. Travis Scholl, CSL).

**PRAY:** Lord God, you have formed the holy Church to be the bride of Christ. Prepare us to celebrate with the Bridegroom, whom we eagerly expect; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**July 20**

**READ:** Psalm 46 and 2 Kings 7-9

**MARK:** “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (Ps. 46:7, 11). “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (Ps. 46:10). “Yet the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah, for the sake of David his servant, since he promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever” (2 Ki. 8:19).

**LEARN:** Elisha secondhandedly anoints Jehu king of Israel, as God had foretold to Elijah before him (1 Ki. 19:16). Jehu would usher in a new reign of righteousness. He begins by cleaning up the pollution that had overtaken Israel.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** 2 Ki. 7 outlines the most anticlimactic siege there ever was. Israel was being starved by famine and by siege. Women were literally eating their children for food (see 6:26-31). But then the threat simply vanishes. The Lord gives victory to his people, and often he does so through ways that his people never would have expected (such as the Israel’s king dying on a cross for her salvation).

**PRAY:** Lord God, our refuge and strength, when the restless powers of this world and the waters of hell rise up against your holy city, watch over it and keep it safe. By the river that flows from the throne of the Lamb, purify this new Jerusalem as your chosen dwelling, for you are with us, our stronghold now and forever. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**July 21**

**READ:** Psalm 47 and 2 Kings 10-12

**MARK:** “God has gone up [read: ascended] with a shout” (Ps. 47:5). This psalm finds its fulfillment in the ascension of Christ the King.

**LEARN:** With the death of Ahab, Joram, and Ahaziah, Israel’s kings get much better. Jehu “cleans house”—wiping out Ahab’s descendants and the prophets and priests of Baal. However, Jehu, does not remove the golden calves (Israel’s substitute places of worship, since they despise Judah and won’t go into that land to worship at the Temple). He does not break down the political, familial, and historic barrier between Israel and Judah, and thus he dooms Israel to fall back into paganism—even through his own son and grandson (see chp. 13).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Christ’s ascension into heaven has at least two important implications for Christians. First—and what Psalm 47 focuses on—is that he reigns on high, at the Father’s right hand. He exercised some of his godly powers in his earthly ministry, but he also kept his identity somewhat hidden until his resurrection. Now that he has ascended into heaven, “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to [him]” (Matthew 28:18). He is the king; he is in charge. Second, his ascension is necessary so that all might be fulfilled—so that the Day of the Lord might finally and fully come at his return. “If I go to prepare a place for you, *I will come again* and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3). He has ascended, but he will descend again to finally and fully restore his creation.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, you reign on high at the Father’s right hand with all rule and authority. Protect us by your mighty hand from the powers of the Evil One, that we may fall into neither sin nor danger. Send your holy angels to protect us, and nurture our faith that we may rejoice when you come again; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**July 22**

**READ:** Psalm 48 and 2 Kings 13-15

**MARK:** “Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that his is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever” (Ps. 48:12-14).

**LEARN:** “Amaziah serves the Lord, yet he overestimates his power and tries to gain influence in the kingdom of Israel, which defeats him. Faith is not a guarantee of success. Pride leads to downfall. Enact your plans with reflection on God’s Word, with prayer, and with wisdom from God. The Lord watches over those who are His and welcomes them by faith as noble children of His everlasting kingdom” (*TLSB*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “King Jotham of Judah faces pressure from the kings of Syria and Israel, who tempt him to focus on human alliances and strength rather than on the Lord. God, of course, is not opposed to alliances, friendships, or trust between His subjects. Indeed, He calls us to faithfulness in such relationships. Yet, He places the greatest importance on trust in His salvation. He is our greatest ally against misplaced faith and false saviors” (*TLSB*).

**PRAY:** Father, the body of your risen Son is the temple not made by human hands and the bulwark of the new Jerusalem. Make this holy city, built of living stones, so shine with spiritual radiance that it may show your greatness in the sight of all nations; for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. – *For All the Saints*

**July 23**

**READ:** Psalm 49 and 2 Kings 16-18

**MARK:** “Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice” (Ps. 49:7-8). “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me” (Ps. 49:15).

**LEARN:** 2 Kings 16 goes together with Isaiah 7. The Lord has just spoken words of comfort to Ahaz through his prophet Isaiah: "Though Syria and Ephraim are against you, they will not defeat you," implying that the Lord would protect Ahaz and Judah (Is. 7:7-9). And yet, the reader also knows that words of comfort will not be the overall thrust of Isaiah's prophecy to Judah; he has been told that they will hear, but not understand--see, but not perceive (Is. 6:9). And so as we hear Ahaz's reaction of skepticism rooted in misplaced trust in his alliances rather than in YHWH, we ought not to be surprised. This king, like many before him, does not know YHWH as his God--the one who would grant him victory and salvation. Nevertheless, YHWH does not abandon his people. He will leave a remnant (Is. 6:13), and he will give them--even falsely pious Ahaz--a sign of his favor.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** People are blinded by a world view that is contrary to the scriptural view. They want to explain the existence of the world without giving credit to the Creator God who made it. They look for assistance and support from everyone and everything, other than their loving Father who provides for all their needs. They look for salvation in manmade religions or the things they have done instead of from the gracious Lord who already provided for eternity in Christ. They have already made up their minds and it will be difficult for even the truth to convince them otherwise.

What about us? We also find ourselves trusting in our own strength or the strength of our own alliances rather than trusting in the Lord. We make our plans as though we had control of the future, sometimes without even praying and consulting God for direction and guidance. We trust our income, bank accounts, retirement funds, the government, to provide for all our needs, and we panic when these things fail us. We trust our military strength and power of might to secure our own peace and the peace of our allies, but realize that there is so much war and violence, not just in other parts of our world, but right here in our own neighborhoods.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, you condemned the rich because they have already received their reward, and y ou proclaimed the poor blessed because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Teach us to seek imperishable goods and to have confidence in your blood, poured out as the price of our redemption; and to you be the glory now and forever. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**July 24**

**READ:** Psalm 50 and 2 Kings 19-22

**MARK:** “For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills” (Ps. 50:10). “Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (Ps. 50:13-15).

**LEARN:** Luther: “It is well known that at the time of King Hezekiah the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians in a single night and by a single assault (2 Kings 19:35). And Christ praises the might of the angels when He tells Peter (Matt. 26:53) about the twelve legions, although a single angel would have been enough to turn back and destroy the enemies of Christ. Indeed, the story of Job proves that even the wicked angels are endowed with great power. It is profitable to know these facts; they serve to comfort the godly but to frighten the ungodly. For we who believe must be certain that the princes of heaven are with us, not one or two, but a great multitude of them, as is recorded in Luke that the heavenly hosts were with the shepherds (Luke 2:13).”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God owns the cattle, and he even owns the hills! What shall I offer in response to the unmerited favor he shows me? What of mine shall I lay down that he might pick me up and call me blessed? The goats and bulls of the OT were never about the goats and bulls; their flesh is not for God to eat, but for his people to sacrifice. What does the Lord require of his people? Honor him as God. Call upon him in every trouble. Pray, praise, and give thanks. Trust in his salvation won not by the blood of bulls and goats but by the blood of the Lamb of God.

**PRAY:** *Pray Luther’s Morning or Evening Prayer (found in your* Small Catechism *under “Daily Prayers,” emphasizing “Let your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me.”*

**July 25**

**READ:** Psalm 51 and 2 Kings 23-25

**MARK:** Ps. 51:1-12 is one of those passages that we should all memorize and take to heart.

**LEARN:** Josiah’s wholehearted restoration of the proper worship of the Lord is not an outlier in history. As we have seen so far in the books of Kings, even in times of terrible kings and terrible circumstances, God raises up kings who are righteous like their father David. There are many “back to the sources” moments in history. Josiah rediscovered the Torah—the faith of his fathers—and it changed his life and his kingdom. Similarly, there are moments when people will realize the folly of their ways and turn back to ancient wisdom (for example, Luther’s insights on justification which led him to learn and confirm these things in Scripture and in the Church Fathers). Our society seems to be approaching rock-bottom, but nevertheless we trust our God who is able to save us from ourselves—in this life and the next. We pray that he will bring people to their senses and turn them to the ancient wisdom and truth of the Christian faith.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Sin is not just a thing that we do. People are not sinners because they sin. Rather, sin is a core part of what it means to be a fallen human in the fallen creation. People sin because they are sinners. We are born into this corruption, this decay, this rebellion; we inherited it from our father Adam. It will kill us, and we cannot help it. We are all truly born lost and condemned sinners. (This is a chief reason why we baptize babies, by the way.)

But there is One who was born without this corruption, One who was never ensnared by sin, One who was conceived not through the flesh but through the working of the Holy Spirit. He is everything we could never be, and he is everything we now are. By his dying, he has destroyed the power of corruption and death, and by his rising he has restored to us the everlasting life that Adam experienced before the Fall. When he returns, this corruption and the death it yields will be but a distant memory, and we will truly know a life without sin—a never-ending life of incorruptible peace and joy.

**PRAY:** O God, You have trodden our iniquities underfoot and have cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You have forgotten as You have forgiven. The rising sun is not darkened by my dark yesterday; my hot rebellion of yesteryear has not dried this year’s compassionate rain or parched the teeming earth on which I walk. Oh, still this guilty memory of mine, this dark and unadmitted doubt of You, this questioning of Your forgiveness and Your forgetting. Oh, do not let them rise again to torment me, those harsh defacements of my fellowman, those words that flew, arrows fiery with my anger, those proud and brittle clashes of my against my neighbor, those ragged neglects of simple duty. Your Son’s cross stands empty against the sky. Your Son’s grave is opened wide. Your angels have spoken. And Your Son sits at Your right hand for me, for me. Let me remember this; let me forget. Amen. –Martin Franzmann, “To Forget Past Sins”

**July 26**

**READ:** Psalm 52 and 1 Chronicles 1-5

**MARK:** “Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God endures all the day” (Ps. 52:1).

**LEARN:** While 1-2 Chronicles covers much of the same history as 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings, it has a different thrust. 1-2 Kings was written during the middle of the 49 years of Judah’s exile in Babylon. It demonstrates how the exile was not the result of God’s unfaithfulness to them, but of their unfaithfulness to him and his covenant. 1-2 Kings emphasizes the downward slide into sin.

On the other hand, 1-2 Chronicles was written about 100 years after Judah’s return to their homeland. The second temple had been built and the walls of Jerusalem had been restored. 1-2 Chronicles portrays the disasters that took place between David and the exile as resulting from the people’s forsaking the Lord or not properly seeking the Lord. 1 Chronicles emphasizes God’s rule through David’s lineage and the appointment of the Levites to serve at the tabernacle and the temple. The author wants to bring his hearers/readers back to wholehearted worship—properly seeking the Lord.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** 1 Chr. 1-9 can be difficult to trudge through, but here’s the point: God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Beginning with Adam (from whom all people descend) and continuing particularly through Abraham and Jacob/Israel (God’s covenant people), the author sketches out God’s blessings to all people and particularly his faithfulness to his chosen people.

**PRAY:** You put me on the stretch, O God. You do me the honor of putting me to the test as You once tested our father Abraham. You bid me to do the impossible: not only to endure the tempering heat of trial but to rejoice in it—impossible! But Your Son did not find it impossible when You tried Him with failure. He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and gave thanks to You when You took from Him the wise and understanding and revealed Him only to babes, to the inconsequential little ones in whom Your love delights. Your servant Paul found it possible. Your servant James found it possible. And You are my Father just as You are theirs. I thank You for all proofs of Fatherhood. I Thank You for the trials I meet. Give me the heart to meet them unafraid, to joy in them as I rejoice in You. Amen. –Martin Franzmann, “To Find Joy in Life’s Trials”

**July 27**

**READ:** Psalm 53 and 1 Chronicles 6-10

**MARK:** “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 53:1). “There is none who does good, not even one” (Ps. 53:3).

**LEARN:** Luther on the Korahites (1 Chr. 9:19): “In Moses we read (Num. 26:11) that the sons of Korah received extraordinary grace in that they were preserved when their father was swallowed up by the earth with his companions.… They would not depart from the tabernacle, but had admonished their father and his followers to desist from error. For that reason they are highly praised in Chronicles. The psalms they composed are very joyous and most delightful and are plainly wedding lyrics. Therefore I believe the descendants of Korah were especially chosen for God’s worship that there might also be poets of sacred things among God’s people, to sing together and compose hymns for the honor and glory of God. Thus Ethan and Jeduthun are praised among many others (1 Chron. 15:19; 9:16, 19). More than the others, however, the sons of Korah sang especially of Christ; but they sang in a different way from David—under the allegory of marriage. It is apparent that they were good and pious sons, who believed God in the face of their father’s madness. For that reason they were preserved for the praise of God. They were not priests, but Levites. They remained in that station and did not aspire to the priesthood as their father did.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Although Psalm 53 seems to say “There is none who is good,” etc. about the corrupt and those who oppose God, Saint Paul extends this statement to all people (Romans 3:10-12). All are corrupt, all oppose God. Original sin is real: by default, everyone despises God.

**PRAY:** Holy Father, apart from you nothing is true, nothing is holy. Eradicate our sins and give us strength in our weakness, so that all who believe in your Son may rejoice in his glory now and forever. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**July 28**

**READ:** Psalm 54 and 1 Chronicles 11-15

**MARK:** “O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth” (Ps. 54:2).

**LEARN:** 1 Chr. 15:1-28 presents material that is not in 2 Samuel. It is an extensive description of the preparation to bring the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. David abided by God’s design of the Levitical priesthood and made precise decisions for this triumphant event. Worship is meant to be orderly.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Much of 1 Chronicles (esp. chp. 13, 15, 16) and 2 Chronicles (esp. chp. 5) describe the ark of the covenant—a physical entity to which God had died his presence. With Chronicle’s focus on the proper worship of the Lord, the ark of the covenant serves as a reminder of God’s abiding presence and the means by which God breaks into the world to save us. The ark has been lost, but his tangible presence among us endures, namely in the Sacraments.

**PRAY:** Father, hear our prayer and come to the aid of your Church. Mercifully deliver us from evil, so that from the rising of the sun to its setting we may offer you a pure sacrifice of prayer; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**July 29**

**READ:** Psalm 55 and 1 Chronicles 16-20

**MARK:** “Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved” (Ps. 55:22). “Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples!” (1 Chr. 16:8).

**LEARN:** David’s worship and victories are mentioned in 1 Chr. 16-20 (cf. 2 Sam. 7-12). But Chronicles does not tell the next part of the story: David’s affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11-12); the horrid deal with Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom (13-14); Absalom’s rebellion (15-19); Sheba’s rebellion; and the death of Saul’s sons (21). Given that 1-2 Chronicles was written at Israel’s new beginning, it chooses to focus on the aspects of Israel’s history which clearly demonstrate God’s faithfulness to his people.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “The author finds himself in a town full of wickedness and violence, betrayed by a trusted friend and colleague, with no one to help except God. He turns to the Lord in prayer, entrusting his life to God’s hand with confidence. When troubles press hard, we may find it easy to give in to our feelings and give up on God. The psalmist’s steadfastness challenges us to trust in God’s mercy. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, faced a city full of violence and plots against His life. Betrayed by Judas, He endured the cross, where He turned to the Father with confidence and gave His life as the ransom price for ours” (*TLSB*).

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, you were rejected by your people, betrayed by the kiss of a friend, and deserted by your disciples. In our trouble, give us the confidence that you had in the Father and the assurance of our salvation now and forever. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**July 30**

**READ:** Psalm 56 and 1 Chronicles 21-25

**MARK:** “In God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?” (Ps. 56:4).

**LEARN:** While most of 1 Chronicles is soft on David, chp. 21 lets him have it for his idolatrous census (that he might trust in the might of his army of over 1 million troops). However, I believe it tells this story primarily for its result: establishing the location of the Temple (22:1).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** With what specific order David establishes the Lord’s servants!

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, victim for our sins, you trusted in your Father’s protection and kept silent when you were tormented. Give us that same confidence, that we may gladly suffer with you and for you, offering the Father our sacrifice of praise and walking before him in the light of the living; and to you be the glory now and forever. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**July 31**

**READ:** Deuteronomy 32:1-4 and 1 Chronicles 26-29

**MARK:** “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he” (Deut. 32:4).

**LEARN:** Martin Chemnitz (early Lutheran reformer) on Deut. 32:1-4: “The works which God performs in Himself are holy and perfect… since God is without any iniquity, He is just and righteous. But those things which the Holy Spirit works in our body of sin and death in the regenerate, these things the Spirit Himself affirms are imperfect because of our flesh which has not yet been completely destroyed, Rom. 6:6.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “David, the king, acts like a priest by leading the assembly of Israel’s leaders in prayer. God calls all leaders to be examples in faith for those they lead. As you conclude the Lord’s Prayer each day (cf vv 10–11), keep David’s example in mind and humble yourself before the King of heaven. He reigns on your behalf to bless and strengthen you by the grace of His Son, Jesus” (*TLSB*).

**PRAY:** Lord God, as I pray for all who are in authority, I thank You especially for the form of government given us in our beloved country. Give me the grace with my fellow citizens to value the officers and the magistrates of our government as those sent by You. Instill in me that respect and honor that is due them. Lord, endow them with wisdom for their several duties, with a spirit of sacrifice for the common welfare, with mercy and justice, with uprightness and kindliness. Correct the evils of selfishness, greed, a vain desire for honor, or abuse of power among us as well as in the other governments of the world. Grant that the true purposes of government may prevail, safeguarding peace and prosperity, so that we may live soberly and uprightly in Your sight and have opportunity to tell of You and Your kingdom. These petitions I direct to You because in Jesus I know You as my Father and Lord. Amen. –*Lutheran Book of Prayer*

**August 1**

**READ:** Habakkuk 3:2-19 and 2 Chronicles 1-3

**MARK:** 2 Chronicles 1:7-12 – King Solomon asks for wisdom and knowledge and he receives that along with riches and honor.

**LEARN:** In the account of Solomon’s reign (chapters 1-9) the first chapter and the last two chapters serve as a framework for the feature of main interest: the building of the temple. Chapter 1 sketches the setting, telling how Solomon invoked God’s blessing on the immense project. God promised to equip him with wisdom for the task and to provide the necessary riches to do so. God did bless Solomon with military and financial resources adequate for the uninterrupted pursuit of his goal.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The value of the materials and expense of the labor that went into the building of the temple is hard to imagine. The Most Holy Place was overlaid with 23 tons of fine gold! This is not counting the temple vessels and other decorations. The temple inspired awe. The location of the temple mount is Mount Moriah, the same name given to the mount which Abraham and Isaac ascended and sacrificed upon. Solomon asks for wisdom and he receives much more. Our wisdom likewise comes from the Lord and we have a wisdom that Solomon did not – the written Word of God. May we treasure Christ as His word more dearly than the Israelites treasured Solomon’s Temple.

**PRAY:** O Lord, I yield my treasure, my life, and all things in wise service to your kingdom and care for my neighbor. Amen.

**August 2**

**READ:** Psalm 57 and 2 Chronicles 4-6

**MARK:** 2 Chronicles 5:13-14 – The Ark of the covenant is brought into the temple and the glory of the Lord fills the house of God.

**LEARN:** The chosen occasion for the dedication of the temple was the feast of tabernacles, when the elders of Israel were gathered in Jerusalem. Ceremonies began with the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant from its makeshift quarters into the inner sanctuary of the house, the holy of holies. When the symbol of divine presence was in place, the glory of the Lord filled the house of God, hallowing it as its dwelling place.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** When the glory of the LORD filled the temple in the form of the cloud all the people knew and rejoiced that the LORD now dwelt among them. This ceremony and celebration of the Ark coming into the temple was magnified by the harps, cymbals, lyres, and 120 priestly trumpeters. The singers sang in unison with the instruments praise to the LORD, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” (1 Ch 5:14). The night when Jesus was born in Bethlehem and God dwelt again with His people, the glory of the angels filled the sky as they praised God and said, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Lk 2:13). In the Divine Service each Sunday we get a little glimpse of that glory of God as we celebrate with ceremony and song the LORD dwelling among his people by means of the Word and Sacrament for this we sing, “Glory be to God on high!”

**PRAY:** Oh LORD God, You dwelt with the Your people of old by the presence of the cloud with the Ark in the temple, so too now continue to dwell with Your people in the word and work of the Your only Son, Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

**August 3**

**READ:** Psalm 58 and 2 Chronicles 7-9

**MARK:** 2 Chronicles 7:19-22 – The people again are warned not to turn aside from the LORD their God to serve other gods. If they do, their land will be taken away.

**LEARN:** The building of the temple is a focal point in the account of Solomon’s reign. Yet Solomon rebuilt and fortified much of Israel. He fortified citied and built store cities in strategic locations. Twenty cities ceded to the King of Tyre to finance the building program in Jerusalem were returned. Solomon excelled in riches and wisdom beyond compare. It was a time of prosperity for Jerusalem and for all of Israel. Silver became as common as stone in Jerusalem. Solomon reigned for forty years in Jerusalem and his son, Rehoboam took his place.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:**  Solomon begins and ends his reign under the watchful eyes of the Lord’s prophets, who reviewed his accomplishments and likely also reviewed his failures. Today, treasure the faithful spiritual leaders the Lord provides for your wisdom and counsel. Both their rebuke and their blessing stem from the Lord’s good purposes for you: to call you to repentance and to make you wise unto salvation in Christ.

**PRAY:** Grant me ready ears and a sincere heart, O Lord, to welcome the counsel You provide. Amen.

**August 4**

**READ:** Psalm 59 and 2 Chronicles 10-12

**MARK:** 2 Chronicles 10:8 – Rehoboam foolishly abandons the wisdom of the elders and heeds the advice of his youthful contemporaries.

**LEARN:** Israel rebelled against the harsh and unwise rule of Rehoboam, Solomon’s son. The conflict between Solomon and Jeroboam returned. Jeroboam, son of Nebat, was a chief servant under Solomon’s reign and Solomon put him in charge of the forced labor of Joseph (1 Ki 11:28). Jeroboam rose up against Solomon but fled for safety to Shishak, king of Egypt. When Jeroboam heard that Solomon had died, he returned to Israel and he and all of Israel asked Rehoboam to lighten the heavy yoke of service put upon them. Rehoboam refused and instead increased the harshness of his rule. The people revolted and Solomon’s kingdom became divided between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Jeroboam ruled in the north and set up his own form of worship to goat idols and calves that he had made. Shishak, King of Egypt came up against Jerusalem and took away the treasures of Jerusalem. After Rehoboam died, he was burned in the city of David, not buried, a sign of the displeasure toward his seventeen years of rule.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Solomon left some big shoes to fill! Rehoboam chose to listen to the advice of the foolish and not the wisdom of the elders and of the Lord. Often times, and exceedingly so our age, people do not listen to the sage advice of the elders and heed the wisdom of the scriptures and of our Lord. Pride and popularity often take prominence over doing that which is right. It would have been right for both Rehoboam and Jeroboam to submit themselves to the wisdom and counsel of the priests and elders of the people but pride and popularity caused them fall. God forbid that ever to happen to us!

**PRAY:** Oh Lord, deliver us from evil, and grant us faithful leaders and fellow believers who can help us in our time of need. Amen.

**August 5**

**READ:** Psalm 60 and 2 Chronicles 13-15

**MARK:** 2 Chronicles 14: 2-6 – Asa reigned in Judah and did what was right in the eyes of the Lord**.**

**LEARN:** Abijah, king of Judah, the southern kingdom goes to war against, Jeroboam, king of Israel, the northern kingdom. God defeated Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah (2 Ch 13:15). Abijah was given a dignified burial in Jerusalem unlike his successor, Rehoboam. His son, Asa, assumes his reign and does what is right in the sight of the LORD and takes away the foreign altars and their high places and cuts down the Asherim. This pious king leads the nation toward proper worship as he repaired the altar of the LORD. Not all the high places to foreign gods were removed from all of Israel, nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly true all his days (2 Ch 15:17).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** When Azariah speaks God’s Word to King Asa, the king courageously brings reform to Judah and to members of the tribes of Israel. Today, the Lord likewise calls you to courageous action on behalf of others who need to hear His Word. Take courage! The Lord’s Word accomplishes His purposes for the sake of His people, especially His purpose of salvation.

**PRAY:** Oh Lord, we seek Your blessing in accord with Your Word. Grant us courage to call others to repentance and faith in Your Name. Amen.

**August 6**

**READ:** Psalm 61 and 2 Chronicles 16-18

**MARK:** 2 Chronicles 18:18 – The divine counsel gathers the heavenly army to plot against Israel and Ahab because of their evil.

**LEARN:** The marriage alliance of Jehoshaphat’s son with Athaliah, daughter of Ahab, may have been designed to unite the divided kingdom politically and religiously. However, the attempted reconciliation produced nothing good. Chapter 18 records how it led to a military disaster and the death of Ahab. In contrast to Ahab’s ungodly behavior, Jehoshaphat abolishes idolatry and introduced a program of mass education in the Law of the Lord (2 Ch 17:7-9).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord strengthens faithful Jehoshaphat so that the fear of the Lord falls upon the nations. He sought to return the people to the ways of the LORD their God. He sought to honor God’s name and keep it holy. As the Lord strengthens you by means of His word and sacrament, use that strength likewise to honor God’s name in your work and vocation. The Lord still has the nations in mind as He works in our lives. He desires salvation and peace for all people, as taught in His Word.

**PRAY:** Lord, provide us with strength in all realms of our lives, that we may in every way give testimony to Your generosity. Amen.

**August 7**

**READ:** Psalm 62 and 2 Chronicles 19-21

**MARK:** 2 Chronicles 20:20-21 – Jehoshaphat strove to return his people to the Lord their God.

**LEARN:** Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem and renewed his efforts to bring back to the Lord the people under his jurisdiction. He personally undertook a campaign to reform the judicial system of the land. All cases were to enforce the law of the Lord without fear or favor because in reality they judged not for man but for the Lord (2 Ch 19:6). Disputed cases of civil litigation were to come before a superior court in Jerusalem. The LORD delivered Judah from the Moabites and Ammonites and Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers. However, his son, Jehoram did not walk in his ways but in the ways of his wife, the daughter of Ahab. The LORD struck him with disease and in the end, at age forty, he died in great agony when his bowels came out.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord calls Jehoshaphat to serve Him with His whole heart – halfhearted commitment simply will not do. This is no less true for us. The Lord desires our wholehearted commitment, for He committed Himself wholly to us in the person of His beloved Son.

**PRAY:** Dear Lord, take my whole heart in love toward you and in service toward my neighbor according to Your Word alone. Amen.

**August 8**

**READ:** Psalm 63 and 2 Chronicles 22-24

**MARK:** 2 Chronicles 24:10 – When the temple was rebuilt, all the princes and all the peopled rejoiced and payed their taxes.

**LEARN:** Athaliah’s cruelty rivaled that of Jezebel. She did not shrink from killing off her own grandsons, fearing that they could challenge her usurpation of power. However one of them escaped the assassins. Joash was kept in hiding for six years by his aunt and her husband, Jehoiada, the high priest. In the seventh year, a counterrevolution was waged, masterminded by Jehoiada, the high priest, to put Joash on the throne. Athaliah was put to death and house of Baal was torn down. Joash repaired the temple but later apostatized after the death of Jehoiada and even executed Zechariah, the prophet of God.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord guides Joash through the priest Jehoiada and his son, Zechariah, but Joash finally rejects the Lord’s ways. Each of us needs good counsel, especially around the Word of the Lord, which leads us in the paths that we should go. When others point out your weakness, do not harden your heart toward them or toward the Lord. The Lord’s great desire is to bring you back, restoring you through confession and absolution.

**PRAY:** Continue to call me back to You by the preaching of Your Word by Your faithful prophets. Amen.

**August 9**

**READ:** Psalm 64 and 2 Chronicles 25-27

**MARK:** 2 Chronicles 25:15-16 – The prophet of the Lord was sent to speak boldly to the king to repent.

**LEARN:** There was unanimity in the nation that the Davidic succession was to continue even though a conspiracy swept away the previous occupant to the throne. Uzziah, whose name means, “my strength is the Lord,” also known as Azariah “the Lord helps”, at first sought the Lord and God made him prosper. Later he was false to the Lord and offered incense on the altar of incense which stood in the holy place. Not even the king was permitted to assume worship functions. He was struck with leprosy and spent the rest of his days in a separate house.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Jotham orders his ways before the Lord and grows mighty as a result. He learns from both the good example and the bad example of his father, Uzziah. Learn to respect and emulate all that is good in your parents, for they are God’s gift to you. Also seek to grow in the ways of your Heavenly Father, who gives life everlasting in the might of His Son.

**PRAY:** Order my ways, dear Father, that I may emulate your goodness. Amen.

**August 10**

**READ:** Psalm 65 and 2 Chronicles 28-30

**MARK:** 2 Chronicles 30:1-2 – The Passover was celebrated again under Hezekiah’s reforms.

**LEARN:** Ahaz was an evil, evil king. He did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He set up altars and metal images for the Baals. He burned his sons as an offering to these gods and made sacrifices at all the pagan altars (2 Chron 28:3-4). Ahaz was decimated by the king of Syria and then offered sacrifices to the gods of the Syrians. He gathered together the holy vessels of the temple and cut them in pieces and shut up the house of God. Hezekiah, his son, succeeded him. Hezekiah’s mother was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah, possibly the priest who instructed Uzziah, but was murdered under king Joash. Hezekiah cleanses the temple, opens its doors and brings back temple worship. Even the Passover is celebrated again. It was a time of much rejoicing for the southern kingdom.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Often times we see evil leaders followed by good and upright leaders and vice versa. The evil that Ahaz promoted is hard to imagine, even sacrificing his own sons to the pagan gods. One thing not to overlook is the influence of godly and ungodly women. Jezebel influenced King Ahab to greater evil but here, Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah, likely influences Hezekiah toward godliness. The great stand that Hezekiah took against the pagan idol worship must have been great, yet even greater still was the work and effort he put in to restoring worship at the temple. The word of God and the Psalms were read and sung again. The people began to return to the Lord their God and there was much rejoicing. May we do the same!

**PRAY:** O Lord, consecrate Your servants, that we may offer sincere worship in Your name. Amen.

**August 11**

**READ:** Psalm 66 and 2 Chronicles 31-33

**MARK:** 2 Chronicles 32:20-23 – Isaiah is the prophet at the time of Hezekiah and the Angel of the Lord defeats the army of Sennacherib, king of Assyria.

**LEARN:**  Hezekiah’s reforms continue on with the influence of Isaiah the prophet. Jerusalem is attacked by Sennacherib and should have fallen to his Assyrian army, but 185,000 of the Assyrian army fall in one night by the hand of the Angel of the Lord. Hezekiah’s pride almost causes his fall, but he humbled himself and the inhabitants of Jerusalem as well. Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh succeeds him and does much evil in the sight of the Lord, burning his sons in the Valley of Hinnom as his grandfather Ahaz did. However Manasseh repents and returns to the LORD, the God of Israel.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Through distress and the admonitions of the prophets, the Lord leads Manasseh to repentance. Like a patient father, the Lord disciplines us and even allows us to learn our lessons the hard way, through error and pain. Yet He is always ready to hear us, just as He heard and had compassion on the wicked king Manasseh.

**PRAY:** O Lord, instruct me through the words of Your prophets, and grant me sincere repentance day by day, that I may know You alone as my God. Amen.

**August 12**

**READ:** Psalm 67 and 2 Chronicles 34-36

**MARK:** 2 Chronicles 34:1-7 – Josiah purged the land of Israel of their idols. Even their precious metals were not reused, but ground into dust and scattered.

**LEARN:** At the beginning of Josiah’s reign, idolatry was as entrenched in Judah as it had been at his grandfather’s time if not more so. Following Hezekiah’s footsteps, the young king initiated a campaign to destroy the images and altars of heathen worship. When he had purged the land and house, he went on to repair the house of the Lord. In the process, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the Lord given through Moses. Terrified by its contents and by the condemnation of Judah’s apostasy by the prophetess Huldah, he called and assembly of the people, read to them all the words of the book, and renewed the covenant before the Lord, demanding that all who were present stand to it. After an intensive purge of the abominations now extended to all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel, he reconsecrated himself and the people to the Lord by celebrating the Passover.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Josiah seeks the Lord and destroys the idolatrous shrines in Judah and all Israel. Sincere faith is expressed not only by service to the Lord but also by leaving behind and removing those things that tempt us and would divide our devotion. The Holy Spirit will lead you not only to confess you sin but also to put away and avoid temptation. The Lord alone is your God; He is the only Savior.

**PRAY:** O one true God, grant me an undivided heart, that I may serve You truly. Amen.

**August 13**

**READ:** Psalm 68 and Ezra 1-5

**MARK:** Ezra 3:12-13 – There was both joy and weeping as the temple’s foundation was laid.

**LEARN:** The first two chapters set the stage for the events which were to culminate in the rebuilding of the temple. In the seventh month of the first year of their repatriation those who had availed themselves of Cyrus’ proclamation and had formed a registered community erected an altar on which sacrifices were resumed. But intent on restoring the full worship ritual, they hired workmen to build the temple of the Lord and contracted for cedar wood for its construction. Already in the second year work got underway under the oversight of the priests and Levites.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The service dedicating the foundation for the new temple stirs deep emotions for the Judeans because of the memory of their shortcomings and because they are eyewitnesses to God’s renewed mercy for them. God’s word of both Law and Gospel will likewise move your heart. That word is your focus for comfort and for hope. By the word, the Lord lays a foundation for new life and peace in your life.

**PRAY:** All I am, good Lord, belongs to You, including my tears and shouts of joy. May I praise You in thought, word, and deed. Amen.

**August 14**

**READ:** Psalm 69 and Ezra 6-10

**MARK:** Ezra 10:1-3 – Ezra confesses his sin, weeps, and prays. So do the people.

**LEARN:** A half century after the temple of stone and wood was erected, it was apparent that a rebuilding of their moral integrity was needed if the rehabilitation of those chosen people was not to end in national dissolution. The man who cleared away the rubbish of abuses and laid new spiritual foundations was Ezra. After his return to Jerusalem at the head of a group of exiles, he attacked the threatening disintegration at its roots: mixed marriages.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ezra expressed remorse and shame when he learns of the unfaithful Judeans’ marriages. Today, few topics have grown more sensitive than the issues surrounding marriage. This is ultimately because families fail to believe in or teach what God’s Word teaches about the holy blessings of marriage. Like Ezra, express your shame, remorse, and prayers to God when sinful notions of marriage tear at your family. Study and share the teachings of God’s Word about marriage. Christ the Bridegroom is also our Redeemer, who removes all our shame and comforts our remorseful hearts.

**PRAY:** Jesus, hear my prayers for family and friends, that they would enjoy the blessings of holy wedlock according to Your Word. Amen.

**August 15**

**READ:** Psalm 70 and Nehemiah 1-3

**MARK:** Nehemiah 1:4-11 – Nehemiah’s prayer of confession.

**LEARN:** The book of Nehemiah records the second phase in the rehabilitation of postexilic Israel. Supplementing Ezra, it too tells the story of material reconstruction, the fortification of Jerusalem, and of a moral and spiritual rebuilding through reform and covenant renewal. The walls of the holy city rose on ancient foundations under the leadership of a highly resourceful and deeply religious layman, who held high office at the Persian court. Hearing the trouble and shame of defenseless Jerusalem and invoking divine blessing on his decision to help, Nehemiah requested and received permission from the king to take charge personally of his proposal to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** On behalf of those struggling in Jerusalem, Nehemiah fasts and prays with great empathy as guided by God’s Word. God’s Word grants confidence in prayer. As you call on the Lord to confess your sins and to plead for others, use God’s promises as your guide, for all His promises to you are “Yes” and “Amen” in Christ the Savior.

**PRAY:** Holy Spirit, increase in me the desire to know the Word and to pray according to it in all things. Amen.

**August 16**

**READ:** Psalm 71 and Nehemiah 4-6

**MARK:** Nehemiah 7:15-16 – The wall was finished in 52 days to the surprise of nations around them.

**LEARN:** Social and economic inequities, tolerated for some time but aggravated by the additional strain of building the walls, worked such a hardship on the poor people, who were many, as to bring them to the point of mutiny. Exorbitant interests rates charged on mortgages and debts by the nobles and their officials forced the borrowers to sell their children into slavery and brought them to the brink of starvation. Nehemiah was as courageous and resolute in attacking this internal evil as he was in dealing with dangers threatening from the outside. At a great assembly he minced no words in confronting the wealthy culprits with their sins of oppression. He so impressed the hardhearted creditors with their guilt that they promised under oath to restore what they had acquired by unlawful means. Nehemiah himself set a good example of restraint and forbearance, shaming the greedy landowners. He did not demand the food allowance for the governor from the heavily burdened immigrants, to which he was entitled, lest the work on this wall be impeded.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Nehemiah sets and excellent example for his countrymen of generosity that honors the Lord, our Maker. As the Lord grants you opportunity, lead others by good example. Call for the Lord’s blessing. He who blessed you through Baptism and faith in His name will provide for your every need in Christ.

**PRAY:** Grant me a heart for sincere service, O Lord, that I may bless my neighbors and colleagues. Amen.

**August 17**

**READ:** Psalm 72 and Nehemiah 7-9

**MARK:** Nehemiah 8:13 – The heads of the fathers’ houses studied the words of the Law.

**LEARN:** Nehemiah realized that if the completed walls were to make live in the city safe, it would be necessary that they be manned with enough guards, and the gates remain open only in full daylight and that the city’s population be increased to raise the number of potential defenders. However, those who were to be moved into the city from the countryside were to be screened carefully lest subversive elements destroy the city from within. Nehemiah was about to take a census to determine by genealogy who were the bona fide members in the province were when they came up out of the exile under King Cyrus 90 years before.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** By studying Scripture, the Judeans learn that they had overlooked celebrating a key feast. How often we may overlook God’s teachings because we do not know the Word! Each day, the Lord’s people need to partake of God’s Word – a feast for the soul. Consume and study the Scriptures daily, for by them the Lord nurtures faith and grants life.

**PRAY:** I rejoice, O Savior, in the goodness of Your Word, my daily good news in this sad, sin-broken world. Amen.

**August 18**

**READ:** Psalm 73 and Nehemiah 10-13

**MARK:** Nehemiah 13:28-30 – Nehemiah stood faithful, chasing evil away from the Lord’s people.

**LEARN:** The book closes with Nehemiah’s oft-repeated prayer. Here the curtain falls also on his career. He and Ezra drop from sight as suddenly as they appeared on the scene of action. What they did to promote the kingdom of God is a matter of record written down for our instruction (1 Co 10:11). Their full life’s story is known only to God. He has inscribed their names in the book of life, making them citizens of the holy city Jerusalem, which John saw coming down out of heaven from God.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Nehemiah confronts ongoing issues of the Law and holiness, even losing his composure when people violated the covenant. As you serve the Lord, you will also have frustrating experiences. Pray for the Lord to grant you strength as leader, to control your anger, and to maintain proper focus on the Word. When frustration gets the better of you, count on the Lord to forgive you and strengthen you for continued service.

**PRAY:** Remember, O my God, the needs of Your people, and give us grace under pressure. Amen.

**August 19**

**READ:** Psalm 74 and Esther 1-3

**MARK:** Esther 1:22 – The king sends a decree for all men to succeed in that which he failed: marriage.

**LEARN:** In an introductory section (1:1-3:6) the author brings on stage the chief characters of his highly dramatic story. He provides background information about them which the reader needs to know in order to understand their respective roles. First to make his appearance is the Persian king, because the outcome of the issues depends on his decision. Called Ahasuerus by the Persians and Xerxes by the Greeks, his domestic affairs rather than his military exploits furnish the setting of the account. His rejection of one queen and selection of her successor precipitate that action and to a great extent determine the course of events. At a banquet for the men of high office, the king, deep in his cups, ordered Queen Vashti to display her beauty to those in attendance. She refused to comply with his wishes. The king’s friends advised him to depose Vashti and issue a decree that all women give honor to their husbands, both low and high alike.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Haman’s extreme prejudice against the Judeans threatens them with annihilation. Bigotry and intolerance continue in our modern world. The danger is that we criticize these attitudes in others but fail to see the log in our own eye. Our prejudices can put barriers in the way of people hearing the Good News of salvation. To become better witnesses, the Holy Spirit must root out the sin of Haman from our hearts. For God desires all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. (I Tim 2:4)

**PRAY:** When prejudice limits my vision, open my eyes, dear Savior, to see Your vast forgiving love for me and all people, which resulted in your sacrifice on the cross. Amen.

**August 20**

**READ:** Psalm 75 and Esther 4-6

**MARK:** Esther 5:15 – Haman’s wife is the antithesis of Esther.

**LEARN:** Drastic action was required if Haman’s wicked designs were to be foiled. Mordecai promptly set in motion a counterplot by enlisting Esther’s cooperation. Reluctant at first, she agreed to risk her life to go unbidden to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people. Her charm gained her and unusual audience with the king. However, she did not present her request to him at once. Only after he was her guest at two banquets did she find opportune moment to make her appeal. The result was that the tables were turned on the villain and the decree to kill the Jews was neutralized by another edict which permitted the Jews to defend themselves.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Mordecai is shocked by Haman’s edict and goes into pubic mourning. Esther gradually comes to realize the seriousness of the situation and pledges her life in an attempt to save her people. Like Esther, God may provide us with positions, wealth, and talents that enable us to serve the cause of God’s people and the Gospel. Yet, we all have been guilty of exhibiting weak faith by our failure to act. Thanks be to God, in the fullness of time He sent our Deliverer to redeem us from every failure. Unlike Esther, our Deliverer had to die for His people and the whole world. He freed us to serve under His rule as His witnesses.

**PRAY:** Dear Jesus, Your kingdom expands through Word and Sacrament. Grant me golden opportunities to be Your witness. Amen.

**August 21**

**READ:** Psalm 76 Esther 7-10

**MARK:** Esther 10:26-28 – The origin of the Festival of Purim.

**LEARN:** The book concludes with a brief sequel to the story. The Jews did not have to hear a repetition of Haman’s threat to their lives for some time. They were safe everywhere at least as Mordecai was the highest official of a king whose power and might stretched across the land. The record of Mordecai’s administration as written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia has not been discovered.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The festival of Purim is established by Mordecai and Esther to celebrate the destruction of Haman and other Persian enemies. God works behind the scenes to bring about victory. Later, God intervenes in a very pubic, yet mysterious way to overcome the spiritual enemies of all people: sin, death, and the devil. We were helpless, but God rescued us by sending His Son, who took our sin, our punishment, and our death upon Himself, paying the price for our redemption. We have gotten relief from our enemies. Our sorrow has been turned to joy and our mourning into feasting because the Holy Spirit has worked faith in our hearts. We celebrate our victory at the festivals of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.

**PRAY:** Loving Father, You sent Jesus to rescue me from eternal death and the Spirit to create faith in my heart. My celebration of joy and gladness has begun, and I look forward to it continuing with You in heaven forever. Amen.

**August 22**

**READ:** Psalm 77 and Job 1-3

**MARK:** Job 1:21 – The Lord gives and the Lord takes away – May the Name of the Lord be praised.

**LEARN:** Job was a member of the human race who was to demonstrate that every son of Adam without exception had to look beyond himself for a Savior from Satan and from his own demonic self. If anyone could be expected to pass the test of unalloyed love of God, it would be Job – a man blameless and upright in heart. Job was not godless reprobate. His devotion to God was not hollow pretense. When Satan challenged the sincerity of his piety, neither the loss of wealth or of his children, nor the torture of physical pain could induce him to sin with his lips or to charge God with wrong. Yet before Satan is through with Job, it will be evident that even the best of men fails to love God solely for His own sake and expecting nothing in return.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Job is unique in being as faultless as one can be. He has a wonderful – even perfect—family and life. Yet Job’s devotion to God is not based on self-righteousness. He recognizes the sinful, corrupt nature at work within his family and seeks God’s forgiveness. Even when all seems right in our families, the Lord calls us to daily repentance, because true peace and devotion flow from His mercy.

**PRAY:** Lord, give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses through the perfect offering of Your beloved Son. Amen.

**August 23**

**READ:** Psalm 78 and Job 4-6

**MARK:** Job 5:17 –Eliphaz reminds Job that the Lord often works blessing through suffering.

**LEARN:** Job’s three friends are ready to take up the question raised by him: Why must I suffer? Their answer precipitates a long discussion, resembling a debate. The issue can be phrased, “It has been resolved that Job suffers because he has sinned much.” False charges are brought against Job by his friends and in his attempt to disprove the false charges made against him, Job proves Satan correct in his claim that no man serves God purely out of love for him.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Eliphaz, the first friend who tries to comfort Job, only adds to Job’s misery. His “encouragement” discourages Job because Eliphaz never really connects with Job or his pain. He only offers platitudes. When you reach out to a friend or family member, do not give answers that simply bandage deep hurts. Listen carefully to the sufferer and learn to share the pain. God does use adversity to discipline His people as Eliphaz pointed out. In the midst of trial, we might doubt God’s love for us. But the cross shows us the measure of God’s love. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can see suffering as a tool to refine faith and strengthen our relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

**PRAY:** Father, strengthen us by Your Holy Spirit so that we do not despair or falter when pressed by trial and tribulation; for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

**August 24**

**READ:** Psalm 79 and Job 7-9

**MARK:** Job 9:32-35 – Job laments the lack of a mediator between him and God. He awaits the Messiah.

**LEARN:** Bildad, his Shuhite friend is the second try to be helpful to Job. He prescribes the same remedy recommended by his companions. Job must realize that whereas piety brings blessing without fail, suffering is always the consequence of sin. For God’s justice is inflexible in reacting to man’s behavior. Without sparing Job’s feelings, Bildad states bluntly that man gets precisely what he deserves, cites the experience of the bygone ages to substantiate this truth, warns not to be misled by the apparent successes of the godless, and promises Job laughter for his tears if he proves himself a blameless man.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Bildad argues backward: sin produces suffering; therefore, all who suffer must have sinned against God. The Bible does not teach that sin brought suffering and death (Rom 5:12), but this does not mean that an individual’s suffering is the direct consequence of some particular sin against God. In Christ Jesus, our perfectly righteous Savior, God atoned for all sin. In the midst of trials, we need constant and regular reassurance of God’s love for us, anchored in Christ.

**PRAY:** Cure my heart and bind my wounds, O Redeemer, with Your grace, which is ever new. Amen.

**August 25**

**READ:** Psalm 80 and Job 10-12

**MARK:** Job 8:9 – From dust you are and to dust you shall return.

**LEARN:** Weary and despairing of life, Job continues to raise charges against God, accusing Him of dealing unfairly with him. Now addressing his complaints directly to Him, he protests that God should oppress him ostensibly in search for sin, all the while knowing that he is not guilty. Job asserts that God takes pleasure in destroying man, created and nurtured by Him for the very purpose of reducing him again to dust. Job claims that God tracks down the wicked and the righteous alike as if He were hunting a lion. Job wants at least a slight respite before death overtakes him as it should have at his birth.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God can do with Job as He pleases, so Job sees his own position as a lose/lose situation. If he has sinned, then he has not hope before God, since God is righteous and punishes sinners. If he has not sinned, he still has not hope before God, because God is all-powerful, the Creator and Lord. We must remind ourselves and others that God provides hope for all sinners in Jesus Christ.

**PRAY:** Father, shine the light of Jesus, even when everything else is deep darkness. Amen.

**August 26**

**READ:** Psalm 81 and Job 13-15

**MARK:** Job 13:3 – Job boldly argues his case before God.

**LEARN:** A diagram of the first round of speeches (chapters 4-14) would resemble six concentric rings of a tree trunk. The three speeches by his friends and Job’s reply to them represent a series of circles not only because the discussion has revolving motion. This does not mean that these participants avoid coming to grips with the issue. In ever new formulations and from different angles, they draw lines aimed at the same central questions like so many radii from a perimeter. The three friends insist Job is concealing a great sin because God’s punishment always fits the crime. Job denies that his suffering is the measure of his sin. However, baited by his accusing friends, Job supplies Satan with evidence that even such a blameless man as he does not serve God for nothing. Hurting in body and soul, Job lets it be known that he expects godliness to pay dividends.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Job expressed the hope of forgiveness and live, but struggles with an overwhelming awareness of God’s heavy hand upon weak and sinful human beings like himself. In other words, Job has focused on the condemning power of God’s law, rather than on the forgiving and renewing power of the Gospel. We are like that when we suffer. We tend to see only the anger and condemnation, but we fail to see that even in the darkest hour, God is a God of forgiveness and love. On the cross, Christ suffered not only inscrutable pain physically, emotionally, and mentally for us, but He also suffered hellish spiritual anguish. Through Him we enjoy God’s love, now and eternally. Our sufferings can remind us of His greater sufferings on our behalf. They also remind us that this earth is not our permanent home – heaven is our home.

**PRAY:** Almighty God, forgive our many doubts, strengthen our faith, and lead us through this life to the joys of heaven. Amen.

**August 27**

**READ:** Psalm 82 and Job 16-18

**MARK:** Job 16:1 – Job answers his friends with a rebuke of their misguided efforts.

**LEARN:** Everyone whose faith has been shaken to its foundation by a crushing calamity, who has battled against cynicism, who has been irritated by hollow words of sympathy, will not be surprised at the abrupt changes in the mood displayed in Job’s fourth speech. After letting fly some stinging words of sarcasm aimed at his friends for their heartless kind of comfort and after bitterly questioning God’s right to torture him, he suddenly appeals to God to vindicate him, only to lapse again into a lament, into recriminations against his friends, into a dull stupor of resignation.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Job’s misery only increased through the aggravating words of his friends. Everyone has abandoned him. Even God treated him as His enemy. But Job confesses that God will nevertheless be his witness and intermediary at the coming judgment. Job properly keeps justification as something outside of himself; his witness/intermediary will deliver him. Regardless of the circumstances and the depth of darkness you may face, call on Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and all people. No matter how bad things may be, Christ is now interceding for you at the right hand of God. (Rom 8:34)

**PRAY:** We rejoice, O Father, that Your Son intercedes for us. Hear our plea. Amen.

**August 28**

**READ:** Psalm 83 and Job 19-21

**MARK:** Job 19:23-27 – Job states bold confidence in the resurrection of all flesh.

**LEARN:** Job opens his fifth reply to Bildad by underscoring what he said previously. His friends are not comforters but tireless tormentors. They refuse to believe that God is wronging him by assaulting and degrading him so that he has become a social outcast, shunned even by his own family. In the second part of the speech there is a change of attitude toward his friends and toward God. He no longer exchanges recriminations and insults with his visitors, but pleads with them at least to have pity on him in his misery, leaving it to future generations to pass judgment on his case. He no longer calls God to account for inflicting undeserved punishment on him, demanding restitution in this world. He confidently looks for deliverance from all evil when he sees God in the life beyond the grave.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Job’s friends ignore the observable fact that many among the wicked prosper and live seemingly easy lives. By truthfully describing life on earth, Job is reminded to look beyond this life for his hope and righteousness. We, too, must look beyond the injustice we observe and continually confess that our outward predicament does not define God’s attitude toward us. While the houses of the wicked remain after earthly storms, the spiritual houses of those in Christ endure forever against sin, the world and the devil.

**PRAY:** Dear Lord Jesus Christ, assure us that nothing will ever take us from Your hands, that even our death will be precious to you, and that we, like Your servant Job, will see you with our own eyes when our bodies are raised from the grave. Amen.

**August 29**

**READ:** Psalm 84 and Job 22-24

**MARK:** Job 23:6 – Job knows that God will hear his prayer.

**LEARN:** Eliphaz again takes the floor to open the final round of speeches. The point at issue remains the same. Job, he says again, has brought calamity on himself saying that it is God’s punishment for some unconfessed sin. However, the debate has become increasingly vehement in tone. No effort is made to spare Job’s feelings. The more or less veiled insinuations of guilt give way to a direct indictment with an attached bill of particulars. Ignoring Job’s plea of innocence, Eliphaz bluntly asserts that divine justice finally has caught up with his friend’s wickedness. There is no other way to explain his suffering. Eliphaz confronts Job with a list of the kind of iniquities of which he must be guilty to be punished as he is. For sudden terror overwhelms anyone who exploits his defenseless fellowman even though he deludes himself into thinking that God does not see it. Job’s only hope of averting doom is to return to the Almighty, penitently confessing his guilt.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Epiphaz’s speech calls Job to repentance, and as such chapter 22 is profitable for meditating on one’s own sin and the need for God’s deliverance. Putting ourselves in Job’s place for a moment, who can argue with Eliphaz when he accuses us of failing to love both neighbor and God alike? Surely Eliphaz is also correct when he declares that God will listen to our repentant prayers. Yet the sufferings Job bears are not because of his sin, as Eliphaz assumes. The Lord humbles him in order to exalt him. This is truly the way of the cross.

**PRAY:** O Lord, in all circumstances, grant us sincere repentance, delight us in Your ways, and lift our faces to behold You. Amen.

**August 30**

**READ:** Psalm 85 and Job 25-27

**MARK:** Job 27:2-6 – Job hold’s fast to his righteousness.

**LEARN:** Chapter 26 records Job’s last direct reply to his friends. What he has to say not is more in the nature of a dissertation than a challenge to continued dialog. The miserable comforters still are addressed in passing. It is also clear that the discourse is provoked by points made in the conversation, but the debate is over. It failed to solve Job’s problem. He is still bitter. Under oath he declares the friends were not right when they claimed that his suffering only could be the wages of sin. The godless indeed deserve the terrible fate which they have seen befalling him. However, when God’s judgment overtakes the wicked, as it eventually must, it does not follow that his misery likewise is evidence of guilt, deserving the same kind of judgment.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Job refuses to abandon his confidence. He knows and confesses what is with the Almighty, namely, that he will finally be vindicated, while his enemies will be swept away. Job’s faith in God grows stronger in the face of his difficulties, just as iron is strengthened on the anvil and in the forge. No matter what befalls him, Job entrusts all things to his Creator.

**PRAY:** Lord, no matter what struggle we may endure in this earthly life, we know that by God’s power we are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Amen.

**August 31**

**READ:** Habakkuk 3:2-19 and Job 28-30

**MARK:** Job 28:28 – The fear of the Lord is wisdom.

**LEARN:** In principle Job subscribed to the doctrine he just propounded that the fear of the Lord is wisdom. However, he cannot understand why a God fearing way of life did not continue to be rewarded by the benefits he once received in such abundance. He gives a final review of his mysterious experiences in these chapters. Only a short time ago fellowship with God and kindness to fellowman paid high dividends in his life. In favor with God and men, he had every reason to expect a long, peaceful existence on this earth, but now he has lost everything: honor among men, physical wellbeing, fellowship with God, and peace of mind. He cannot explain why when he looked for good, evil came. If he could argue his case in a court of justice, his plea of innocence would be upheld.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Luther writes: “Job did not deserve such punishments by his life; for he was God-fearing, guileless, and virtuous. . . . It tends to instruct and comfort us when we learn that God often causes even the innocent to experience the most serious misfortunes and punishments, merely in order to test them. When faint hearts feel the punishments, they immediately think of sin, and believe that these are punishments for sin. But one must maintain that the godly experience many evils, solely in order that they may be tested.” (Luther’s Works; American Edition 2:319)

**PRAY:** Merciful Lord, test me and prove me not on my own merits or strength. For then, I would surely fail. But test and prove me on the merits of Jesus Christ, who cannot fail to redeem me when I stumble. Amen.

**September 1**

**READ:** 1 Chronicles 29:10-13 and Job 31-33

**MARK:** Men, mark this: “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze as a virgin [young woman]?” (Job 31:1).

**LEARN:** 1 Chr. 29 presents us with a wonderful example of a freewill offering. Now, first things first: God does not need anyone’s money. “All that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours… Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all” (1 Chr. 29:11, 12). *It’s all God’s*. All of it. “Your” money is not your own; God has provided you with it so that you are equipped to love and serve God and your neighbor with it. “Your” time is not your own; you cannot make one hair on your head grey, nor can you extend your life by a single day from what God determines. God has provided you with every minute of your life so that you are equipped to love and serve God and your neighbor with them. Your purpose in life is to love and serve the Lord your God and the people whom God has put in your life. This is why you’re here.

A “tithe” literally means a “tenth.” Within the Church, we all give a tithe of all God provides us with to rightly support his Church and mission. This is what our “offering plate” is really primarily for—our regular contribution. Again, he does not *need* this from us; he can raise up children for Abraham from the very stones, and neither the gates of hell nor a lack of money will destroy his Church. However, God has designed us and his Church such that it is good, right, and proper for us to give a tithe of our income to the Church. Not only do you support the Lord’s mission, but it’s also good for you to intentionally give some things away so that you don’t make idols of them. Biblically, this is rooted in Genesis 14:19-20 and supported in places like Numbers 18:21, 26; Deuteronomy 12:5-6 and Matthew 23:23, along with the idea of returning to God the “firstfruits” of what he provides for us in e.g. 2 Chronicles 31:4-5. We can even consider “the widow’s mite” (e.g. Mark 12:41-44) in this light.

An “offering”—especially a “freewill offering”—is something different. Typically, an offering is a special gathering of riches for a particular use, e.g. when building the Tabernacle (Exodus 25) or the Temple (here in 2 Chr. 29), or today perhaps things like a diaper derby, building a clean water well in a 3rd world country, or supporting a missionary. Our benevolence offering on 5th Sundays is this sort of thing, though the offering plate can work just as well for this. At these times, God has a special project that he wants his people to accomplish, and he stirs up their hearts so that they freely and bountifully support this project. In 1 Chr. 29, the following language is used for this: “in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God” (v. 3) and “Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord” (v. 9).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** From the demon’s guide to tempting men that is C.S. Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters*: “[Unexpected visitors or a friend’s talkative wife] anger him because he regards his time as his own and feels that it is being stolen. You must therefore zealously guard in his mind the curious assumption ‘My time is my own’. Let him have the feeling that he starts each day as the lawful possessor of twenty-four hours. Let him feel as a grievous tax that portion of this property which he has to make over to his employers, and as a generous donation that further portion which he allows to religious duties. But what he must never be permitted to doubt is that the total from which these deductions have been made was, in some mysterious sense, his own personal birthright.”

**PRAY:** *When receiving a meal with thanksgiving:* The eyes of all look to you, O Lord, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these your gifts which we receive from your bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**September 2**

**READ:** Psalm 86 and Job 34-36

**MARK:** “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name” (Ps. 86:11).

**LEARN:** Elihu is the only one of Job’s friends that actually gets it right (he is not condemned in Job 42:7-9). His commentary on Job’s despair is essentially this: Job, I’ve watch all this happen to you—terrible things which God allowed. However, you have handled it wrongly. You roll around in the filth of scoffing and you listen to your stupid, faithless friends. Who are you to condemn the Lord God Almighty with injustice? You are only human. God’s ways are higher than yours. He created you and your feeble little mind; you shouldn’t expect to understand him. God has not forgotten you. He has not ceased to care for you. But Job, you don’t get to ask why God lets evil things happen.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** If God is all-powerful, good, and he cares for us, then why does he let tragedy strike us and take away our health, our possessions, and even our lives? We don’t get to ask those questions; the creature cannot demand to know the fullness of the Creator’s workings. “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (Romans 9:20). We don’t always get answers to our questions, especially when they involve the causes of evil and suffering—things which are beyond our comprehension. However, we look to the cross, where we see clearly just how God feels about us. Through his Son’s death and resurrection, he has healed all our wounds. With Saint Paul, we must conclude, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Romans 11:33).

**PRAY:** “Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant, and save the son of your maidservant. Show me a sign of your favor, that those who hate me may see and be put to shame because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.” Amen. (Ps. 86:16-17)

**September 3**

**READ:** Psalm 87 and Job 37-39

**MARK:** The Lord answers the arrogant: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action [gird up your loins] like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me” (Job. 38:2-3).

**LEARN:** Of the many things we can learn from God’s wisdom in Job 38-39, one noteworthy aspect is God’s great care for his creation. He designed things to be just so. He made everything on the earth and in the stars to work together well and for specific purposes. He delights in what he has made, from the stars (which he painted and set in order), to the ravens (for whom he provides prey), to the horses (noble creatures whom he has designed, in part, for battle).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Reflect on a few verses of Job 38-39, marveling at God’s great design.

**PRAY:** “We turn a corner and stagger at the unexpected wind that sweeps our street. We look fearfully into the shadowy corners and dark doorways and complain of the inadequate lighting of our streets. We step fretfully across puddles. We fuss and fret our way through mud—as if we were alone, as if You were gone, an absentee God careless of His own. O Lord, give us light to see You steadily and see You whole in all Your world; give us wisdom to fear and to obey and trust the God unseen whom we can see, O God made visible by Your own illumining, to trust You round all corners, down all streets, in all shadows, across all puddles, through all mud, in Your world, ruled by Your almighty and all-giving hand, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (Franzmann, *Pray for Joy*).

**September 4**

**READ:** Psalm 88 and Job 40-42

**MARK:** Job’s words of repentance: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42:2-3).

**LEARN:** Two particularly strange creatures are mentioned in Job 40-41. The first is Behemoth (same word use commonly for “animal” or “beast”). This term likely references a hippopotamus, a dinosaur, or some other terrifying beast. The point in 40:15-24 is that God reiterates just how fantastic of creatures he has made; who is Job to question him? The second creature is Leviathan, which possibly refers to a crocodile, whale, dinosaur, or even a dragon (see 40:18-21). Again, God is demonstrating his power and creativity—how insignificant is Job by comparison! Even though Job has been suffering terribly, he doesn’t get to know why. God is in control of things much bigger and smaller than Job; Job just needs to trust him.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Irony of ironies: Job’s friends argued that God does not readily show mercy and that he was angry with Job. In reality, God became angry at the friends, but he showed them mercy through Job. Job—the one robbed of family and property and left without any worldly goods is commissioned to pray for his friends and to offer sacrifices to the God whom he has found to be both terrifying and merciful.

**PRAY:** “O God of immeasurable goodness, You have given Your Son to be for us the power of God and the wisdom of God. For this we humbly thank You. Oh, give us fear to bow before Him in His foolish majesty and learn a wisdom that will stand the shocks of the world and come through the crash and howling end of the world. Amen.” (Franzmann, *Pray for Joy*).

**September 5**

**READ:** Psalm 89 and Proverbs 1-3

**MARK:** “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prv. 1:7).

**LEARN:** “The fear of God is reverence for God and spiritual worship of Him, for in this meaning Scripture everywhere uses the expression ‘the fear of God.’ For the truest worship of God does not consist in works, no matter how great and holy they may be, but in true and proper respect” (Luther). Fear thus also involves both humility and faith: recognizing one’s need to be taught (as in Proverbs) or saved (as with Christ), and trusting that God does, in fact, teach and save us through the Word who became flesh.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Knowledge is not something to be mastered, but perpetually pursued. “The fear of the Lord is *the beginning* of knowledge [or wisdom].” It is the foundation, and one will face the complexities of life better if built on this firm foundation. Likewise, other virtues serve to equip us for life: justice, discipline, honesty, chastity. These are not goals to be completed per se (likewise, knowledge), but characteristics to be honed. In Proverbs, knowledge/wisdom will equip you to take on the difficult situations of life; the point is the life lived well, not simply the knowledge that gets you there.

**PRAY:** O Lord, to be wise is to know and fear you. Teach us, we pray, the ways of the world and the ways of your kingdom, that we might follow in the path of your Son. Amen.

**September 6**

**READ:** Psalm 90 and Proverbs 4-7

**MARK:** “The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:10, 12).

**LEARN:** Much of proverbs talks about money, and with good reason. It’s something we’re all acquainted with, and our hearts so easily chase after it. We treasure it, we hoard it, and we use it as power over others. The love of money is certainly the root of all kinds of evil, so there’s good reason that Jesus talked about money quite a bit, too.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Men and men-to-be, read well Prv. 7. Temptations of the flesh are sure to come, but you must flee them. See where temptation leads: “All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life.” Flee, men. Flee.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, you have showered us with good gifts, but we only want what we cannot have. Teach us that the grass is never greener; that our passions, while puffed up, are empty; that temptation is but an illusion. Teach us true wisdom, O Lord, that we may be truly satisfied in you. Amen.

**September 7**

**READ:** Psalm 91 and Proverbs 8-10

**MARK:** “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you *in all your ways* [the part missing from Satan’s tempting Jesus in Matthew 4]” (Ps. 91:11).

**LEARN:** Compare and contrast the houses of Wisdom and of Folly in Prv. 9. Both call out, hoping to bring people in. Both houses are filled with the gifts of creation. However, Wisdom is established with order and beauty—things as they ought to be. She takes men in, though she requires that men leave behind their former ways. She gives them the gifts of life and leads them to further life. Folly has the gifts of creation, but they are without God’s proper order—stolen water and bread. She takes men as they are with no requirements placed upon them, and then they are trapped. She gives them the gifts of life, but they are poisoned, and she drags them down to death. See here the ways of the kingdom of God and the ways of the world!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Try to read Ps. 91 as Jesus would have on the day of his resurrection. This will be your experience, as well, when he raises you.

**PRAY:** Holy Spirit, you have enlightened me with your gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. Keep me on the narrow path, lest I stray into Folly’s snares. Reprove and rebuke me, that by your discipline I may learn to love true life. Amen.

**September 8**

**READ:** Psalm 92 and Proverbs 11-13

**MARK:** “Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman without discretion” (Prv. 11:22). “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him” (Prv. 13:24).

**LEARN:** “Whoever puts up security for a stranger will surely suffer harm, but he who hates striking hands in pledge is secure” (Prv. 11:15). As Dave Ramsey notes regarding this passage, co-signing on someone else’s loan is typically unwise. If a bank would not otherwise loan them the money, it’s because they’re unlikely to pay it back. The likelihood of *them* paying it back does not change when you sign; the bank just ensures that *you* will pay it back instead if they don’t.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Many people understand the OT Sabbath to be all about what you cannot do. Ps. 92, which was written for the Sabbath, portrays quite the opposite. What should we do on the Sabbath? Praise God and celebrate his great works.

**PRAY:** Lord, plant us firmly in faith and righteousness that we may grow in you and bear much fruit for your kingdom. Amen.

**September 9**

**READ:** Psalm 93 and Proverbs 14-16

**MARK:** “Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city” (Prv. 16:32).

**LEARN:** Macho, macho man! How can I be a macho man? Contrary to popular opinion, a manly exterior often conceals inner weakness and insecurity. More than mighty is the man with self-control, wisdom, and a tongue that speaks softly (gently). See Prv. 15:1; 16:32.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Hurricane Harvey has just struck Texas. Heavy wind and floods have destroyed many homes and businesses. People have died. It will take years to recover. And yet, even this torrent of destruction pales in comparison to the might of the Lord: “Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty!” (Ps. 93:4). The Lord is stronger than storms, as Jesus himself proved. Though destruction surround us, we are still in the Lord’s hands—a very good place to be, indeed!

**PRAY:** Lord God, you control the wind and the rain, and you inspire compassion. Have mercy on those whose homes have been destroyed, and lead your people to pour out compassion beyond measure that everyone might see the good works you do through us and praise you. Amen.

**September 10**

**READ:** Psalm 94 and Proverbs 17-19

**MARK:** “O Lord, God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, shine forth! … They kill the widow and sojourner, and murder the fatherless; and they say, ‘The Lord does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive’” (Ps. 94:1, 6-7).

**LEARN:** “Like the prophets, Proverbs has a persistent concern for righteousness and justice, not only in personal life, but also in the public arena of the law court (Prv. 18:5, 17). The modern relegation of religion to the private and personal would have been incomprehensible and abhorrent to ancient Israel’s prophets and sages. Public justice and righteousness are integral expressions of the ‘fear of the Lord’ (1:3b, 7; Jeremiah 22:13-17). For America, with its millions of Christians, this means that claims of biblical piety and godliness are empty unless they bear fruit in collective Christian action for equity between rich and poor, and among races and ethnic groups in our criminal justice system” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Family structure lies at the heart of society—certainly among the Hebrews and even still to a certain extent today. However, Prv. 17:2 reveals a relationship even more foundational than family: wisdom, godliness, and divine grace—in short, righteousness, i.e. being the right sort of human being—can override even the ties of family. Key examples of this are two women in the OT who were “outsiders” in a severe sense: they belonged to foreign nations and had worshipped foreign gods. However, by God’s grace, these two women were brought into, not only God’s covenant with his people, but actually into the Davidic line of heritage. Who were these women? Rahab and Ruth (Joshua 2; 6:17-25; Ruth 4:13-22). So, too, Jesus says that the brothers of faith are of more significance than the brothers of blood (Mark 3:31-34). And so he has brought us into the family of faith.

**PRAY:** Lord God, heavenly Father, how can you bear with the wicked with such patience? Then again, how can you bear with us? Teach us righteousness and humility, that we might see as you see and not think ourselves more highly than we ought. Hear us for the sake of your Son. Amen.

**September 11**

**READ:** Psalm 95 and Proverbs 20-22

**MARK:** “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prv. 22:6).

**LEARN:** In Prv. 21:30-31, the Lord warns people not to rely on power and technology. Throughout Scripture, and even seen in glimpses of daily life, the Lord demonstrates that *he* gives his people the victory. Often he demonstrates this by having a boy fight a giant bred for fighting (1 Sam. 17), having Gideon greatly reduce the number of troops he’ll take into battle (Judges 7), making the walls of Jericho fall without any military actions (Joshua 6), and the like.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** There’s a movie that I wouldn’t recommend watching entitled “Full Metal Jacket.” All I had heard about this movie before I watched it was from the first 10 minutes, which is filled with lighthearted humor. However, the movie takes a sudden and extremely dark turn, and it stays dark for the rest of the movie. This moment hit me like a ton of bricks, because I was expecting the whole thing to be a comedy. That’s what I was expecting out of Psalm 95: Oh, it’s the Venite from the service of Morning Prayer (LSB 236). I know this one. It’s a nice praise psalm. And then BAM! In comes verse 8’s stern warning, and it doesn’t get any more lighthearted, ending with the Lord swearing, “They shall not enter my rest.” The psalm presents itself in two stages: honor the Lord, for this is good; then, honor the Lord, or else.

**PRAY:** O Lord, our rock and our fortress, defend us with your mighty hand. Keep us this day from sin and from the snares of the devil, for without your salvation all is lost. Hear us for the sake of your Son, the victor. Amen.

**September 12**

**READ:** Psalm 96 and Proverbs 23-25

**MARK:** “Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns!’” (Ps. 96:10).

**LEARN:** Regarding Ps. 96:2-3, *The Lutheran Study Bible* notes, “tell … Declare. Psalmist first directs our singing to God, then has us speak to others. Evangelism is proclaiming to others this message of grace: God shows His glory through His wonderful deeds of salvation on behalf of all people.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Why does Solomon bother to teach us dining etiquette (Prv. 23:1-3)? Because this is a daily example of God’s ordering of things. Dining together connects us to the physical world that sustains us, connects people to one another, and gives expression to our various relationships. Eating in front of the TV takes away from every aspect of this.

**PRAY:** Lord, you feed us with food everlasting. Help us to know your gracious provision, that we look to you for all things. Amen.

**September 13**

**READ:** Psalm 97 and Proverbs 26-28

**MARK:** “O you who love the Lord, hate evil!” (Ps. 97:10).

**LEARN:** Regarding Ps. 97, *The Lutheran Study Bible* notes, “When people stand before God to be judged, only two responses are possible: terrified humiliation or joyful thanksgiving. Which will it be for us? The cross is where God’s justice is served and His anger appeased on our behalf. The empty tomb is the assurance that we are preserved for life everlasting. We rejoice because His judgment is that we are His saints, the upright in heart, through faith.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Proverbs 26:1 is an ancient version of the ‘Peter Principle,’ in which persons are promoted to their level of incompetence. When persons who are not gifted, trained, or ‘fit’ for a particular position of power, responsibility, and authority are nonetheless given that position, damage results (see 26:6, 8, 10). This is true of musicians [or pastors who would chant] without a sense of pitch, of basketball players without depth perception, and of preachers without faith or morals. The principle of giving honor only to those to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7) is especially crucial in the sphere of government (Prv. 29:1, 12; Ecclesiastes 4:14; 10:5-7). The allocation of honor (including wealth) is a key indicator of a society’s true values. When a society showers wealth and adulation on sports figures and entertainment celebrities without morals and underpays those who educate their children, something is desperately wrong with that society’s value system. Proverbs 26:1 implies that Christians must respect the diversity of gifts in the body of Christ and in society at large. But it also condemns us for giving glory to fools” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible*).

**PRAY:** By what right may we approach your throne, O God? How can we stand before you? Because your Son stood before Pilate. Because he was condemned before us, that we would not be condemned before you. Your mercy astounds us, O God, for you have declared us innocent in your Son. Amen.

**September 14**

**READ:** Psalm 98 and Proverbs 29-31

**MARK:** “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is in vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Prv. 31:30).

**LEARN:** Prv. 8:22 alludes to the Son of God: distinct from the Lord and yet begotten from all eternity. So does Prv. 30:4. The answer to this verse’s rhetorical questions must be the Lord. Who, then, is his son that is mentioned? Food for thought on the Trinity in the OT.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** It may seem surprising to go from talking about a woman going well about her daily activities (Prv. 31:10-29) to saying that she “fears the Lord” (31:30). Why make this jump? Well, it’s actually not a jump at all. We ought not separate daily life and secular activities from our Christian identity and worship. It is we who are in Christ—all of us, taken as whole people—who serve in our vocations for the benefit of our neighbor.

**PRAY:** Faithful Lord, you provide for us with skills and supplies that we might serve our neighbor. Grant us wisdom and virtue as we use your gifts to love the people in our lives. Amen.

**September 15**

**READ:** Psalm 99 and Ecclesiastes 1-3

**MARK:** “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?” (Ec. 1:2-3). “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ec. 1:9). “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die…” (Ec. 3:1-2).

**LEARN:** Solomon, son of David, wrote Ecclesiastes right around the end of his reign, which had begun so well and ended so poorly. He began in wisdom, following the path of his father David. But his riches—namely, his marriage alliances—ended up being too tempting for him, and he fell away from the Lord to chasing foreign gods. As he reflects on the downward spiral that is his life, he writes, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Singer/songwriter Derek Webb, reflecting on the groaning of creation and the pending return of Christ (see Romans 8), considers Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, “Yes there's a time for peace, there is a time for war. There's a time to forgive and a time to settle the score. A time for babies to lose their lives, a time for hunger and genocide. And this, too, shall be made right.”

**PRAY:** Lord, because of our sin-driven tendency to destruction, everything our hands touch eventually falls apart. Send your Son to do away with this vanity and entropy, that everyone and everything he blesses may be renewed in perfect harmony. Amen.

**September 16**

**READ:** Psalm 100 and Ecclesiastes 4-6

**MARK:** “And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive” (Ec. 4:2). “As he came from his mother’s womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand” (Ec. 5:15). “Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot” (Ec. 5:18).

**LEARN:** I, Pastor Bauer, read nearly the entirety of Ecclesiastes (except for its ending verses) as a lament of a closed universe—a world in which there is effectively no gracious God. Solomon may be wise, but he has forfeited godly wisdom for worldly wisdom. In this mindset, God may exist, but he does not really desire good for mankind; he indiscriminately gives riches or poverty, wisdom or folly. This imagined world is in desperate need of a Savior—one “greater than Solomon” (Matt. 12:42) who has now come in Jesus Christ, who demonstrates with his life and with his death just how vain this fallen world is… before the resurrection.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ec. 5:18 reflects the fatalist attitude, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (see 1 Corinthians 15:32). Surely Solomon’s eyes are closed to God’s grace as he writes this! He did write this at the end of his reign, after falling into the snares of false gods.

**PRAY:** Gracious God, if left to ourselves, we despair for lack of meaning and substance in our lives. If you had not revealed yourself to us and if you did not place your name upon us in baptism, we would be left to wander the earth, seeking but never finding. Thank you for the grace you have shown us in your Son, and give us faith to find our identity and meaning in him. Amen.

**September 17**

**READ:** Psalm 101 and Ecclesiastes 7-9

**MARK:** “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Ec. 7:20).

**LEARN:** Solomon laments the plight of the righteous: why do the wicked get just as good (or bad) of treatment as the righteous? The Psalmist also laments often: God, why do you allow the wicked to prosper while we your people suffer? The key difference here is that the Psalmist turns his lament into a prayer to God—the one who can properly address the situation. Solomon, however, laments to no one in particular; he does not see God as being someone who will or should intervene in the world to bring about divine justice and to bless the righteous. It seems to me that Solomon has forgotten the one true God.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Throughout Ecclesiastes, for the most part, nothing that anyone does has any lasting effect on the next generation—whether for good or for evil. Everything is done in vanity and is, in the end, meaningless. Yet in Ec. 9:13-16, Solomon sees value—not in righteousness as in Ps. 101(!)—but in wisdom. People may not remember the wise, but the benefits of their deeds will carry on to coming generations. For Solomon, if anything breaks the spell of vanity, it is wisdom.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, by your Word and Spirit be present in our minds and in our lives that we might never forget that you are, in fact, our God and that you have saved us, are saving us, and will save us. Amen.

**September 18**

**READ:** Psalm 102 and Ecclesiastes 10-12

**MARK:** “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ec. 12:13-14).

**LEARN:** The study notes in *TLSB* do a great job explaining the imagery used in Ec. 12:2-7: “12:2–7 The Preacher gives us powerful and vivid images of old age and approaching death to rouse us from complacency or resignation due to troubles. We are to address the matter early in life, while we are able, so that failure does not sneak up on us. 12:2 *sun … darkened*. Describing death. 12:3 *grinders cease*. Poetic language. Teeth of an older person are compared with stones for grinding grain. those who look. Figuratively, the eyes, which in older age function less effectively. 12:4 *doors on the street*. Describing the mouth and ability to speak or the ears and ability to hear. at the sound of a bird. Though the hearing of enjoyable sounds is reduced in the elderly, their sleep is still easily disturbed, such as early in the morning when the songs of birds begin. 12:5 *almond tree*. One of the first to blossom and lose its petals in the spring. *grasshopper drags*. Formerly nimble gait is replaced with overall difficulty in movement. *desire fails*. Loss of appetite and impending death make it difficult to be enthusiastic about enjoying any earthly pleasure. 12:6–7 Repeats theme of vv 1–2. *cord … bowl … pitcher … wheel*. Placement of these four images suggests they represent life in some way. Their destruction implies the end of life. We are to remember our Creator before all this happens. *silver cord … golden bowl*. Precious objects indicate how valuable life is. *pitcher … wheel*. Practical objects are needed daily. A clay pitcher was attached by a rope, which wrapped around a wheel, making it easier to draw life-giving water. 12:7 *dust*. The body (Gn 3:19; Ps 104:29). *and the spirit returns*. Or “but the spirit returns.” The immaterial aspect of a person is separated from the body by death. Solomon’s expression anticipates everlasting life with God.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Vanity has been thoroughly examined, and what is left? What is “the end of the matter”? If you are not within a right relationship with your Creator, all is vanity. However, in our relationship with God, life does, in fact, have great meaning. Through our Redeemer, we have been saved from this vanity; death is not, in fact, the end of life. Through our Sanctifier, we are enlightened, not only with truth, but with the wisdom that Solomon so highly values. True value (the opposite of vanity) must come from outside this fallen and decaying world; it must come from God himself. And in Jesus Christ it has.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, you have shown the purpose of man in your Son Jesus Christ, who is the image of God and the Son of David. Through his life you have restored humanity to its fullness and righteousness. Through his death you have joined our dead selves to him. Through his life you have inaugurated the new creation in which vanity will be but a faint memory. By your Holy Spirit, create within us true faith in your provision and in Christ’s resurrection that we not despair over what our eyes see, but with eyes of faith we look forward in hope to the way things truly are and truly will be. Amen.

**September 19**

**READ:** Psalm 103 and Song of Solomon 1-4

**MARK:** “Do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases” (SoS 2:7).

**LEARN:** “The Song is not mere erotic literature, as many critics argue. It wrestles with the tension between the beauty and sensuality of the human body and the wisdom of reserving the body for marriage and genuine love. Wisdom counsels the listener “[do] not stir up or awaken love until it pleases” (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). The individual and the family have a responsibility to reserve sex for the wedding night (8:8–10). The Song connects the passion of love to the power of the Lord, comparing love to “the very flame of the LORD” (8:6). Also, wisdom admonishes that love is too valuable to be bought (8:7). For these reasons, the Song fits naturally with OT Wisdom Literature (see pp 775–78). Rightly understood, the Song is especially appropriate for teaching about the goodness of marriage and love in distinction from promiscuity (cf this theme in Pr 7)” (*TLSB*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Song of Solomon is often read by Christians as depicting the love of Christ and his Church.

**PRAY:** (O good Creator, You made us man and woman; You blessed us in our being for each other; You planted Your creative potency in us and bound us to each other with seeking coquetry and the gallantry of proud pursuit, with living tendrils of delight, with new life, radiant, of our bodies sprung. Forgive us, Lord. We have forgotten Eden and have run from You down darkling paths of selfishness. We have defiled Your gift and held cheap Your blessing. We have made a mania of Your gift of conjugal sanity. Bless us again, we pray, through Jesus Christ, who smiled on us at Cana once. Amen.” (Martin Franzmann, *Pray for Joy*)

**September 20**

**READ:** Psalm 104 and Song of Solomon 5-8

**MARK:** “You cause… that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart” (Ps. 104:14-15).

**LEARN:** Contrary to some outspoken moralistic teetotalers, Ps. 104:15 seems to suggest that, not only does the Lord provide wine for men (fermentation is not a corruption of grapes), but he actually does so, in part, because of alcohol’s effects: “to gladden the heart of man.” Now, as with all of God’s gifts, we are to use it in moderation so it does not become an idol or a stumbling block for us (cf. Solomon’s God-given gifts of wisdom and riches leading to his downfall and Ecclesiastes’ “vanity”).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:**

**PRAY:** “O Lord, You speak well of us in Jesus! Teach us to speak well of all whom You have covered in His righteousness, especially those nearest to us. Help husbands and wives to love and honor each other, and as Christians, help us to speak well of our Bridegroom, Jesus, so that all the world would want to seek Him. Amen” (*TLSB* on SoS 5:10—6:1).

**September 21**

**READ:** Psalm 105 and Jeremiah 1-3

**MARK:** “See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer. 1:10). “He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations” (Ps. 105:8).

**LEARN:** Jeremiah prophesied before and after Judah (the Southern Kingdom) and Jerusalem fell to Babylon’s armies. Jeremiah warned God’s people of the punishment that God was bringing because of their sin. He called them to repent, threatening God’s destruction. But even so, God also commanded him to proclaim God’s grace. Not only was Jeremiah “to pluck up and to break down,” but also “to build and to plant” (1:10).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In Psalm 105, on the basis of God’s remembering and keeping his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses, the psalmist calls God’s people to trust him now to continue to keep his promises to them. It’s as if he’s saying, “You have seen God’s faithfulness, and it will endure forever.”

**PRAY:** O God, you have made a great many promises to us: wonderful promises of eternal life in your renewed creation. Fulfill your promises, O Lord, for this world of death relentlessly encroaches upon us. Here us for the sake of your risen Son. Amen.

**September 22**

**READ:** Psalm 106 and Jeremiah 4-6

**MARK:** “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, ‘Amen!’ Praise the Lord!

**LEARN:** In Ps. 106:6ff, the psalmist portrays Israel’s group guilt. As he goes on to describe the people’s sin, he’s talking about their fathers’ sin (not that of all/most of the people living at the time). How can he say that our fathers’ sin is our own? Why should we bear the guilt for what we ourselves have not actually done? In the West today, and especially in America, we have a tremendously difficult time understanding this because we see ourselves as individuals first—not first and foremost members of our family, Christians, American citizens, residents of Brookings, etc. Practically speaking, our context begins with our birth and ends with our death, and the fact that *my* parents raised *me* is not significant for who I am as a person today. But this way of thinking minimizes sin and its effects. Think of it this way: if a man struggles with alcoholism, his children are very likely to struggle with it to. Why? It’s not their sin—why should it affect them? But you see, sin is bigger than that. Alcoholism has both genetic and behavioral effects, not to mention the overwhelming degree to which it can mess people up. Our people’s sin affects us, and to some degree we share the guilt for things that we never actually did ourselves.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Psalm 106:4-5, however, speaks of shared grace. Here, salvation is not portrayed as my personal relationship with God/Jesus, but as my belonging to a group: the people of God. “Help me when you save them” is much like saying, “Let me be among your people. Let the promises you give them also come to because I belong with them.”

**PRAY:** Almighty God, as I reflect on my sin, my heart mimics your prophet’s: “My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent… Crash follows hard on crash” (Jer. 4:19-21). Rescue me from my evil self, dear Lord. Spare your servant, that I might not forfeit your promises but cling to them. Let me believe. Let me live. Amen.

**September 23**

**READ:** Psalm 107 and Jeremiah 7-9

**MARK:** “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so” (Ps. 107:2).

**LEARN:** Psalm 107 reflects a pattern that repeats throughout the book of Judges: God blesses his people, then they fall into sin, so God makes things hard for them, so they repent and cry to the Lord, and so he saves them and blesses them.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Crying “This is the temple of the Lord” (Jer. 7:4) is insufficient to save God’s people, for they say it with a double tongue. “Though they say, ‘As the Lord lives,’ yet they swear falsely” (5:2). We are in the Church of the Lord—we are part of God’s redeemed people—but this does not give us license to pursue wickedness.

**PRAY:** Lord God, as we lead ourselves into dark and treacherous paths, please forgive us seventy times seven times, as you have said—and many more! Lead us back to the path of righteous which leads to eternal life. Amen.

**September 24**

**READ:** Psalm 108 and Jeremiah 10-12

**MARK:** “A tree from the forest is cut down and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move. Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil; neither is it in them to do good” (Jer. 10:3-5).

**LEARN:** Several times, Jeremiah describes the folly of pursuing false gods made of wood and stone. When the real God makes himself known, he shows these idols to be worthless and powerless, much like he did with Dagon (1 Samuel 5). God makes these prophecies, though, not because of the other nations’ idolatry, but because of his own people’s.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord extends a plea for repentance, but those who refuse to hear the word of the Lord will soon perish (Jer. 11:21-23).

**PRAY:** Lord, so often we replace the idols of old of wood and stone with our own of paper, screens, and desire. Please continue to reveal to us that these idols are worthless creations of our own hands, not the true treasure of our heart. Renew us by your Spirit so that our trust is properly oriented: in you for all things. Amen.

**September 25**

**READ:** Psalm 109 and Jeremiah 13-15

**MARK:** “May another take his office” (Ps. 109:8; cited Acts 1:20).

**LEARN:** Jer. 14:13-14 describes false prophets—people who say, “Thus says the Lord: ‘I will bless you’” when, in fact, the Lord will actually bring about their destruction, as he is actually prophesying through the prophet Jeremiah. It can be tempting for Christians to water down the full truth of God’s Law—that Jesus is coming back soon to judge everyone to either eternal life or eternal punishment. However, we ought not to lie in order to butter people up or avoid uncomfortable situations. Look how the Lord takes revenge on the false prophets and those who believe them!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Imprecatory (cursing) psalms like Ps. 109 can be difficult for Christians to read, let alone pray. How can we pray curses upon our enemies, when Jesus says to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you? It appears that David knew his enemies to be truly wicked and to have completely rejected the Lord. To pray for your salvation from evil is to pray for judgment against evil.

**PRAY:** Deliver us, O Lord, from those who hate you. Give us ears to hear, that we may discern those who speak for you from those who spread lies. Rescue us from this evil age that we might rejoice in the life and truth of your kingdom forevermore. Amen.

**September 26**

**READ:** Psalm 110 and Jeremiah 16-18

**MARK:** “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (Ps. 110:1). “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4).

**LEARN:** Psalm 110 is quoted 17 times in the New Testament. Jesus quotes v. 1 to demonstrate that David’s Son is also David’s Lord—a mystery which perplexed the Jewish leaders so much they didn’t try to test Jesus anymore. The apostles quote v. 4 to show that, although Jesus was a Judahite, not a Levite, he could still be a priest. God instituted the priesthood of Melchizedek long before Levi was even born. Thus we come to see more clearly who Jesus is: David’s promised Son, who is also David’s Lord, who sits at the right hand of the Father, who intercedes for his people as a priest.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord repeatedly uses means which perplex and surprise his people in order to save them. It’s almost as if he wants us to rely him, not our own understanding and power, for all things (go figure).

**PRAY:** Almighty God, make known in every place the perfect offering of your Son, the eternal high priest of the new Jerusalem, and so consecrate all nations to be your holy people, that the kingdom of Christ, your anointed one, may come in its fullness; and to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all honor and praise now and forever. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**September 27**

**READ:** Psalm 111 and Jeremiah 19-22

**MARK:** “Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day on which my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!” (Jer. 20:14).

**LEARN:** In the early Church, Ps. 111 would be chanted at Sunday evening’s vespers service. Christians would reflect on the food which the Lord provided that very morning, at which time the Lord remembered his covenant (“Take, eat… Do this in my remembrance”) and redeemed his people.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** *TLSB* on Jer. 20: “Jeremiah complains bitterly about the opposition he has experienced in response to the dire warnings he preached to the people. His predictions of destruction stand unfulfilled, giving his enemies grounds to beat him, imprison him, and plot against his life. Jeremiah calls on the Lord for help and praises His name, but he cannot help expressing the anger and despair he genuinely feels. Like Jeremiah, we are often weak and fearful in times of crisis because we doubt the Lord and trust in ourselves. When we are weakest, God’s strength shines through more clearly (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:10). He is ever our refuge and strength, who hears our confession and forgives all our sins.”

**PRAY:** By Your Holy Spirit, Father, keep us strong in faith and grant us the courage to bear the name of Jesus in this evil world. Amen. -*TLSB*

**September 28**

**READ:** Psalm 112 and Jeremiah 23-25

**MARK:** “For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries” (Ps. 112:6-8).

**LEARN:** Ps. 112 praises the Lord’s gifts to those who follow him and keep his commandments. God blesses the faithful—whether in this life or the next. Ultimately, this psalm (like the rest) is about Christ, the one who deals generously, would not be moved, firmly trusted in the Lord, and looked in triumph on his adversaries after rising from the dead.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply” (Jer. 23:3). Even amidst God’s many, many prophesies of destruction which he spoke through Jeremiah, he consistently remains faithful to his covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: he will not abandon them, but will establish them in the land which he swore to them—even if it is just a remnant that comes back.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, you are the light shining in darkness for the upright. Teach us to love one another as you love us, that we might bring peace and joy to the world and find the happiness of your home, where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen. –*For All the Saints*

**September 29**

**READ:** Psalm 113 and Jeremiah 26-28

**MARK:** “Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised” (Ps. 113:2-3).

**LEARN:** *TLSB* on Jer. 26:1-15: “God sends Jeremiah to warn the people about the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple due to their sin. If they confess their sin, God will forgive them and spare them. For Jeremiah’s faithful proclamation, he is arrested and tried for treason (a capital crime). Hard hearts resist every overture of mercy from God and ignore all His warnings of impending judgment. God’s heart longs to forgive sinners, even though they resist His Word and murder His prophets. Today, know that the Lord has set His heart on you. Call on Him in repentance and faith, through Christ.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ps. 113 celebrates God’s being on high. But what is joyful about his power? By his power he sends hurricanes and floods, topples governments, and punishes evildoers. But that’s not the emphasis here. By his power God uplifts those who are lowly. He “raises the poor from the dust… to make them sit with princes.” The Lord shows his power primarily in blessing his undeserving people.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, surrendering the brightness of your glory, you became mortal so that we might be raised from the dust to share your very being. May the children of God always bless your name from the rising of the sun to its setting, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen. *–For All the Saints*

**September 30**

**READ:** 1 Chronicles 29:10-13 and Jeremiah 29-31

**MARK:** “The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. For behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the Lord, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it’” (Jer. 30:1-3)

**LEARN:** Even in their exile, God does not abandon his people. He will restore them to the Promised Land and ultimately raise up from their descendants the Son of David—a Savior for all his people.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Meditate upon Jer. 30-31 in light of the previous 29 chapters of doom and gloom. Rejoice in the sweet, sweet Gospel.

**PRAY:** O God, You have given Your people a future and a hope—hope fixed and grounded in the resurrection of Your Son, who lives and reigns, who by His Spirit has given us a vision that can look beyond the gray breakers of our successive days and through the mists that obscure Your sun, out to the quiet shore of our unending home with You. Oh, keep us in that hope, that vision. Let us not lose it amid the clutter of the things that we possess, that threaten ever again to possess us. Teach us the loose hold on Your present gifts lest we lose the greater gifts You hold in store. Teach us to hold to that hope even amid our good and pure concern for this world’s agonies lest we forget that we can do no more than bind up this world’s wounds until Your Son returns and lifts up finally the fallen world; lest we forget that this hope is the most precious thing that we can give to men; lest we forget that giving mammon is no cure for hopelessness, that hopeless men well housed and hopeless still, that men fed on our food are futureless for all our feeding them. And since we are men who go from far left to extreme right, from one ditch to the other, and cannot hold a true course down the road that leads homeward, let us not use our hope to shield us from the poor who cry to us, the poor in whose outstretched hands and upturned faces we can see the hands and face of Jesus Christ, who at the last will come to judge us all. Through Him we pray. Amen. *–Martin Franzmann*

**October 1**

**READ:** Jonah 2:2-9 and Jeremiah 32-34

**MARK:** Jeremiah 32:42 – the Lord chastens and heals.

**LEARN:** Jeremiah, being in prison for his prophecy, purchased a piece of ground. This was to signify, that though Jerusalem was besieged, and the whole country likely to be laid waste, yet the time would come, when houses, and fields, and vineyards, should be again possessed. It concerns ministers to make it appear that they believe what they preach to others. And it is good to manage even our worldly affairs in faith; to do common business with reference to the providence and promise of God.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord promises to return his exiled people to their homeland. More than that, he will renew his covenant with them and change their hearts. Because of our fallen nature, we cannot trust God or obey him by our own reason or strength, only he can create and sustain saving faith and faithful living in his people. Repent of your sins. In the new covenant established by Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit creates faith within us and leads us every day as God’s children

**PRAY:** O Holy Spirit, cleanse our hearts of sinful desires, and lead us to live for You. Amen.

**October 2**

**READ:** Psalm 114 and Jeremiah 35-37

**MARK:** Jeremiah 35:6 – the Rechabites lived and ascetic lifestyle.

**LEARN:** Jonadab was famous for wisdom and piety. He lived nearly 300 years before, (2 Kings10:15). Jonadab charged his posterity not to drink wine. He also appointed them to dwell in tents, or movable dwelling: this would teach them not to think of settling anywhere in this world. To keep low, would be the way to continue long in the land where they were strangers. Humility and contentment are always the best policy, and men's surest protection. Also, that they might not run into unlawful pleasures, they were to deny themselves even lawful delights. The consideration that we are strangers and pilgrims should oblige us to abstain from all fleshly lusts. Let them have little to lose, and then losing times would be the less dreadful: let them set loose to what they had, and then they might with less pain be stript of it. Those are in the best frame to meet sufferings who live a life of self-denial, and who despise the vanities of the world. Jonadab's posterity observed these rules strictly, only using proper means for their safety in a time of general suffering.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God uses the faithful Rechabite family to show his people what obedience looks like. People seem to be much more willing to follow the traditions of men and ignore God’s law. God patiently calls sinners to repentance, sending messengers and granting them ample time to turn back to him in faith.

**PRAY:** Father, make us ready servants, faithful to Your word and will, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

**October 3**

**READ:** Psalm 115 and Jeremiah 38-40

**MARK:** Jeremiah 39:11-12 – Jeremiah was well cared for by Nebuchadnezzar.

**LEARN:** Jeremiah went on in his plain preaching. The princes went on in their malice. It is common for wicked people to look upon God's faithful ministers as enemies, because they show what enemies the wicked are to themselves while impenitent. Jeremiah was put into a dungeon. Many of God's faithful witnesses have been privately made away in prisons. Ebed-melech was an Ethiopian; yet he spoke to the king faithfully. These men have done ill in all they have done to Jeremiah. See how God can raise up friends for his people in distress. Orders were given for the prophet's release, and Ebed-melech saw him drawn up. Let this encourage us to appear boldly for God. Special notice is taken of his tenderness for Jeremiah. What do we behold in the different characters then, but the same we behold in the different characters now, that the Lord's children are conformed to his example, and the children of Satan to their master?

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Like Jeremiah, God’s people today should never give up hope but rather trust the Lord, especially when things are at their worst. Also, God works through us to help one another in time of need, as Jesus helps us in our greatest need by rescuing us from sin and damnation.

**PRAY:** When all seems lost, O Lord, lift up our heads. Keep our hearts faithful and our eyes on you. Amen.

**October 4**

**READ:** Psalm 116 and Jeremiah 41-43

**MARK:** Jeremiah 42:18-22 – they are warned not to go to Egypt.

**LEARN:** Only by pride comes contention, both with God and man. They preferred their own wisdom to the revealed will of God. Men deny the Scriptures to be the word of God, because they are resolved not to conform themselves to Scripture rules. When men will persist in sin, they charge the best actions to bad motives. These Jews deserted their own land, and threw themselves out of God's protection. It is the folly of men, that they often ruin themselves by wrong endeavors to mend their situation.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Jeremiah promises God’s blessings to Johanan and his band of refugees if they will stay in Judah, but warns of certain death if they go to Egypt. God does not want his people to place their confidence in Pharaoh or his army. Today, when you face questions in life, seek the Lord’s will through the wisdom of his word and by commending your life to him through prayer. He will watch over you faithfully and be with you always.

**PRAY:** Help us, heavenly Father, to trust in you above all earthy reason, might, and power, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**October 5**

**READ:** Psalm 117 and Jeremiah 44-47

**MARK:** Jeremiah 46:27 – The Lord’s judgment falls and Jacob shall return from captivity.

**LEARN:** The whole word of God is against those who obey not the gospel of Christ; but it is for those, even of the Gentiles, who turn to Him. The prophecy begins with Egypt. Let them strengthen themselves with all the art and interest they have, yet it shall be all in vain. The wounds God inflicts on his enemies, cannot be healed by medicines. Power and prosperity soon pass from one to another in this changing world.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God declares that he will use Egypt’s defeat by Babylon as a pattern for further military losses. Egypt, however, will not survive. Added to this prophecy of destruction is a note of comfort for the Judean exiles in Babylon: God will discipline, but not completely destroy them. God created the world and rules it, administering his righteous justice according to his will. At all times, and through all things, God works for the salvation of his people. Even in the midst of his discipline, God preserves a faithful remnant, out of which came Jesus Christ – his long promised Messiah.

**PRAY:** Help us, O Lord, to keep faith when chaos and warfare erupt. Amen.

**October 6**

**READ:** Psalm 118 and Jeremiah 48-50

**MARK:** Jeremiah 50:4-5 – The people of Israel seek the Lord in tears of repentance.

**LEARN:** The king of Babylon was kind to Jeremiah, yet the prophet must foretell the ruin of that kingdom. If our friends are God's enemies, we dare not speak peace to them. The destruction of Babylon is spoken of as done thoroughly. Here is a word for the comfort of the Jews. They shall return to their God first, then to their own land; the promise of their conversion and reformation makes way for the other promises. Their tears flow not from the sorrow of the world, as when they went into captivity, but from godly sorrow. They shall seek after the Lord as their God, and have no more to do with idols. They shall think of returning to their own country.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God holds Babylon responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of its citizens. During the process of Babylon’s destruction, the Israelites will come together to seek the Lord to make and everlasting covenant. God’s heart aches when the people he loves turn away from him. Like the father of the prodigal, he yearns to forgive those who return with repentant hearts.

**PRAY:** Father, lead us by Your Holy Spirit to repentance, and forgive us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**October 7**

**READ:** Psalm 119:1-8 and Jeremiah 51-52

**MARK:** Jeremiah 52:12-23 – The temple and walls of Jerusalem were burned and destroyed.

**LEARN:** This prophecy is sent to Babylon, to the captives there, by Seraiah, who is to read it to his countrymen in captivity. Let them with faith see the end of these threatening powers, and comfort themselves herewith. When we see what this world is, how glittering its shows, and how flattering its proposals, let us read in the book of the Lord that it shall shortly be desolate. The book must be thrown into the river Euphrates. The fall of the New Testament Babylon is thus represented, Revelation 18:21. Those that sink under the weight of God's wrath and curse, sink forever. Babylon, and every antichrist, will soon sink and rise no more forever. Let us hope in God's word, and quietly wait for his salvation; then we shall see, but shall not share, the destruction of the wicked.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Jeremiah continues speaking God’s oracle against Babylon, condemning her for the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. The Lord called his people out of Babylon, lest they share in the city’s fate. Through Babylon’s destruction, God teaches other nations of his dominion over them so they may come to faith. At the same time, he spares those he has called by his name.

PRAY: Lord, lead us to live with compassion toward others, for you loving look upon the whole human race through the redeeming blood of Christ. Amen.

**October 8**

**READ:** Psalm 119:9-16 and Lamentations 1-2

**MARK:** Lamentations 2:17 – The Lord has followed through on his word of judgement.

**LEARN:** The prophet sometimes speaks in his own person; at other times Jerusalem, as a distressed female, is the speaker, or some of the Jews. The description shows the miseries of the Jewish nation. Jerusalem became a captive and a slave, by reason of the greatness of her sins; and had no rest from suffering. If we allow sin, our greatest adversary, to have dominion over us, justly will other enemies also be suffered to have dominion. The people endured the extremities of famine and distress. In this sad condition Jerusalem acknowledged her sin, and entreated the Lord to look upon her case. This is the only way to make ourselves easy under our burdens; for it is the just anger of the Lord for man's transgressions, that has filled the earth with sorrows, lamentations, sickness, and death.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Jeremiah describes the terrible conditions in Jerusalem after it fell to the Babylonians and its leading citizens were taken captive. Contrasted with the wealth and beauty of its former days, the ruins lie as a testimony to God’s just response against persistent sin and rebellion. The foundation of sin and rebellion is unbelief, a refusal to trust God and follow him. Even in the face of his people’s faithlessness, God proves himself faithful to his promise of a savior by preserving a remnant that will return to Jerusalem.

**PRAY:** Teach us to live wisely, O Lord, according to Your will and in the joy of our salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen.

**October 9**

**READ:** Psalm 119:17-24 and Lamentations 3-5

**MARK:** Lamentations 4:13 – this was because of the sins of the priests and prophets.

**LEARN:** Nothing ripens a people more for ruin, nor fills the measure faster, than the sins of priests and prophets. The king himself cannot escape, for Divine vengeance pursues him. Our anointed King alone is the life of our souls; we may safely live under his shadow, and rejoice in Him in the midst of our enemies, for He is the true God and eternal life.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Jeremiah points out that the sins of all the people lie at the very root of their current suffering. Because of their unfaithfulness, they struggle just to get enough to eat; they find themselves subjected to abuse and humiliation. Lamenting in anguish, God’s people appeal to the Lord for forgiveness and restoration. In our own lives, we easily forget God and our calling as his people at times when it seems that everything is going our way. God stands ready to forgive penitent sinners by restoring his blessing to us through the blood of Jesus Christ.

**PRAY:** Father, keep us faithful in good times and secure in our faith during bad times, for we are yours at all times. Amen.

**October 10**

**READ:** Psalm 119:25-32 and Ezekiel 1-3

**MARK:** Ezekiel 1:26-28 – here the eternal Son is denoted.

**LEARN:** Those who will do anything to purpose in the service of God, must not fear men. Wicked men are as briers and thorns; but they are nigh unto cursing, and their end is to be burned. The prophet must be faithful to the souls of those to whom he was sent. All who speak from God to others, must obey his voice. The discoveries of sin, and the warnings of wrath, should be matter of lamentation. And those acquainted with the word of God, will clearly perceive it is filled with woe to impenitent sinners; and that all the precious promises of the gospel are for the repenting, believing servants of the Lord.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ezekiel describes the movement of the living creatures and the revelation of God’s glory and voice. Today, God does not send us visions with new revelations, but works through the word to convince us that we are “poor, miserable sinners.” Yet God does not show his glory in Christ to terrify us. Through repentance and absolution, he desires to raise us with Christ in newness of life.

**PRAY:** Lord, lead us to daily repentance and a life of thanksgiving for the revelation of your glory in your Son, who will through his Holy Spirit lead us into the blessings of eternal life. Amen.

**October 11**

**READ:** Psalm 119:33-40 and Ezekiel 4-6

**MARK:** Ezekiel 4:4-5 – Ezekiel lays on his side 390 days.

**LEARN:** The prophet was to represent the siege of Jerusalem by signs. He was to lie on his left side for a number of days, supposed to be equal to the years from the establishment of idolatry. All that the prophet sets before the children of his people, about the destruction of Jerusalem, is to show that sin is the provoking cause of the ruin of that once flourishing city.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ezekiel’s action prophecies illustrate the dreadful judgment that God would visit upon the Israelites for their infidelity. God’s ultimate purpose was to save as many as possible, who would repent before the judgment. God’s wrath was a reality. Calvary’s cross represents the maximum of God’s wrath as well as the maximum of his love and great desire to deliver us.

**PRAY:** Lord, lead us in true repentance and steadfastness of faith out of our Babylonian captivity, through Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Amen.

**October 12**

**READ:** Psalm 119:41-48 and Ezekiel 7-9

**MARK:** Ezekiel 9:6 – the justice goes out from the sanctuary.

**LEARN:** It is a great comfort to believers, that in the midst of destroyers and destructions, there is a Mediator, a great High Priest, who has an interest in heaven, and in whom saints on earth have an interest. The representation of the Divine glory from above the ark, removed to the threshold, denoted that the Lord was about to leave his mercy-seat, and to pronounce judgment on the people. The distinguishing character of this remnant that is to be saved, is such as sigh and cry to God in prayer, because of the abominations in Jerusalem. Those who keep pure in times of general wickedness, God will keep safe in times of general trouble and distress.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The vision vividly describes God’s final judgment on his disobedient people. But a remnant, bearing a mark of salvation on their foreheads, will escape. The road to perdition is broad, but God does not fail to place his mark of salvation on all who repent, “who sigh and groan over the abominations that are committed” in the holy city (Ez 9:4).

**PRAY:** Lord, by your grace, keep our eyes fixed on the cross of salvation and with your Holy Spirit help us ward off the temptations to follow the heedless masses who ignore and reject your name. Amen.

**October 13**

**READ:** Psalm 119:49-56 and Ezekiel 10-12

**MARK:** Ezekiel 12:28 – prophecies will be performed.

**LEARN:** From that forbearance of God, which should have led them to repent, the Jews hardened themselves in sin. It will not serve for an excuse in speaking evil, to plead that it is a common saying. There is but a step between us and an awful eternity; therefore it concerns us to get ready for a future state. No one will be able to put from himself the evil day, unless by seeking peace with the Lord.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Two action prophecies forecast the forthcoming deportation after Jerusalem’s fall and its attendant horrors, followed by refutations of two complaints the people are using to discount God’s warnings. Yet, God’s overarching purpose in judgment is to bring forth repentance and create trust in his salvation, offered freely in Christ’s death and resurrection.

**PRAY:** Lord, keep us ever mindful of our sinfulness. United by Baptism with Christ’s death and resurrection and through word and sacrament, keep us firm in faith until the day of our Lord. Amen.

**October 14**

**READ:** Psalm 119:57-64 and Ezekiel 13-15

**MARK:** Ezekiel 13:1-7 – heavy judgements against lying prophets.

**LEARN:** Where God gives a warrant to do anything, he gives wisdom. What they delivered was not what they had seen or heard, as that is which the ministers of Christ deliver. They were not praying prophets, had no intercourse with Heaven; they contrived how to please people, not how to do them good; they stood not against sin. They flattered people into vain hopes. Such widen the breach, by causing men to think themselves deserving of eternal life, when the wrath of God abides upon them.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** All religions do not lead to the same place. There is only one true Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ; anyone who preaches or practices otherwise is condemned. By repeating phrases such as “My people,” the Lord expresses his offer of salvation to all who believe.

**PRAY:** Lord, keep us steadfast in your word; curb those who by deceit or sword would wrest the kingdom from your Son and bring to naught all he has done.” Amen (LSB 655:1)

**October 15**

**READ:** Psalm 119:65-72 and Ezekiel 16-18

**MARK:** Ezekiel 16:59 – the Lord will establish an everlasting covenant.

**LEARN:** After a full warning of judgments, mercy is remembered, mercy is reserved. These closing verses are a precious promise, in part fulfilled at the return of the penitent and reformed Jews out of Babylon, but to have fuller accomplishment in gospel times. The Lord’s mercy should be powerful to melt our hearts into godly sorrow for sin. Nor will God ever leave the sinner to perish, who is humbled for his sins, and comes to trust in His mercy and grace through Jesus Christ; but will keep him by his power, through faith unto salvation.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In a long allegorical satire, Ezekiel equates idolatry with adultery. The underlying theme is one of base ingratitude. Forgetting God’s unmerited grace, Jerusalem chases after the favors of idolatrous nations. God has no alternative but to punish her severely. If the Lord can restore someone who has fallen as far as Jerusalem, he can restore anyone. His grace is broad enough to cover even your greatest sin.

**PRAY:** Lord, keep ever mindful of all the underserved mercies you have showered upon us from birth, especially the forgiveness of sin and eternal life, lest, like Jerusalem, we fall into great shame and vice. Amen.

**October 16**

**READ:** Psalm 119:73-80 and Ezekiel 19-21

**MARK:** Ezekiel 20:33-34 – the Lord will restore with power and might.

**LEARN:** By the Spirit of prophecy Ezekiel foresaw Nebuchadnezzar's march from Babylon, which he would determine by divination. The Lord would overturn the government of Judah, till the coming of Him whose right it is. This seems to foretell the overturnings of the Jewish nation to the present day, and the troubles of states and kingdoms, which shall make way for establishing the Messiah's kingdom throughout the earth. The Lord secretly leads all to adopt his wise designs. And in the midst of the most tremendous warnings of wrath, we still hear of mercy, and some mention of Him through whom mercy is shown to sinful men.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God’s hand draws his sword of judgment: Nebuchadnezzar. The righteous and unrighteous will both perish as Babylon strikes Jerusalem. In a section of Scripture filled with foreboding, destruction, and doom, there seems scant room for God’s peace, salvation, and forgiveness. Yet, as quickly as God drew his sword, he returns it to its scabbard. God claps his hand and his fury abates. Today, he is equally ready to put away his wrath and forgive your sins.

**PRAY:** Father, daily we witness your infinite mercy. Though our sins are numerous, your word and sacraments call us to forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Amen.

**October 17**

**READ:** Psalm 119:81-88 and Ezekiel 22-24

**MARK:** Ezekiel 24:15 – Ezekiel’s wife dies.

**LEARN:** Though mourning for the dead is a duty, yet it must be kept under by religion and right reason: we must not sorrow as men that have no hope. Believers must not copy the language and expressions of those who know not God. The people asked the meaning of the sign. God takes from them all that was dearest to them. And as Ezekiel wept not for his affliction, so neither should they weep for theirs. Blessed be God, we need not pine away under our afflictions; for should all comforts fail, and all sorrows be united, yet the broken heart and the mourner's prayer are always acceptable before God.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ezekiel must hold in sorrow over the death of his wife as a sign to the exiles that they have no right to mourn over the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. False tears offend God. He calls for true sorrow and contrition as genuine results of repentance. Our sins profaned his most glorious temple – the body and life of his Son. Yet the Father quietly gave him over to death that we might have life. Thankfully, Jesus cleanses our pain-filled hearts and will wipe away all our tears.

**PRAY:** O Jesus, when our sin profaned the temple of your body, you prepared for us a place in your eternal glory. Return and deliver us. Amen.

**October 18**

**READ:** Psalm 119:89-96 and Ezekiel 25-27

**MARK:** Ezekiel 25:17 – vengeance is laid upon the nations.

**LEARN:** The most mighty and magnificent kingdoms and states, sooner or later, come down. Those who make creatures their confidence, and rest their hopes upon them, will fall with them: happy are those who have the God of Jacob for their Help, and whose hope is in the Lord their God, who lives for ever. Those who engage in trade should learn to conduct their business according to God's word. Those who possess wealth should remember they are the Lord's stewards, and should use his goods in doing good to all. Let us seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God requests that nations sing a funeral lament over the destruction of Tyre. His are is stretching out to oppose his enemies and to reach his people, to save them from themselves. Today, take his hand and ask him to lead you on life’s way. His arm of salvation, stretched out at Calvary, reaches across time to save you.

**PRAY:** Father, the nations bow before you, Keep us steadfast in your ways, for you alone provide eternal salvation. Through our service, further your kingdom. Amen.

**October 19**

**READ:** Psalm 119:97-104 and Ezekiel 28-30

**MARK:** Ezekiel 28:25 – the Lord’s holiness will be manifested again.

**LEARN:** The Sidonians land bordered upon the land of Israel, and they might have learned to glorify the Lord, but, instead of that, they seduced Israel to the worship of their idols. War and pestilence are God's messengers; but he will be glorified in the restoring his people to their former safety and prosperity. God will cure them of their sins, and ease them of their troubles. This promise will at length fully come to pass in the heavenly Canaan: when all the saints shall be gathered together, everything that offends shall be removed, all griefs and fears for ever banished. Happy, then, is the church of God, and every living member of it, though poor, afflicted, and despised; for the Lord will display his truth, power, and mercy, in the salvation and happiness of his redeemed people.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God plans to lead Israel back into the land promised to their ancestors. In this instance, God directs Israel back to his covenant with their namesake Jacob – Israel. God’s mercy provides a recurring theme throughout the Bible. His promises point to the cross, where he willingly sacrificed his Son – the ultimate judgment against sin and the fullness of our redemption.

**PRAY:** Lord, You are faithful; through Holy Baptism, you have called us out of sin to eternal life. Strengthen us through Holy Communion and protect us with Your Spirit. Amen.

**October 20**

**READ:** Psalm 119:105-112 and Ezekiel 31-33

**MARK:** Ezekiel 33:7-9 – Ezekiel is made a watchman over the house of Israel.

**LEARN:** The prophet is a watchman to the house of Israel. His business is to warn sinners of their misery and danger. He must warn the wicked to turn from their way, that they may live. If souls perish through his neglect of duty, he brings guilt upon himself. See what those have to answer for, who make excuses for sin, flatter sinners, and encourage them to believe they shall have peace, though they go on. How much wiser are men in their temporal than in their spiritual concerns! They set watchmen to guard their houses, and sentinels to warn of the enemies' approach, but where the everlasting happiness or misery of the soul is at stake, they are offended if ministers obey their Master's command, and give a faithful warning; they would rather perish, listening to smooth things.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God changes Ezekiel’s focus. No longer does Ezekiel speak against the nations. Instead, God calls Ezekiel to serve once again as Israel’s watchman. Today, God calls us not only to repent of our sins and receive the forgiveness he offers through Christ but also to warn others and to announce the Lord’s forgiveness for all who repent. Thankfully, the Lord is watching over us and will sustain us in this vital service.

**PRAY:** Lord, You continually provide leadership and guidance through servants of your word. Grant us swiftness to answer your call of repentance and service. Amen.

**October 21**

**READ:** Psalm 119:113-120 and Ezekiel 34-36

**MARK:** Ezekiel 34:1-6 – the shepherds of Israel just feed themselves.

**LEARN:** The Lord declared that he intended mercy towards the scattered flock. Doubtless this, in the first place, had reference to the restoration of the Jews. It also represented the good Shepherd's tender care of the souls of his people. He finds them in their days of darkness and ignorance, and brings them to his fold. He comes to their relief in times of persecution and temptation. He leads them in the ways of righteousness, and causes them to rest on his love and faithfulness. The proud and self-sufficient, are enemies of the true gospel and of believers; against such we must guard. He has rest for disquieted saints, and terror for presumptuous sinners.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** It would do little good for God to replace Israel’s bad shepherds with other earthly rulers. Human society cannot lift itself out of the quicksand of pervasive corruption. God himself must come to the rescue, which he has done in the person of his Son and in the power of his Holy Spirit. Serve with confidence, knowing that your Good Shepherd is ever vigilant to deliver you from evil.

**PRAY:** Bind my wounds, Good Shepherd, and restore me to Your sheepfold, that I may be strengthened by your caring hand. Amen.

**October 22**

**READ:** Psalm 119:121-128 and Ezekiel 37-39

**MARK:** Ezekiel 37:26-28 –the Lord will set his sanctuary in their midst again.

**LEARN:** No created power could restore human bones to life. God alone could cause them to live. Skin and flesh covered them, and the wind was then told to blow upon these bodies; and they were restored to life. The wind was an emblem of the Spirit of God, and represented his quickening powers. The vision was to encourage the desponding Jews; to predict both their restoration after the captivity, and also their recovery from their present and long-continued dispersion. It was also a clear intimation of the resurrection of the dead; and it represents the power and grace of God, in the conversion of the most hopeless sinners to himself. Let us look to Him who will at last open our graves, and bring us forth to judgment, that He may now deliver us from sin, and put his Spirit within us, and keep us by his power, through faith, unto salvation.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ezekiel prophesies that God will unite Israel again. No longer will two kingdoms exist, but one under “my servant David,” (Ez 37:24). God fulfills this messianic prophecy for us in Jesus Christ at Calvary when the Church (God’s new Israel) “was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing (Rm 6:6). In Christ, God is our God and we are his people.

**PRAY:** Almighty Father, through Christ, you hallowed us from all uncleanness. We rejoice in our salvation as your pure gift. Amen.

**October 23**

**READ:** Psalm 119:129-136 and Ezekiel 40-42

**MARK:** Ezekiel 40:4 – Ezekiel sees the vision of the new temple.

**LEARN:** Here is a vision, beginning at chapter 40, and continued to the end of the book, chapter 48, which is justly looked upon to be one of the most difficult portions in all the book of God. When we despair to be satisfied as to any difficulty we meet with, let us bless God that our salvation does not depend upon it, but that things necessary are plain enough; and let us wait till God shall reveal even this unto us. This chapter describes two outward courts of the temple. Whether the personage here mentioned was the Son of God, or a created angel, is not clear. But Christ is both our Altar and our Sacrifice, to whom we must look with faith in all approaches to God; and he is Salvation in the midst of the earth, Psalm 74:12, to be looked unto from all quarters.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Symbolism form the basis for the rest of Ezekiel. Already God has promised to deliver his people from captivity. He now describes an even greater deliverance through his promised Messiah. We also rejoice in God’s deliverance! God makes us the beneficiaries of his abundant grace. Through Holy Baptism we belong to God’s heavenly kingdom. By his precious word and sacraments, God holds us close to him for all eternity.

**PRAY:** Lord, at times, we become disheartened. Grant us eyes of faith to see the blessings and the future you prepare for us in Christ. Amen.

**October 24**

**READ:** Psalm 119:137-144 and Ezekiel 43-45

**MARK:** Ezekiel 44:28 – The Lord is the possession of the priests.

**LEARN:** After Ezekiel had surveyed the temple of God, he had a vision of the glory of God. When Christ crucified, and the things freely given to us of God, through Him, are shown to us by the Holy
Spirit, they make us ashamed for our sins. This frame of mind prepares us for fuller discoveries of the mysteries of redeeming love; and the whole of the Scriptures should be opened and applied, that men may see their sins, and repent of them. We are not now to offer any atoning sacrifices, for by one offering Christ has perfected forever those that are sanctified, Hebrews 10:14; but the sprinkling of his blood is needful in all our approaches to God the Father. Our best services can be accepted only as sprinkled with the blood which cleanses from all sin.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** God reiterates Levitical standards for his priests with some new regulations. In the N.T. the Father has made Jesus our High Priest. “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them,” (Hb 7:25). Christ has fulfilled the older order of sacrifice and permanently replaced it with a new order sealed in his blood.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, your victory at Calvary provides eternal salvation for me and all who trust in you. I give you praise. Amen.

**October 25**

**READ:** Psalm 119:145-152 and Ezekiel 46-48

**MARK:** Ezekiel 47:12 – the water signifies the Gospel of Christ.

**LEARN:** These waters in chapter 47 signify the gospel of Christ, which went forth from Jerusalem, and spread into the countries about; also the gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost which accompanied it, by virtue of which is spread far, and produced blessed effects. Christ is the Temple; and he is the Door; from him the living waters flow, out of his pierced side. They are increasing waters. Observe the progress of the gospel in the world, and the process of the work of grace in the heart; attend the motions of the blessed Spirit under Divine guidance. If we search into the things of God, we find some things plain and easy to be understood, as the waters that were but to the ankles; others more difficult, which require a deeper search, as the waters to the knees, or the loins; and some quite beyond our reach, which we cannot penetrate; but must, as St. Paul did, adore the depth, Romans 11. It is wisdom to begin with that which is most easy, before we proceed to that which is dark and hard to be understood. The promises of the sacred word, and the privileges of believers, as shed abroad in their souls by the quickening Spirit, abound where the gospel is preached; they nourish and delight the souls of men; they never fade nor wither, nor are exhausted. Even the leaves serve as medicines to the soul: the warnings and reproofs of the word, though less pleasant than Divine consolations, tend to heal the diseases of the soul. All who believe in Christ, and are united to him by his sanctifying Spirit, will share the privileges of Israelites. There is room in the church, and in heaven, for all who seek the blessings of that new covenant of which Christ is Mediator.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Ezekiel’s guide takes him to the inner court, where a stream of water begins flowing, transforming the Salt Sea. God’s grace transforms what was dead to bring forth new life. How great is his power! How gentle his kindness toward you.

**PRAY:** Precious Lord Jesus, transform me. I find myself dead in sin, but your grace can make me alive again.

**October 26**

**READ:** Psalm 119:153-160 and Daniel 1-3

**MARK:** Daniel 2:27-28 –there is a God who reveals mysteries.

**LEARN:** Daniel humbly prayed that God would discover to him the king's dream, and the meaning of it. Praying friends are valuable friends; and it well becomes the greatest and best men to desire the prayers of others. Let us show that we value our friends, and their prayers. They were particular in prayer. And whatever we pray for, we can expect nothing but as the gift of God's mercies. God gives us leave in prayer to tell our wants and burdens. Their plea with God was, the peril they were in. The mercy Daniel and his fellows prayed for, was bestowed. The fervent prayers of righteous men avail much. Daniel was thankful to God for making known that to him, which saved the lives of himself and his fellows. How much more should we be thankful to God, for making known the great salvation of the soul to those who are not among the worldly wise and prudent!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Daniel takes away the king's opinion of his magicians and soothsayers. The insufficiency of creatures should drive us to the all-sufficiency of the Creator. There is One who can do that for us, and make known that to us, which none on earth can, particularly the work of redemption, and the secret designs of God's love to us therein. Daniel confirmed the king in his opinion, that the dream was of great consequence, relating to the affairs and changes of this lower world. Let those whom God has highly favored and honored, lay aside all opinion of their own wisdom and worthiness, that the Lord alone may be praised for the good they have and do.

**PRAY:** Dear Jesus, may I never think of you as being distant or absent but always present for me in your word and sacrament. Amen.

**October 27**

**READ:** Psalm 119:161-168 and Daniel 4-6

**MARK:** Daniel 6:26-27 – King Darius makes a degree for all to fear the Lord God.

**LEARN:** Daniel reads Belshazzar's doom. He had not taken warning by the judgments upon Nebuchadnezzar. And he had insulted God. Sinners are pleased with gods that neither see, nor hear, nor know; but they will be judged by One to whom all things are open. Daniel reads the sentence written on the wall. All this may well be applied to the doom of every sinner. At death, the sinner's days are numbered and finished; after death is the judgment, when he will be weighed in the balance, and found wanting; and after judgment the sinner will be cut asunder, and given as a prey to the devil and his angels. While these things were passing in the palace, it is considered that the army of Cyrus entered the city; and when Belshazzar was slain, a general submission followed. Soon will every impenitent sinner find the writing of God's word brought to pass upon him, whether he is weighed in the balance of the law as a self-righteous Pharisee, or in that of the gospel as a painted hypocrite.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The best way to have a good night, is to keep a good conscience. We are sure of what the king doubted, that the servants of the living God have a Master well able to protect them. See the power of God over the fiercest creatures, and believe his power to restrain the roaring lion that goes about continually seeking to devour. Daniel was kept perfectly safe, because he believed in his God. Those who boldly and cheerfully trust in God to protect them in the way of duty, shall always find him a present help. Thus the righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead. The short triumph of the wicked will end in their ruin.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, keep me ever watchful for your coming and prepared for your rule. Amen.

**October 28**

**READ:** Psalm 119:169-176 and Daniel 7-9

**MARK:** Daniel 9:16-19 – Daniel prays for the people.

**LEARN:** The eternal Son of God stood before the prophet in the appearance of a man, and directed the angel Gabriel to explain the vision. Daniel's fainting and astonishment at the prospect of evils he saw coming on his people and the church, confirm the opinion that long-continued calamities were foretold. The vision being ended, a charge was given to Daniel to keep it private for the present. He kept it to himself, and went on to do the duty of his place. As long as we live in this world we must have something to do in it; and even those whom God has most honored, must not think themselves above their business. Nor must the pleasure of communion with God take us from the duties of our callings, but we must in them abide with God. All who are entrusted with public business must discharge their trust uprightly; and, amidst all doubts and discouragements, they may, if true believers, look forward to a happy issue. Thus should we endeavor to compose our minds for attending to the duties to which each is appointed, in the church and in the world.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Daniel learned from the books of the prophets, especially from Jeremiah, that the desolation of Jerusalem would continue seventy years, which were drawing to a close. God's promises are to encourage our prayers, not to make them needless; and when we see the performance of them approaching, we should more earnestly plead them with God.

**PRAY:** O Christ, Lamb of God, have mercy on me, a sinner, and grant me peace. Amen.

**October 29**

**READ:** Psalm 120 and Daniel 10-12

**MARK:** Daniel 12:1-3 – the end times.

**LEARN:** The angel shows Daniel the succession of the Persian and Grecian empires. The kings of Egypt and Syria are noticed: Judea was between their dominions, and affected by their contests. From vs. 5-30, is generally considered to relate to the events which came to pass during the continuance of these governments; and from Daniel 11:21, to relate to Antiochus Epiphanes, who was a cruel and violent persecutor of the Jews. See what decaying, perishing things worldly pomp and possessions are, and the power by which they are gotten. God, in his providence, sets up one, and pulls down another, as he pleases. This world is full of wars and fighting, which come from men's lusts. All changes and revolutions of states and kingdoms, and every event, are plainly and perfectly foreseen by God. No word of God shall fall to the ground; but what he has designed, what he has declared, shall infallibly come to pass. While the potsherds of the earth strive with each other, they prevail and are prevailed against, deceive and are deceived; but those who know God will trust in him, and he will enable them to stand their ground, bear their cross, and maintain their conflict.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The remainder of this prophecy is very difficult, and commentators differ much respecting it. From Antiochus the account seems to pass to antichrist. Reference seems to be made to the Roman empire, the fourth monarchy, in its pagan, early Christian, and papal states. The end of the Lord's anger against his people approaches, as well as the end of his patience towards his enemies. If we would escape the ruin of the infidel, the idolater, the superstitious and cruel persecutor, as well as that of the profane, let us make the oracles of God our standard of truth and of duty, the foundation of our hope, and the light of our paths through this dark world, to the glorious inheritance above.

**PRAY:** Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Grant me steadfast faith amid all troubles. Amen.

**October 30**

**READ:** Psalm 121 and Hosea 1-4

**MARK:** Hosea 1:3 – Hosea marries Gomer.

**LEARN:** Israel was prosperous, yet then Hosea boldly tells them of their sins, and foretells their destruction. Men are not to be flattered in sinful ways because they prosper in the world; nor will it last long if they go on still in their trespasses. The prophet must show Israel their sin; show it to be exceedingly hateful. Their idolatry is the sin they are here charged with. Giving that glory to any creature which is due to God alone, is an injury and affront to God; such as for a wife to take a stranger, is to her husband. The Lord, doubtless, had good reasons for giving such a command to the prophet; it would form an affecting picture of the Lord's unmerited goodness and unwearied patience, and of the perverseness and ingratitude of Israel. We should be broken and wearied with half that perverseness from others, with which we try the patience and grieve the Spirit of our God. Let us also be ready to bear any cross the Lord appoints. The prophet must show the ruin of the people, in the names given to his children. He foretells the fall of the royal family in the name of his first child: call his name Jezreel, which signifies “dispersion.” He foretells God's abandoning the nation in the name of the second child; Lo-ruhamah, “not beloved,” or “not having obtained mercy.” God showed great mercy, but Israel abused his favours. Sin turns away the mercy of God, even from Israel, his own professing people. If pardoning mercy is denied, no other mercy can be expected. Though some, through unbelief, are broken off, yet God will have a church in this world till the end of time. Our salvation is owing to God's mercy, not to any merit of our own.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In obedience to the Lord’s request, Hosea redeems Gomer and renews his commitment to her, despite her unfaithfulness. This prophesies God’s desire to restore Israel as a pure people after the exile. We are sometimes challenged to swallow our pride and forgive others in similar difficult ways. At such times, we are strengthened by the knowledge that God gave his Son to forgive and restore us.

**PRAY:** We give thanks to you, O Lord, that your patience toward us covers all our sins and restores us perfectly to the image of your Son. Amen.

**October 31**

**READ:** Jonah 2:2-9 and Hosea 5-7

**MARK:** Hosea 6:1 – return to the Lord that he may heal.

**LEARN:** The piercing eye of God saw secret liking and disposition to sin, the love the house of Israel had to their sins, and the dominion their sins had over them. Pride makes men obstinate in other sins. And as Judah was treading in the same steps, they would fall with Israel. By dealing treacherously with the Lord, men only deceive themselves. Those that go to seek the Lord with their flocks and their herds only, and not with their hearts and souls, cannot expect to find him; nor shall any speed who do not seek the Lord while he may be found. See how much it is our concern to seek God early, now, while it is the accepted time, and the day of salvation.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The destruction of impenitent sinners is not mere talk, to frighten them, it is a sentence which will not be recalled. And it is a mercy that we have timely warning given us, that we may flee from the wrath to come. Compliance with the commandments of men, who thwart the commandments of God, ripens a people for ruin. The judgments of God are sometimes to a sinful people as a moth, and as rottenness, or as a worm; as these consume the clothes and the wood, so shall the judgments of God consume them. Silently, they shall think themselves safe and thriving, but when they look into their state, shall find themselves wasting and decaying. Slowly, for the Lord gives them space to repent. Many a nation; as well as many a person, dies of a consumption. Gradually, God comes upon sinners with lesser judgments, to prevent greater, if they will be wise, and take warning. When Israel and Judah found themselves in danger, they sought the protection of the Assyrians, but this only helped to make their wound the worse. They would be forced to apply to God. He will bring them home to himself, by afflictions. When men begin to complain more of their sins than of their afflictions, then there begins to be some hope of them; and when under the conviction of sin, and the corrections of the rod, we must seek the knowledge of God. Those who are led by severe trials to seek God earnestly and sincerely, will find him a present help and an effectual refuge; for with him is plenteous redemption for all who call upon him. There is solid peace, and there only, where God is.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, spare us from the judgment we deserve, for we admit that we, too, have turned to other gods. Accordingly, work in us true repentance, return us to you, and lead us to your side by your gracious Son. Amen.

**November 1**

**READ:** Exodus 15:1-18 and Hosea 8-10

**MARK:** “The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation” (Ex. 15:2).

**LEARN:** What is salvation? To be *saved* us from something/someone. How does God save us? Jesus died on the cross to save us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. This is true, but in the OT “salvation” has another meaning, too. As you read the OT, you’ll find that the people of Israel constantly recount the great moment of their salvation: when God brought them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. He saved them from Pharaoh, slavery, and captivity.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** When God’s people suffered, they looked back to the great moment when God saved them and trusted him to do the same again. When God’s people went astray, the prophets called them back on the basis of Exodus: the Lord claimed you and brought you into the Promised Land, so stop rebelling against him. When God gave the Ten Commandments, he did so *on the basis of his salvation*: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me…” (Ex. 20:2-3). As we suffer, go astray, and reflect on God’s Law, we, too look back to God’s great moment of salvation. But we NT people look back to a different event: the cross and empty tomb. It is through these that God has chiefly saved us. Everything else was foreshadowing this and leading up to it.

**PRAY:** Lord God, heavenly Father, you have brought us out of the domain of darkness and death, and you have brought us into your kingdom of light and life. Thank you for saving us. Help us to keep your salvation ever before us, that we might know ourselves to be your people and you to be our God. Amen.

**November 2**

**READ:** Psalm 122 and Hosea 11-14

**MARK:** “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos. 11:1) is quoted in Matthew 2:15 as a prophecy that Jesus would flee from Herod to Egypt and then return.

**LEARN:** Hosea is the last prophet to preach to Israel (the Northern Kingdom) before Assyria conquered them and carted them off into exile. Even after God sent numerous prophets to call his people to return to him and receive mercy, his people rejected him.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Reflecting on this psalm, Luther notes that, seeking God’s Word and being unable to find it, the Israelites put their faith in the city much like many Catholics in his day put their trust in visiting holy relics and sites. “But the holy church is our Jerusalem, and Christ is our temple, city, altar, and mercy seat, to which, from which, and with which we seek and hear his Word.”

**PRAY:** O Lord, make us glad to come to your house, to worship before you, to give you offerings of thanksgiving for the countless blessings you give us every day. Teach us to love you, your presence, and your gifts of Word and Sacrament. Amen.

**November 3**

**READ:** Psalm 123 and Joel

**MARK:** “’Yet even now’ declares the Lord, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.’ Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster” (Joel 2:12-13).

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit… And everyone who call son the name of the Lord will be saved” (Joel 2:28-29, 32).

**LEARN:** In the OT, the Holy Spirit comes on select individuals: prophets, priests, kings, and judges. Through Joel, God promises a universal outpouring of the Spirit. Peter quotes this in Acts 2 and then says, “Repent and be baptized… and *you* shall receive the Holy Spirit.” Yes you. Jesus’ work was finished on the cross. The Spirit is now being poured out on all flesh. Through repentance and baptism, you now, all of you, can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for young and old, near and far off, Jews and Gentiles alike.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The repentance that Joel calls God’s people to is not merely turning away from sin. To only turn *away* from something is to still have little idea where to go. Rather, we are to return to a God who is gracious and merciful, who shows loving kindness.

**PRAY:** Lord God, you have graciously poured out your Spirit on all flesh. You have not withheld even your Spirit from us. You do, indeed, graciously give us all things. You do make us holy; you make us clean and able to approach you. Your Spirit even dwells within us! By the power of your Spirit, continually create in us new and clean hearts. Change us to be like your Son. Amen.

**November 4**

**READ:** Psalm 124 and Amos 1-5

**MARK:** “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:21-24).

**LEARN:** The prophet Amos begins preaching at the shrine of Bethel (1 of the 2 golden calf shrines Jeroboam I set up so his people didn’t have to worship down in Jerusalem). What does he preach? “Oh, Israel: your enemies are in for it. They are wicked, and God is going to bring swift vengeance.” He does this for 6 surrounding nations, one by one. You can imagine people standing there saying, “Yeah, preach it brother! Give it to them! Let ‘em have it!” Then Amos names Judah as the 7th nation to be judged. Most likely, they thought that was all. 7 is the number of completion, after all. But then he finishes by saying that the worst judgment will fall on *you*, Israel!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Amos 1-2 reminds me of Romans 1-2. Paul begins by talking about how terrible the pagan Gentiles are; God gives them over to their depravity. But then comes the twist: “Therefore *you* have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself because you, the judge, practice the very same things.” It’s not just “those people” out there that you have to worry about: “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:5).

**PRAY:** Lord, when we are tempted to think better of yourself than we ought, bring to our mind your Son on the cross. Show us his blood, his lifeless corpse; and in so doing show us the best that we have to offer: that is worth death and hell. Show us your grace which covers every part of us and washes away all pride and pretension. Amen.

**November 5**

**READ:** Psalm 125 and Amos 6-9

**MARK:** “Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore” (Ps. 125:1-2).

**LEARN:** Of the 5 visions Amos brings up in chp. 7-9, let’s talk about the most famous the one: the plumb line. This is a weight on a string. You hold it up to a wall, drop the weight, and make sure the line is straight (neither leaning against the wall nor falling away from it). If this is the case, the wall is straight and good to go. Amos’ image is this: God takes a plumb line and holds it up next to a wall (Israel), and the wall is crooked. The wall therefore must collapse, and it will collapse.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Even with all of God’s heavy-handed Law preaching through Amos, he ends with hope: a promise restoration (still within the Davidic covenant!) and a bountiful harvest.

**PRAY:** Lord God, the day is coming when you will hold up the plumb line to all people and judge their integrity. And yet you have promised that when you judge us you find us innocent and good on account of your Son. Defend us in this faith. Guard us against all schemes of the devil and all his temptations of doubt. Hear us for the sake of your Son. Amen.

**November 6**

**READ:** Psalm 126 and Obadiah, Jonah

**MARK:** Jonah’s brief message: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jonah 3:4). The king’s response ends, “Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish” (Jonah 3:9).

**LEARN:** Several of the “Minor Prophets” (the briefer prophetic writings) are not directed to God’s people (Israel or Judah) at all, but to particular other nations. Obadiah (read: “Oh bad Edom”) is written to the people of Edom who watched and waited for Jerusalem to fall and then took advantage of it. Jonah’s message is for Nineveh, the distant capital of the pagan empire of Assyria.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** What is Jonah’s complaint at the end of his story? He didn’t want to proclaim the Word of the Lord to Nineveh because he knew that the Lord would have mercy on them if they repented—and so he did. Jonah wanted to prevent God from keeping his promise to Abraham to bless all the nations if those nations included the despicable Assyria. As it turns out, God really does want you to shine the light to the nations instead of hording it.

**PRAY:** Great God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You desire that all people be baptized and saved from eternal death. You do not desire the death of one transgressor, but that sinners should turn from their evil ways and live with You in eternity. I humbly ask You to remember in mercy and love the unbelievers in this land of ours. Remember those who have never heard the way of salvation, and lead them to the knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ. Grant that the messengers of Your Gospel may reach many and bring them the sweet tidings of Your redeeming grace. Let the Spirit of truth work through the Holy Scriptures to bring the forgiveness of sins to the lost. I commend Your messengers to Your heavenly protection, and I ask You to make powerful the Word they proclaim to those who are outside the faith. Gather the lost into the fold of the Good Shepherd of our souls. I ask this in the name of our blessed Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen. —*Lutheran Book of Prayer*

**November 7**

**READ:** Psalm 127 and Micah 1-3

**MARK:** “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Ps. 127:1). “Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry ‘Peace’ when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths…” (Micah 3:5).

**LEARN:** The language in Micah is quite judicial. He acts, in a sense, as the prosecuting attorney on behalf of the Lord. His main concern is social injustice: usury, especially in rural areas. The farmers or land owners were being bought out and displaced by the rich.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** How does God feel about children—about babies? Throughout Scripture, e.g. in Ps. 127:3-5, we find God saying only good things about children. They are a blessing. They are a prize. They are your heritage. They are your retirement plan. They are typically the natural result of marriage. They are to be prayed for. They are a gift directly from God; he closes and opens the womb. What we do *not* find in Scripture, however, are encouragements to inflict the curse of barrenness upon yourself or to prevent conception (see Genesis 38:9-10!), or any language about children being an undue burden. People often use the excuse, “God gave us a brain, so we should discern…” but this, too, is not explicitly biblical. If you find this to be incorrect, please let me know. –Pastor Bauer

**PRAY:** O Lord, You have made the young so beautiful; even their awkwardness has in it a grace we delight to see. Their never-ending laughter, their rippling, eddying energy—they amaze us still and stir us strangely with memories of half-forgotten freedoms, of unsagging drives of constant power; with memories of a time when we did not need to portion out our efforts and ration our spurts. We thank You for the beauty they bring into our ebbing days, for the memories they quicken, for the promise that their simply being speaks. Surely You have not written off a world that has such power and beauty in it. You have not said no to man when he can live anew, so mightily and freshly, in his children. We cannot call them ours because we begot them and bore them; *You* have created them, and You will bless them, and You will bless the world that is their home, and You will bless us through them too. O Lord, there they are, the young: so vulnerable, so liable to hurt, so prone to injury, so open to the backlash of melancholy and melancholy’s close cousin: self-pity; so prone to draw in upon themselves, to think themselves a kind of class apart, to distrust and ignore all ages but their own; so intent on gulping experience, all experience, any experience; so eager to shed the innocence that is their one-time, one-time-only glory; so bent on a sophistication they will find too dearly bought; so impatient to have done with, to have lost what a man can never find again all his days. O Lord, give us grace to love them when they irritate us most; give us wisdom, give us Your Spirit, give us words that will not stop at their ears. O Lord, by us or by whatever secret ways You have, teach them to take delight in the walls which our love and Yours have built to trap the sunlight for them, the sunlight young plants need; teach them to value love in all its forms, in all the sterner ways that love must go if it be love indeed; teach them to know the love that lives and works in discipline, in the clear cup of tradition’s wholesome drink, in measure and restraint, in the settled comeliness of courteous form. O Lord, forgive them the unconscious harshness of their willful ways. Take them up into Your kind, almighty hands. Bless them and keep them. Let their quick devotion be acceptable: a morning scent, an easy song, an improvised and unrepeatable melody to Your glory. Amen. —Martin Franzmann, *Pray for Joy*

**November 8**

**READ:** Psalm 128 and Micah 4-7

**MARK:** “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel” (Micah 5:2). “With what shall I come before the Lord…? …He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:6, 8).

**LEARN:** Micah has two notable predictions. First, he identifies that Babylon will carry Judah into exile some 100 years before Babylon is even a world power. Second, he identifies the place of the Messiah’s birth to be Bethlehem. This passage is what the chief priests referenced when answering Herod and the magi about where the king of the Jews was to be born (Matthew 2:1-6).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Luther on Ps. 128: “The 128th psalm is a psalm of comfort in which the estate of marriage is splendidly praised. Marriage partners are given this great comfort: They should not look only at the trouble, work, discouragement, and discomfort they feel and experience in marriage, but rather the gracious will of God toward them, that their station and life are a gracious creation of God and are blessed by him. Therefore marriage is dear to him, and he gives it much more happiness and blessing than discomfort, if only one believes and adapts oneself to marriage and faithfully remains within it. Therefore in the beginning and middle of the psalm it says, ‘Those who fear the Lord…’ When the godless go astray, on the other hand, it is no surprise.”

**PRAY:** Lord God, bless your holy estate of marriage, and grant that all who live in it might find that they are, in fact, a shadow of the true marriage of the Son and his bride the Church. Strengthen families, that they be united in love and wholly devoted to one another. Amen.

**November 9**

**READ:** Psalm 129 and Nahum

**MARK:** “The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty” (Nahum 1:1-2).

**LEARN:** Jonah visited Nineveh some 100 years before Nahum proclaims this word of the Lord. Under Jonah’s ministry they repented, but soon they again fell away into idolatry. Jonah’s word brought repentance; Nahum’s word seals the judgment.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** When Luther reflects on Ps. 129, he speaks of how often Israel was oppressed by the surrounding nations, as recorded in Kings and Chronicles. The psalmist curses these nations, that they would wither up and not survive. This is, in the end, how it turned out: Israel remained (now in the Church), and the oppressing nations were destroyed. But we will remain forever.

**PRAY:** Lord God, defend your Church, that we may be strengthened and upheld in every good deed. Grant us victory over the evil powers which surround us, and grant us eternal life as you have promised. Amen.

**November 10**

**READ:** Psalm 130 and Habakkuk

**MARK:** “The one who by faith is righteous shall live” (Hab. 2:4; see Romans 1:17). “If you, O Lord, should make iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared” (Ps. 130:3-4).

**LEARN:** Habakkuk was a 7th century BC prophet in Judah, shortly before God would send the Babylonians to carry God’s people off into exile. Habakkuk really wrestled with this. His book is set up as him asking questions and God answering. One of the main things to trouble Habakkuk is that God would use the Babylonians—these evil pagans—to carry out his justice against his own people. That sure doesn’t seem just! The Lord reminds Habakkuk that he does not desert his people—he does not desert the righteous. In fact, he will preserve a righteous remnant in Babylon. Who are the righteous? They are those who have faith, like it always has been (see 2:4).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The fact that God works through what we would call evil means has always troubled humanity, ever since the Fall. How can God carry out his plans through the Babylonians? How can he let Satan loose to just about destroy Job? Why does he allow cancer, and heartache, and poverty, and how does Saint Paul have the boldness to say that “for those who love God all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28)? It sure doesn’t feel good! Our answer is twofold. First, God is God, and we are not. We shouldn’t expect to fully comprehend him, and he does not take orders from us but the other way around. Second, as Joseph reflects upon his brothers’ hatred, “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). That is, even when people do evil things and when this broken world has its broken way with us, God is still in control, and he desires and pursues our good—whether we can see it or not.

**PRAY:** O Lord, we are men of flickering faith; we do not have the courage to put You to the test, to take You at your word, to give You what is Yours, that You may open the windows of heaven and pour down on us Your overflowing blessing; we doubt that Your heart is as great and good as Your strong Word would make us believe, that the riches of Your glory in Christ Jesus will supply our every need. O Lord, we are men of half faith, of cloven faith, half given to You, half saved up for ourselves, faith that would tempt You, experiment with You, use You, to entrench us in our ways, to serve our ends, to give us greater greatness than You have given us when You made us sons of God. Forgive us, Lord. Teach us, O Lord. Let Your Spirit blow and make our faith burn steady and clear, a flame upon Your altar; let Your Spirit make our believing whole and wholly sane, a monomania of trust in You, merely suspended from Your high sustaining Word. Teach us to walk as Your Son walked on the earth, through ministry to death, through death to life and glory at Your right hand. Through Him we pray. Amen. –Martin Franzmann

**November 11**

**READ:** Psalm 131 and Zephaniah

**MARK:** “Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth” (Zeph. 3:19).

**LEARN:** Zephaniah also preaches in Judah just prior to their exile. The judgment is clear: God will destroy Jerusalem because of their apostasy, using Babylon. What is distinctive in Zephaniah is that God’s judgment is portrayed not only as punishment, but as corrective. God will use this not only to punish his people for their sin, but to cause them to repent. The fire will be a refining fire for the remnant whom he will preserve and bring back.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Repeat and meditate upon Psalm 131. Prepare yourself for the Lord’s guiding.

**PRAY:** O God, in you we trust. In you we hope. For you have promised, and you have fulfilled. You have said, and you have done. You keep your Word; teach us to keep it, as well. Amen.

**November 12**

**READ:** Psalm 132 and Haggai

**MARK:** “Consider your ways. You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes” (Hag. 1:5-6).

**LEARN:** When the first group of exiles returned from Babylon to Jerusalem in 538 BC, they started to rebuild the Temple. However, they soon gave up. God used the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to inspire them to continue and finish this work. Why should God’s people live in “paneled houses” while his house was left in ruins?

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Temple was the place where God had chosen to dwell among his people. His presence was there. His promises were there. To rebuild the Temple was to, in a sense, renew or rededicate themselves to God’s covenant with them. Every time we enter God’s holy presence in the Divine Service, we do the same.

**PRAY:** Lord, teach us sacredness. Help us know what it is to be set apart, to be holy, to be far greater than the common things of this world. For thus you have made your Temple, your altar, and your people. Amen.

**November 13**

**READ:** Psalm 133 and Zechariah 1-5

**MARK:** “Thus declares the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 1:3). Then he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’” (Zech. 4:6-7).

**LEARN:** *TLSB* on Zechariah: “A measuring line and filthy garments made pure, a golden lampstand and a flying scroll, a gilded crown and a promise from God—vision by vision, the Lord raised up the second temple to welcome the exiles home and to hold the promise of His presence. The visions that the Lord gave to Zechariah overtook the wandering Judeans and settled their hearts in Zion. This humble beginning would hail the coming of a lowly King, who would fulfill the old covenant and establish an unbounded kingdom wholly consecrated to the Lord.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** How good it is, indeed, when brothers dwell in unity. When sisters bond in sincerity. When Christians speak in unison, sing in harmony, and receive the Sacrament in adjacent iteration.

**PRAY:** O Lord, you have promised that you will gather us from the ends of the earth to celebrate at your feast. And as if that weren’t enough, you even gather us now at your table. Grow within us unity and harmony, that we might truly be the body of Christ who gather around the body of Christ and together receive the body of Christ. Amen.

**November 14**

**READ:** Psalm 134 and Zechariah 6-10

**MARK:** “For thus says the Lord of hosts: “As I purposed to bring disaster to you when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the Lord of hosts, so again have I purposed in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not” (Zech. 8:14-15).

**LEARN:** Zechariah proclaims that salvation (8:7, 13) is at God’s initiative, by God’s own action (8:3), the result of God’s own decision (8:15), consistent with God’s faithfulness (8:8).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “At the heart of Zechariah’s sermon is the suspicion that this is all too wonderful and simply unbelievable. It is impossible. The NT, too, knows of this suspicion. It is not possible for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle or for anyone to be saved (Matt. 19:24-26; Mark 10:25-27). In responding to this suspicion and despair, Jesus alludes to Zech. 8:6. He does not at all deny, but rather affirms that, indeed, this is impossible. But like Zechariah, Jesus reminds his listeners that ‘possibility’ is a concept properly applied to human capacities. It has no application to God. For Zechariah, this theological perspective erodes the limits of what we are able to imagine and believe. He does not commend some kind of positive or possibility thinking; he commends attention to God and to what God has promised. God’s promises redefine what is possible to imagine and believe” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible*).

**PRAY:** O Lord, we are weak in faith, weak in hope, weak in love. We are blinded by what is in front of us so that we cannot see your eternal glory, your eternal plan, your eternal promises. Forgive us, dear Lord, and give us eyes of faith. Amen.

**November 15**

**READ:** Psalm 135 and Zechariah 11-14

**MARK:** “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn” (Zech. 12:10). “And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be one and his name one” (Zech. 14:9).

**LEARN:** “Interpreters have long recognized the role of Zechariah 14 in Mark’s account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11). Jesus begins on the Mount of Olives, which is where God stands in Zech. 14:4. Entering Jerusalem, in a way that reflects Zech. 9:9, Jesus is hailed as king (Mark 11:9-10), echoing Zech. 14:9. Jesus comes finally to the Temple (Mark 11:15), as all people do in Zech. 14:20-21. In the Temple, Jesus drives out those engaged in Trade (Mark 11:15-16), interpreting Zech. 14:2… And in Mark, two chapters later, when Jesus is on the Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3; again echoing Zech. 14:4), he tells his disciples that the way to the future will involve war and suffering no less awful than envisioned by Zechariah, before the ‘Son of man comes with great power and glory’ (Mark 13:26). The NT provides no handy escape from what may offend us in Zech. 14. There, too, we have to cope with God, our only hope” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible*).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** *TLSB* on Zech. 12:10ff: “Zechariah prophesies intense mourning for all people. Can there be any sorrow greater than that of beholding the Son of God, His body pierced and bleeding, hanging on the cross? Such a sight produces contrition in the hearts of believers. The Lutheran Confessions define contrition as ‘the true terror of conscience, which feels that God is angry with sin and grieves that it has sinned’ (Ap XIIA 29). For the contrite sinner, the good news is that the death of Christ opened a fountain that cleanses us from sin and uncleanness. We have good reason to sing, Glory be to Jesus, Who in bitter pains Poured for me the lifeblood From His sacred veins!’ (LSB 433:1).”

**PRAY:** Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

**November 16**

**READ:** Psalm 136 and Malachi

**MARK:** “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 3:1). “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction” (Mal. 4:5-6).

**LEARN:** Malachi is the last prophet of the OT. As noted in the verses above, he prophesies the coming of both John the Baptist (Elijah) and Jesus. He prophesies that the Day of the Lord (Judgment Day) is coming. For those who refuse to repent and believe the Gospel (Mark 1:15), it means utter destruction. But for those who fear his name, it will be a joyous celebration. It is fascinating to read Malachi and the immediately Matthew; it is clearly Christ prophesied and Christ present.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “The 136th psalm is a psalm of thanks and is perhaps the text to show priests how they should sing and preach. Namely, they should sing and preach God and his wonderful deeds, that he is gracious and merciful and a true Savior. Therefore in each verse he repeats the line, ‘His love endures forever,’ with which the psalm is nearly overwhelmed. Truly nothing but grace, not human works or doctrines, should ever be preached. For human works and words have done no wonders such as these. They are not deserving of this worship, but rather only the grace and pure goodness of him who gives all. Gift! Gift, he says! Gift—free of charge! And Christ also stands hidden in the phrase. Such doctrine keeps in the people a pure faith and a right understanding of grace and the forgiveness of sins, against the rebellious and stiff-necked work-saints” (Luther).

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, you created and sustain us, for your steadfast love endures forever. Jesus Christ, you have redeemed us lost and condemned sinners, for your steadfast love endures forever. Holy Spirit, you hold us together in the bonds of grace and peace, for your steadfast love endures forever. Keep us in this true faith, now and always, for your steadfast love endures forever. Amen.

**November 17**

**READ:** Psalm 137 and Matthew 1-2

**MARK:** “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

**LEARN:** They’re not wise men. They are magi—magicians, sorcerers. They are pagans who are involved in some sort of witchcraft or supposedly hidden secret knowledge. They are certainly not God’s people (they are not Jewish). And yet it is these men before whom the Lord appears. In fact, God *directs* them to his Son. He notifies them by their art/science of the skies (see Genesis 1:14), not first by the revelation of Scripture. God truly is beginning to draw all nations to himself—to bring even the pagans, the least of all people, to faith and sonship. Thanks be to God, for even we, too, belong, though we are not descendants of Abraham.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** We have just finished several months of reading through the prophets, and suddenly we read this simple statement from an angel: he will save his people from their sins. Since we have been immersed in the prophets, we are at last in a frame of mind to hear this statement afresh, as Joseph would have heard it—as Mary would have heard it in Luke 1. What? We’ve been waiting, and yearning, and praying for so long. God has brought us his people back from exile and into the Promised Land once again, but we’ve been conquered by Greeks, and Romans, and we’ve thought that God might have given up on us. But *this* is how he’s going to do it? This is how he’s going to save us? Through this baby that is inexplicably in the womb of my betrothed? How wondrous and marvelous and awesome (the proper use of these words!) are the works of the Lord, and how mysterious are his ways!

**PRAY:** “Savior of the nations, come, Virgin’s Son, make here Your home! Marvel now, O heav’n and earth, That the Lord chose such a birth” (*LSB* 332:1).

**November 18**

**READ:** Psalm 138 and Matthew 3-4

**MARK:** “And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” (Matthew 3:16-17).

**LEARN:** Is our baptism linked to Jesus’ death and resurrection, or is it linked to Jesus’ baptism? When the early Church performed baptisms, they closely linked it to Jesus’ baptism, where he cleansed the waters for our baptism, where he dropped his robe of righteousness for us to pick up and wear. In the 4th century, though, Paul’s allusion in Romans 6 of our baptism linking us to Christ’s death and resurrection became more prominently used. Both are good, but the Church has largely stepped away from the mystery of the link to Jesus’ baptism in favor of the dying-and-rising language. We would do well to keep both in view.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. That’s weird. Why would the holy Jesus be baptized with sinners, by a sinner? “Thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). Jesus is in the water with sinners. He is in the sinners’ place. He is taking a sinner’s posture, receiving all gifts which God graciously offers.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, in the waters of baptism, you became one of our own, even as you made us your own. You cleansed the waters that we might be cleansed by them. You were anointed by the Spirit that we might be anointed with your same Spirit. In you the Father is pleased, and therefore he is pleased with us, too. Thank you, dear lord, for this costly bath. Amen.

**November 19**

**READ:** Psalm 139 and Matthew 5-6

**MARK:** “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:13-14).

**LEARN:** Calling Matthew 5:1-12 the Beatitudes is generally a bad idea. What does that title convey? You should try to be like this—to have these attitudes. However, this is missing the point. These statements are not more laws for us to keep (as if we should make ourselves be persecuted or something, because that’s always a good goal for our lives). Rather, these are statements of fact which are tied to God’s blessings. Those people who are spiritually poor, bankrupt, unable, powerless? God blesses them. In fact, God gives them the kingdom of heaven, right now, even as Jesus preaches, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Those people who mourn because the world is being ripped apart by sin, to which even they contribute? God blesses them. In fact, God will comfort them, and he will fix all of this which we have broken. Those people who have nothing to offer, who despair of this life and yearn for the next, who overflow with God’s mercy, and even *y’all*: God blesses *you*. Congratulations.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Martin Franzmann describes the “Beatitudes” as “the Messiah speaking his fullness into human emptiness.”

**PRAY:** O Lord, you have formed the world, you have formed us, and you have put us in this world. We are yours; we can’t not be. Create within us a constant recognition of your blessings, a yearning for Christ to return, and open eyes and hands to love and serve our neighbor whom you have also put here among us. Amen.

**November 20**

**READ:** Psalm 140 and Matthew 7-8

**MARK:** “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (Mt. 7:5). “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Mt. 7:7). “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Mt. 7:12). “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Mt. 7:24).

**LEARN:** As you can see, there are far too many teachings in Matthew 7-8 to cover briefly. Let’s focus on the one which should give us the most trouble: “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you’” (Mt. 7:21-23). This is one of the most terrifying situations Jesus ever puts before his disciples. There will be people who on the Last Day—the Day of Judgment—approach Jesus expecting to be welcomed into his kingdom but who instead will be sent to hell. These people knew Jesus—or at the very least knew of him. They did good Christian things, the sorts of things Jesus had his disciples do. What, then, is the difference between these people who are rejected and the disciples who are accepted? Faith. “Did we not *do* many mighty works in your name? Don’t you see how much we did for you, Jesus? Surely you should love us for this.” Well, no. The Christian life is not primarily about *doing*, but *receiving*. To approach Jesus properly, one must not boast of anything of himself, even his mighty works done in Jesus’ name and, presumably, with Jesus’ power. No, we must approach Jesus as beggars—as servants who, on our best days, merely did what we were told to do. Rather, we say, “Lord, lord, did you not save us? Did you not go to the cross for us? Have you not taken away all our sin and made us your own people?” “Well spoken, my good and faithful servant. Enter my heavenly kingdom.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** To hear Jesus and to think merely, “Oh, that’s nice; it’s good that you believe that” is as stupid and ludicrous as building your house, not only on the beach, but with the sand as the foundation (Mt. 7:26).

**PRAY:** Lord, grant that might be hearers and doers of your Word. Keep us from the arrogance which leads us to trust in ourselves, and train our hearts, minds, and bodies to do the works to which you call us. Amen.

**November 21**

**READ:** Psalm 141 and Matthew 9-10

**MARK:** “And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven’” (Mt. 9:2).

**LEARN:** Was the paralytic in Mt. 9:1-8 cured physically or spiritually? Both, of course. Jesus healed him, in part, to prove that he had the power to do so (v. 6a). But it also makes total sense that Jesus would cure both body and soul because sin is a condition of both. Sin is not *only* a spiritual problem. Sin is everything which goes against God’s good design of things. Adam and Eve’s rebellion and curse have to do with sin, but so does their death, as well as the curse on the ground and their physical removal from the Garden. When people get sick and die today, it’s a sin thing. It’s not necessarily that they committed some particular sin which earned that particular punishment—though at times it may be, e.g. when drunk driving causes an auto accident. Death is not supposed to happen; we are not born to die but to live. Sickness and cancer are not supposed to happen. Paralysis and rebellion against God are not supposed to happen. And none of these will last forever.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Moreover, none of these can stand before Jesus. Where Jesus is, there is the kingdom of God. Where Jesus is, death cannot hold its grip on a widow’s son or a friend’s brother. Where Jesus is, demons flee. Where Jesus is, blindness, lameness, deafness, muteness, bleeding disorders, and every other assault on our humanity is driven away. In the same vein, where Jesus is, people sins and lawless deeds are forgiven—their guilt is wiped away. And when Jesus comes back down from heaven…

**PRAY:** Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Save us, and be present among once again—once and for all. Amen.

**November 22**

**READ:** Psalm 142 and Matthew 11-12

**MARK:** “Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’” (Matt. 11:2-3). “For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:8). “And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:27-28).

**LEARN:** “What did you go out to see? A celebrity? A YouTube video?” “Well, no. But we expected to see *something* real—something that would actually change the world. John’s preaching didn’t actually accomplish anything.” “True. John’s preaching did not accomplish repentance *in you*. The real change that needs to happen isn’t just ‘out there’ somewhere; it’s within your own hearts. That winnowing fork isn’t just for others, but for you. Are you listening? Because judgment is at hand. The kingdom of God is standing in your midst. But I am not only here for judgment; I am also here to serve the least of these.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In Matt. 11:1-19, as throughout the gospel (and, indeed, throughout our lives), people struggle with Jesus not meeting their expectations. What did John the Baptist expect the coming Messiah to be like? He used images of judgment to describe him (Matt. 3:10-12). John essentially asks: “Are you him? We’ve been waiting! But you don’t fully look like what we expect.” And this is indeed the same John who boldly proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Even saints wrestle with Jesus not meeting their expectations. So the questions present themselves: What do you expect from God? Are you getting it? Is God wrong for giving you something other than what you expect, or are your expectations wrong?

**PRAY:** O Lord, when I struggle to see what good you are doing, assure me by your Word and Spirit that you are, in fact, in charge; that you do, in fact, love me; and that you are, in fact, serving the least of these. Amen.

**November 23**

**READ:** Psalm 143 and Matthew 13-14

**MARK:** “Then the disciples came and said to him, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’ And he answered them, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given’” (Matt 13:10-11).

**LEARN:** There are a few common misconceptions about Jesus walking on the water. Unlike when Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples do not appear to be terrified of the wind and waves. Several of them are experienced fishermen, and they’re used to this sort of thing. It is also noteworthy that, although they probably would’ve known the unfavorable conditions and preferred to not set out overnight, Jesus “makes them.” Next, Peter did not necessarily walk out very far on the water; the point is not that he made it most of the way or something. What is the point, then? Jesus is the Lord (for this is always the point). They may think that he’s a ghost (sailors were superstitious about such things), but he has power over the demonic forces of the sea. Even when Peter is close to Jesus (close enough for Jesus to grab him), Peter doesn’t trust him; later in the gospel his wavering faith will both confess his divinity and deny fellowship with him. The disciples worship Jesus, and rightly so. For good Jews like the disciples to worship anyone other than the one true God is unthinkable, and yet they worship Jesus. To a certain degree, they get it.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** One purpose of the kingdom parables is to answer the question, “Why aren’t things going so well, Jesus?” Or, to apply it to our own context, “Why isn’t the Church thriving? Why do people hate us? Why does our church struggle so badly to get new people in the door and get them to stay?” As it turns out, the kingdom of God does not often—and even does not typically—take the form we would expect or choose. It would make sense to only scatter seed on the good soil; you’d save a lot of money and effort. But that’s not how God does it. It would make sense to pull weeds to get a better yield of crop. But that’s not how God does it. It would make sense to put a lot of leaven into a lot of dough, but that’s not how God does it. This is what the kingdom of God is like: God is reigning, often in ways that we don’t expect, and through his working he produces his desired yield. He may not meet your expectations of “success,” but then again maybe your expectations are wrong.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, you have repeatedly shown yourself to be our God and King. When our faith wavers (as is prone to happen for us sinful people), forgive us and enable us to trust you all the more. Amen.

**November 24**

**READ:** Psalm 144 and Matthew 15-16

**MARK:** “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matt 15:18-19). She said, “’Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed instantly” (Matt. 15:27-28). “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:15-19).

**LEARN:** Peter’s rebuke in Matt. 16:22 sounds an awful lot like Satan’s temptations in 4:1-11. It’s no accident that Jesus calls him Satan; he is attempting to divert Christ from his deathward mission.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” “Yes, Peter, and here’s what that means: I am going to Jerusalem to suffer and be killed, and to rise on the third day. And if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross (like mine) and follow me.” The most foundational form of this kind of self-denial is repentance. Bear the burden of turning away from your sin that you may find life in Christ, who died and rose to give you forgiveness and life.

**PRAY:** O Lord, out of our hearts proceed all kinds of evil. Forgive and renew us, that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

**November 25**

**READ:** Psalm 145 and Matthew 17-18

**MARK:** “And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him’” (Matt. 17:4-5).

**LEARN:** “Lord, it is good that we are here. We’re so glad to experience this with you. Let us make 3 tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah (because you’re all basically on the same level as prophets), and let’s keep this party going.” The voice of God speaks: “No. This is my beloved Son. Shut your mouth, Peter, and listen to him.” What does Jesus say? “Rise, and have no fear of what will happen now that you have offended God. We’re good. But don’t tell anyone about this. And listen to me when I say to you that I’m going to Jerusalem to suffer and die, and on the third day to rise. This is what I’ve come to do, for you.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** If you lost one of your 100 sheep, of course you’d abandon the flock to go search him out, right? Of course not! There are wolves out there, just waiting for you to turn your back on the 99. Well, if you found that one, you’d be happier with it than you would with the 99 who didn’t run away, right? Of course not! And yet, God loves us in this mysterious way that perplexes the mind. He finds indescribable joy in bringing sinners back into the fold.

**PRAY:** O Lord, how often we have strayed from you and thought less of you than you deserve. And yet you chase us down and bring us to repentance and faith, that you may not lose a one of us. Thank you, Lord, and please continue to guard and defend us in the one true faith, now and always. Amen.

**November 26**

**READ:** Psalm 146 and Matthew 19-20

**MARK:** “[Jesus] answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate’” (Matt. 19:4-6).

**LEARN:** “Lord, have mercy on us” the two blind men cried (Matt. 20:30). The Greek reads, “Kyrie eleison.” This cry has had a prominent place in the Church’s liturgy for centuries. It is the fundamental plea of all who are burdened by sin—both their own sinfulness and the brokenness of the world which causes them grief.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The disciples are shocked when Jesus tells them, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (Matt 19:24). If the people who are well-off, who are blessed by God, and who have few significant distresses in their lives can scarcely be saved, then who on earth can? Part of the answer is, “Those who actually feel the need to rely upon God for stuff—those who have serious lack in this life and who constantly are driven to prayer.” The other part of the answer is, “No one. Not by themselves. With man it is impossible. However, with God all things are possible. Oh, and to follow God means to follow *me*.”

**PRAY:** Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Amen.

**November 27**

**READ:** Psalm 147 and Matthew 21-22

**MARK:** Jesus said, “And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22:31-32). Jesus said, “’If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?’ And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions” (Matt. 22:45-46).

**LEARN:** “And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, ‘Who is this?’ And the crowds said, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee” (Matt. 21:10-11). Oof. A swing and a miss. So close and yet so far. Who is Jesus, as far as most people are concerned? Not the Son of God. Not the Son of David. Not the long-expected Messiah. Not who, by his words and actions, he is claiming to be. Various groups will challenge him as a prophet, trying to trap him with bad questions to give a bad answer and thus prove himself to be a false prophet (worthy of being stoned to death). However, this Son of God refuses to answer their questions and instead reveals their own schemes and downright wickedness. They will not trap him into his death; he will go to the cross of his own accord. When he is finally killed, the charge against him will be correct: The King of the Jews (Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38). When he is finally killed, bystanders will acknowledge him to be the Son of God (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Countless people still today try to pin Jesus down in order to dismiss what he has to say. “Jesus wouldn’t condemn so-and-so.” “Jesus said, ‘Just love your neighbor.’” “Jesus never actually said he was the Son of God.” Of course, all of these accusations are false or, at the very least, extremely misleading. But if people can limit Jesus’ authority, then they don’t have to listen to what he actually says (or so they think; they’ll all bow the knee and confess him to be the Lord on the Last Day, Philippians 2:10-11).

**PRAY:** Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. —*LSB*: for grace to receive the Word

**November 28**

**READ:** Psalm 148 and Matthew 23-24

**MARK:** “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matt. 24:36-37).

**LEARN:** Matt. 24 is one of those parts of Scripture that many people misuse regularly. This is especially true of people who would try to figure out if things happening today suggest that Jesus’ return is just around the corner. To properly understand this passage in brief, notice that the disciples ask two questions: when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming? Jesus answers these questions in turn: “When” in v. 4-35, and “What sign” in 24:36—25:46 (note the turning point of “But concerning…” in 24:36). “When” is a question, not about the end of the world, but about the destruction of Jerusalem; read v. 1-3 again carefully. Thus, v. 4-35 are not about the end of the world; it’s about the siege of Jerusalem leading to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. The great tribulation here is what happened in the First Century AD. As for what sign will precede Christ’s coming, Jesus says that there will be none: “But concerning That Day [always a reference to the Day of the Lord]… no one knows” (24:36).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** When will the Lord come? What is he waiting for? We don’t know. Are there signs that we can discern today that point to his impending return? Strictly speaking, no: “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars… *but the end is not yet*” (Matt. 24:6). We don’t get to foresee *when* it will happen; we only know *that* it will happen, and that it will happen soon. But this has been true for 2,000 years. We know he is coming, and we continue to look for his return.

**PRAY:** *Martin Franzmann’s prayer “While Reading the News”:* O God Almighty, I thank You for this net that sweeps all waters and brings me the news of all the daily life of all my neighbors everywhere in the world. Make me compassionate, O God of all mercies, with all my neighbors’ sufferings. Teach me to know and feel that distant anguish is as aching as my own. Teach me to pray, “Thy kingdom come!” as widely as Your Son has willed it and meant it. Teach me to do what I can and must do for all men. Teach me long-reaching charity. Give me faith to know, when news is black as ink, that Your hand is guiding all, obscurely and unfathomably but surely, surely toward Your goal; that when the world shakes and Satan triumphs with short certainty, Your Son, Jesus Christ, is Lord of all, that He, the Lamb slain for our sins, is opening the seals of Your book and is working out Your good and holy will. Remember in Your mercy the gatherers and disseminators of the news. Protect them from all harm. Keep them from cynical and cheap success, from a single taste for disaster, from unconsidered or deliberate distortion of the sad and wondrous face of man.

**November 29**

**READ:** Psalm 149-150 and Matthew 25-26

**MARK:** “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Mt. 25:34).

**LEARN:** Why do many of the Jewish leaders want to kill Jesus? Because he claims to be the Son of God—and so utters blasphemy, claiming to be equal with God (cf. John 5:18). When he makes this claim, they ironically perform one of the most blasphemous actions in all of Scripture: they blindfold Jesus, strike him, and say, “Prophesy to us, you Christ [if you are, indeed, the Son of God]! Who is it that struck you? [Surely you know!]” In the next chapter, we see something quite similar. The Jews want to kill Jesus for claiming to be the Son of God and the Christ, but the Romans want to kill him for claiming to be the King of the Jews. They mock him in a similar way, clothing him in an expensive robe, putting a crown of thorns on his head and a reed in his stand as a staff, bowing to him and saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and striking him. It is utterly astonishing that after his resurrection Jesus tells his disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples…” not “Go therefore in my authority and murder those blasphemers who mocked me. Show them who I really am.”

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Perhaps the most terrifying statement in all of Scripture is, “The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born” (Mt. 26:24). I don’t even want to know what that means.

**PRAY:** “O dearest Jesus, what law hast Thou broken That such sharp sentence should on Thee be spoken? Of what great crime hast Thou to make confession, What dark transgression? The sinless Son of God must die in sadness; The sinful child of man may live in gladness; Man forfeited his life and is acquitted; God is committed” (LSB 439:1,5).

**November 30**

**READ:** Exodus 15:1-18 and Matthew 27-28

**MARK:** “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matt. 27:46). “But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you’” (Matt. 28:5-7). “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age’” (Matt. 28:18-20).

**LEARN:** It is no coincidence that many people today believe that Jesus stayed dead and his disciples stole his body. This was the Jews’ cover story from the very beginning (Matt. 28:13).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** When the movie *The Passion of the Christ* portrayed Jesus’ death, it emphasized the gore of it all. When Matthew portrays Jesus’ death, he emphasizes the shame of it all.

**PRAY:** O risen Christ, you are ruling on high over every earthly and spiritual power. But we are still waiting, for you have promised to return to us. Come quickly, Lord Jesus, because although you are reigning it seems like everything is falling apart. Let your kingdom come. Amen.

**December 1**

**READ:** Luke 1:46-55 and Revelation 1-2

**MARK:** Mary’s Song of Praise in Luke has been memorized and sung in the church for two millennia. You should memorize it too. Rev. 1:5b-6*, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom of priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”* Rev. 2:10b, *“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*

**LEARN:** The news of the Savior of the world causes people to break out in song and why not? Sing for the joy of our salvation is here! The Revelation of St. John was to bear witness to the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ. Those who read aloud the prophecy of this book and likewise those who read it will be blessed. Jesus speaks here to the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira and warns them against syncretism – the melding of Christianity to their local pagan deities.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Why is it that God gives us joy at his Word like Elizabeth and Mary? It is for our edification. Likewise, ponder Rev. 2:26 and the heavenly reign of Christ in which we will share. If we will one day reign with Christ in heaven, what then can a mortal man do against us?

**PRAY:** Lord God, Heavenly Father, let my life be a life of song and praise to You for the gifts You give in Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**December 2**

**READ:** Psalm 1 and Revelation 3-5

**MARK:** See how Jesus guides the seven churches; to Sardis, He calls them to repent and watch. To Philadelphia, He bids them to hold on to the truth during testing. To the prosperous church at Laodicea, He warns them not to become complacent and lukewarm. At the same time He also grants to the one who is faithful a seat with Jesus on His throne in heaven at the Father’s right hand (Rev. 3:21). There around the throne are the twenty-four elders representative of the 12 tribes and 12 apostles along with the four living creatures worshiping and giving glory to God.

**LEARN:** Revelation 3 and 4 give us the picture of reigning with Christ there at the Father’s right hand. Do we necessarily reign over all governments and earthly powers like a commander-in-chief? No, but we do reign over all the forces of evil in the heavenly realms. We reign with Christ over Satan. Therefore, we can laugh at the raging of Satan in this world as a ruler laughs at some pathetic foe.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** If the twenty-four elders bow down, worship and cast their crowns before the Lord’s presence and the four living creatures give ceaseless worship to our God in heaven, what does that mean for our fear and love of God when we come to the divine service where He reveals His glory to us in Word and Sacrament? We are truly in the habitation of His house and the place where His glory dwells and it is awesome.

**PRAY:** Lord, move us to love the habitation of Your house and the place where Your glory dwells, for therein we receive Your gifts of life and salvation. Amen.

**December 3**

**READ:** Psalm 2 and Revelation 6-8

**MARK:** Calamities come in these chapters of Revelation as seals are opened and trumpets blast. In the midst of all the chaos of the end times stands the great multitude from every nation. There in the midst of them is the Lamb who is the shepherd (Rev. 7:17).

**LEARN:** Psalm 2 is a Messianic/Royal psalm that speaks of the reign of God in which we join by the work of Christ. The second coming of the Christ is not for a believer’s destruction, but for the believer’s final deliverance. In John’s vision, a protective seal is put upon God’s people marking them as those who will be delivered on the last day. You have been marked, signed, and sealed by your baptism into Christ’s life, death and resurrection so fear not!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Day of Judgment will be a day of much fear and trembling for many and a day of great distress. Ponder and imagine that sight of the final day against the eternal peace and calm of heaven. For those who have been sealed by the blood of Christ, there is only calm and peace.

**PRAY:** Lord, help us to order our days in wisdom so that we are found faithful when You call us to appear before You. Amen.

**December 4**

**READ:** Psalm 3 and Revelation 9-11

**MARK:** See how David cries out to the Lord for deliverance in Psalm 3 and how in Revelation 11, persecution will come upon the people of God. Mark Rev. 11:15, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” On the Last Day Christ will finish off Abbadon or Apollyon (Rev. 9:11) and rule eminently in even this world.

**LEARN:**  George Frideric Handel wrote one the world’s most premier choral pieces of classical music entitled, *Messiah; an Oratorio* and performed it first in 1742 in Dublin. The third movement of his piece includes the now famous *Hallelujah Chorus* with the words of Rev. 11:15 repeated over and over again in victorious, echoing chant. Upon these words, the twenty-four elders around the throne fell down in worship again at the heavenly and earthly reign of Christ. May we worship with such awe and reverence!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Psalm 3 was written by King David in flight from his son, Absalom who sought his demise. David’s family was extremely dysfunctional yet David was the greatest of kings. The dysfunction and troubles came as an earthly consequence of his sin with and it is likewise with us when we follow the desires of our flesh and not God’s Law. In the end, God’s gracious forgiveness in the promise of Christ holds sway for us as it did for David.

Revelation prophecies that persecution will come to the faithful by the hands of those who are perverse (Rev. 11:8). That time of persecution will be limited and brief. The final victory is ours in Christ!

**PRAY:** Lord, be our light when worldly darkness veils us; Lord be our shield when earthly armor fails us; And in the day when hell itself assails us, Grant us Your peace, Lord. Amen. (*LSB* 659:3)

**December 5**

**READ:** Psalm 4 and Revelation 12-14

**MARK:** Memorize Psalm 4:4 and cast your restless cares upon the Triune God who cares for you by creating and sustaining, redeeming you in the faith and keeping you there by His Word. He is faithful. He will do it. Rev. 14:13b, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”

**LEARN:** Four times in Revelation 12 we hear that Satan, “the deceiver of the whole world”, was thrown down out of heaven. This comforts us with the knowledge that no longer can he accuse us before the Father’s throne in heaven. Yet he still makes spiritual war with us, the offspring of Christ’s bride, the church, by rebirth of water and the Word. The eternal Gospel remains triumphant and that is what you hear and receive in the preaching of Christ crucified for you.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** If Satan cannot accuse us before the authority of God’s throne, then what right does he have to accuse your conscience of sins forgiven by Christ? None. He has been thrown down. You are blessed. Try counting the multitude of your blessings today… really.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Lord, I praise you for the victory You have won for me. By Your Word and Spirit keep me forever in the faith that I may one day enjoy a blessed death in you. Amen.

**December 6**

**READ:** Psalm 5 and Revelation 15-17

**MARK:** Psalm 5:3 part of the opening versicles in LSB 295, Daily Prayer: Morning.

**LEARN:** Every day we being by offering up our spiritual worship of prayers and praise which are acceptable to God through Christ Jesus and we watch for His coming. The readings from Revelation today are rather disturbing as we read about the seven plagues and seven bowls of God’s wrath poured out on all those who worship other gods and refuse to repent. The characterization of the beast in chapter 17 is a perversion of the title of God the Father who is the one who is and who was and who is to come. The evil one consistently perverts all of that which the Triune God is and calls good.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Armageddon is coming and it will be a day of much distress and as the Day approaches the baptized will be persecuted all the more for the evil one and his minions will make war with the baptized of God, yet the Lamb will ultimately conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful (Rev. 17:14).

**PRAY:** Lord, cleanse our hearts, eyes, and ears. Give us sound judgment in all things, so that we may reject Babylon’s ungodly lure, remain faithful, and enter with You into glory! Amen.

**December 7**

**READ: Psalm 6 and Revelation 18-20**

**MARK:** Psalm 6:6, “I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.” King David laments his sin and so ought we. Rev. 19:13 – This rider on the white horse with a robe dipped in blood and He who is called “The Word of God” is no less than Jesus Christ our Lord.

**LEARN:** Psalm 6 is a penitential Psalm meaning that it is a prayer sung in lament over sin. The reading from Revelation 20 is read by some Christians to be a literal thousand years. This is called the “Premillennialism,” a widely accepted understanding of the end time propagated by the teachings of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). We hold to the “Amillennialist” view that is in accord with the previous 1800 years of the Christian church. Just like the rest of the book of Revelation, chapter 20 is figurative or written in picture language. The end times are now and the time of the church is the time in which the baptized reign with Christ. Yet as the second coming of the Christ approaches, suffering of Christians will increase for a little while. Fear not that ancient serpent has been thrown down and sealed in the pit (Rev. 20:3).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The next time you commune, think of all the saints and angels around the throne of God who join with you in singing “Holy, Holy, Holy.” We call it the “The Holy Eucharist” for that means sacrifice of praise or rejoicing. In Christ we are never alone. In these end times, in Him who is The Word of God who reigns in heaven and on earth we have a peace that lasts.

**PRAY:** Holy Spirit, move my heart and voice to join in this great hallelujah chorus, both here on earth and then forever in heaven. Amen.



**December 8**

**READ: Psalm 7 and Revelation 21-22**

**MARK:** Revelation 21:7 – This is a reminder that we always live in joyous expectation of our Lord’s return. Revelation 21:13 – Our Lord Jesus Christ was is Lord from all eternity to all eternity.

**LEARN:** In this semi-penitential season of Advent we hear the call to repent as in Psalm 7 and so we repent and believe the Gospel as we prepare for the coming of our King. Christology is the study of and focus upon Christ. All of Scripture points to Christ and the most clear Christology of the book of Revelation is in chapter 22. The high Christology of Revelation is brought to a climax and comprehensively summarized in Rev. 21:13. Jesus Christ is Lord of the Church, creation, and the new creation that is to come. He is with us in the Word and sacraments and He is coming again soon. Fret not and keep your eyes and ears on Him.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** If Christ Jesus is Lord over the Church, all creation, time, and time to come, why worry today about anything other than sin and the devil’s perpetual hunt for your soul? Read, repent, and believe.

**PRAY:** Blessed Redeemer, help us to keep these holy words and thereby conquer sin, death, and the devil. May we, along with Your whole Church on earth and heaven, continue praying with full confidence and a joyful expectation, “Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly!” Amen.

**December 9**

**READ: Psalm 8 and Isaiah 1-3**

**MARK:** Psalm 8:4 – God bestows upon mankind a status above every other creature. Isaiah 1:18 – Your sins shall be as white as snow.

**LEARN:** The Lord describes Israel’s injustice as an unfaithful city and yet in the same breath promises them His plan of justification. He longs to purify us by His righteousness. Jerusalem and Judah had become corrupt, choosing leaders in secret and for their corruption, God was going to give them over to their devices (Is. 3:6).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The book of Isaiah is sometimes called the “Gospel of Isaiah” because there are so many Gospel promises in the book. Chapter one begins with the reminder of our Absolution, that our sins have been made white as snow. Where words of law and judgment are proclaimed, right on their heels runs the comfort of Gospel promises and their fulfillment.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, cover me in the robe of Your righteousness. Grant me honest shame and true repentance. Amen.

**December 10**

**READ:** Psalm 9 and Isaiah 4-6

**MARK:** Isaiah 5:20 – the Lord pronounces woes to those who pervert His word of promise.

**LEARN:** The Lord describes Israel’s unfaithfulness to Him and warns them with “woes.” Generally speaking, anytime a “woe” shows up in Scripture it is a dangerous warning that “woe” or death awaits the one who does not heed the warning. The “woes” of Scripture serve as literary STOP signs with immanent death awaiting if one goes beyond that which God has instructed. Isaiah has a vision of the Lord and His word beckons Isaiah to go and proclaim the Word of the Lord to the people of Israel.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Revival preachers of old would scour the western prairie land and proclaim “woes” to those whose lives were not in accord with God’s Word. The general difference between revival preachers of the plains and Isaiah is that Isaiah always proclaimed a promise of a Savior to come apart from the works of man. Often the revivalist preachers proclaimed only words of warning and law of what the hearer must do and not what God has *done* for us in Christ.

**PRAY:** Oh Lord, may Your goodness and promise bring life to me. Amen.

**December 11**

**READ: Psalm 10 and Isaiah 7-9**

**MARK:** Isaiah 7:14 – The name “Immanuel” means “God with us.” Isaiah 9:9, 6-7 – Verses memorized by many Sunday School children over the years in preparation for the children’s Christmas service.

**LEARN:** The Lord hears the desire of the afflicted and He answers (Ps. 10:17). Isaiah 7:10-14 is often heard during the Advent season. King Ahaz, however, was not a Godly king but here in this reading scorns the Word of Promise from the Lord. Not out of humility does Ahaz not ask for a sign of a Savior to come, but out of apathy. He simply doesn’t care about the promise of a savior from sin. Nonetheless, the Lord sends a sign and our Savior is born. A very dark time is on the horizon for the people of Israel as both the norther and southern kingdoms will be engaged in war for decades and eventually be taken as captives out of the Promised Land and away from the temple of God Most High. That time will be temporarily ended when they return from captivity, but forever ended when the Savior comes.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Evil king Ahaz did not care for the promise of a savior. He had no use for the promise of eternal things and the remedy for sin. Many today live life the same way. Regardless of our rulers, whether they be godly or indifferent, God’s word remains and His promise prevails.

**PRAY:** Savior of the nations, come. Amen.

**December 12**

**READ: Psalm 11 and Isaiah 10-12**

**MARK:** Isaiah 11:1-2 – Jesus is the shoot that arises from the stump of Jesse. Isaiah 11:6 – This is the promise of creation restored. Isaiah 12 – The Old Testament Canticle from the LSB Service of Prayer and Preaching. We sing Isaiah 12 at the beginning of our Advent services this year.

**LEARN:** Though the Lord pronounces judgment and woes to His people who do not listen and obey, He promises that a remnant of the faithful will return. A shoot from the stump of Jesse shall arise. When we hear of remnant we may think of a carpet remnant or a remnant of fabric that appears useless apart from its original intent. The Lord doesn’t just patch in the rest with other left over scraps, but recreates and makes the remnant new. The shoot from the stump of Jesse is a tree that cannot be ultimately killed though it has been cut down. This is an everlasting tree that lives not by will of its own but because God wills it to grow up again even though it has been cut down.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Churches open their doors and someday churches will close their doors for the last time. All earthly things have a finite time span. Someday Mt. Calvary will no longer remain. For those left around during that day, it may seem like God did not keep His word to the remnant of the faithful as they will appear to be cut off from the place where the promises of God shine forth. For any and all churches that have closed or will one day close – the promise of God remains. A shoot has risen from the stump of Jesse it is Christ our Lord who builds His church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The Word remains forever.

**PRAY:** Lord Christ, preserve Your church by the preaching of Your word. Let it take root in me and grow. Amen.

**December 13**

**READ: Psalm 12 and Isaiah 13-15**

**MARK:** Isaiah 14:1-2 – Moved by compassion, the Lord will reverse the fortunes of Israel.

**LEARN:** The Psalmist laments that the godly have vanished and it appears that only wickedness prevails. Not so! God uses even evil to direct us to His gracious promises of salvation. The Lord incessantly works at restoration. Isaiah 14:12 mentions “Day Star” as the force of evil that was eventually cut down. Ironically, about two decades ago, a faction in our synod emerged that pushed for a departure from the pure teaching of the Word of God. Homosexuality, women’s ordination, fellowship with socially progressive church bodies and the like were all promoted by this group called “Day Star”. That group is now defunct. That DayStar did not win the day. The Lord restores our fortunes by the pure teaching, preaching and hearing of His Word.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The Lord “breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come,” (Small Catechism, 3rd Petition. Take this example from Isaiah to see how the devil is still God’s devil, that is, within the control of the Lord. Though the evil one might snarl, rage, and bite, the Lord has ultimately broken him and his evil schemes with His death on the cross. The Lord God breaks and hinders the evil one’s working even when it might not appear that way at the present.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Lord, for the sake of Your church, keep far from us the works of the evil one and grant us Your salvation. Amen.

**December 14**

**READ: Psalm 13 and Isaiah 16-18**

**MARK:** Isaiah 17:4 – judgement is coming upon the land of Israel by means of the Assyrians invading from the north.

**LEARN:** The Psalmist cries out, “How long?” and sings of the promises of God. These three chapters of Isaiah contain oracles against Moab, Damascus and Cush. Damascus was a large city with fortified walls, yet even within her securities, one will not be spared from the coming judgement of God meted out by the Assyrians. Israel should have remained faithful to the Lord and not chased after the gods of the surrounding nations.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** These chapters should cause us to reflect upon the consequences of our sin not just toward our neighbor, where we have immediate consequences, but toward God. He does not take lightly our worship of other gods. Where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also. May we see our treasure only in Him and may He keep our hearts and minds in His peace until His return.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, in Your steadfast love, You sent Your Son to save the lost. Lead us to repentance over every arrogant act, and teach us to depend on the love and faithfulness of Jesus in every endeavor. Amen.

**December 15**

**READ: Psalm 14 and Isaiah 19-21**

**MARK:** Psalm 14:1-3 – There is no one who does good. Apart from God we can do nothing good.

**LEARN:** Here in this reading from Isaiah we have oracles (a word from the Lord) against Egypt, Babylon, Dumah, and Arabia. All the prophecy is that all these nations will one day fall and death and destruction will befall them. The turmoil that we read of in the middle east is nothing new as nation has risen against nation in that area for millennia. In Isaiah 19, a future day is prophesied when Egyptians, Assyrians, and Israelites will all worship together, something unthinkable at that time with regard to the warring among the nations. In Isaiah 20, he is commanded to walk naked, with all his shame exposed to foretell the coming defeat of the Egyptians. In ancient cultures, it was common for the conquering king to lead away exiles naked, or at least with all their garments cut off at the waist. This public humiliation was the parade of his power over the conquered nation. I doubt the UN would up with that today!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:**  Amidst these oracles of destruction and captivity runs the thread of a promised restoration to come. As Isaiah was a watchman, speaking the Word of the Lord, so too are pastors today. They stand as watchmen, proclaiming God’s law and gospel that all might turn to Him.

**PRAY:** Merciful Lord, turn the hearts of those who do not know You, that they may rejoice in the Savior’s deliverance and worship You forever. Amen.

**December 16**

**READ: Psalm 15 and Isaiah 22-24**

**MARK:** Isaiah 22:13 – “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” These are words of unbelief. May they never cross our lips!

**LEARN:** The oracles continue, this time against Jerusalem and Tyre and Sidon. These have become cities full of wealth and pleasure where hedonism appears to rule. The call to repentance is heard, yet their response is not sackcloth and ashes, instead a call to drunken revelry. I hope to you it is unfathomable but when the heart is hardened by the work of the evil one against the preaching of God’s Word, drunken revelry in the face of impending judgment occurs. Here in this semi-penitential season of Advent, let us prepare the way for the Lord by daily repenting of our sins and arising to live before God in righteousness.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Consider the marked difference between the common youth of our nation and the youth of other nations who have fled war to come to the land of the free. The ample wealth and pleasure the United States has enjoyed for the last number of generations as made for us a growing people who hear not the call to repentance but seek only the pleasures of this life. May their hearts and ours too, be softened by the preaching of God’s Word that we all might repent and turn to the Lord, the God of hosts!

**PRAY:** Lord God, grant that the prosperity you have given us may never separate us from the faith given us in our baptisms. Let us daily die to sin and arise to live before You in everlasting righteousness. Amen.

**December 17**

**READ: Psalm 16 and Isaiah 25-27**

**MARK:** Psalm 16 – This is a Psalm to read daily and commit to memory. We perpetually rejoice because our flesh has been redeemed! Isaiah 25:6-9 – The Lord has swallowed up death forever. Isaiah 26:3-4 – The Lord brings peace that lasts.

**LEARN:** When the Lord returns to reign, His people will not be dining in drunken revelry, but instead, invited up to His mountain where He will serve them with a feast of rich food and well-aged wine. The occasion of the feast is that death has been swallowed up forever. Death has been defeated. No longer will war reign, but peace will reign eternal. Israel will be redeemed. You will be redeemed. This happened at the cross and the meal spoken of here is the supper table of the Lamb in His kingdom that has no end.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In the Lord’s Supper, we weekly receive a foretaste of that feast to come. His peace comes to us and it remains in all throughout our days. It is also called the “Eucharist” which means thanks and praise. It is a meal that we celebrate and rejoice in because our salvation has been won, our sins atoned, death defeated, and the gates of heaven opened to us. So why not rejoice?

**PRAY:**  Lord Jesus, grant to us the perfect peace that is known only in You. Amen.

**December 18**

**READ: Psalm 17 and Isaiah 28-30**

**MARK:** Psalm 17:6 – We call upon the Lord and He answers us. Isaiah 29:13, 16 – speaks of those who outwardly profess the faith but inwardly distain the Word of the Lord.

**LEARN:**  Judgement again is professed against the people. Evidently, corruption within society and even religious leaders is nothing new. Isaiah 28 speaks of leaders reeling with strong drink filling their tables with filthy vomit. As such is the extent of man’s rebellion against God and the extent to which man falls prey to the momentary desires of the flesh. Judgement is impending upon Jerusalem because they have become gods in their own eyes. The clay thinks it has become the potter. A reset of reality is about to occur.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** As you read through Isaiah in this season of Advent, you hear two themes 1) The Savior is coming, and 2) Judgment is impending. For the baptized, there is nothing to fear. We simply continue in that which we have always done as Christians – repenting and believing the gospel. We hear the word of the law to curb our sin and turn us back toward Him and His ways. We hear the gospel and look forward to our Savior’s ultimate return. Such is our life in Christ. It is a joy to turn from the vile vomit of sin that covers all life without God to the promises of God in Christ.

**PRAY:**  Merciful Lord, grant that we may not act like stubborn children, but turn to you and repent that you might remove our sin, disgrace and shame. Amen.

**December 19**

**READ: Psalm 18 and Isaiah 31-33**

**MARK:** Isaiah 32:2 – This is the promise of the Messianic king that is to come. Though good kings will reign, the Messianic king will reign forever.

**LEARN:** In Isaiah 32, the Lord speaks against complacency calling for those who are complacent to mourn the loss that is to come. When we become spiritually complacent, thinking, “I have heard the gospel and attended services in God’s house a number of times this year. I am sufficiently guarded against the evil one and done my good deeds for a while,” then we are in great danger of falling into a snare of the devil. The Spirit works faith through the Word and the sacraments and there alone makes our faith firm. One should not become complacent nor one who hears God’s word and keeps it worry too much that he has become complacent, but simply be thankful that he has heard the word of God and taken it to heart.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Both the Psalm and the reading from Isaiah today direct us to look forward to and thank God for His deliverance of us in both body and soul. Every Lord’s Day when He comes to you in His body and blood, He comes as your king to rescue and rule over you in body and soul with all righteousness and blessedness. This is an immense gift.

**PRAY:** Grant me Your grace, that I may fervently sing the praises of what You have done to make Your name known to all people. Amen.

**December 20**

**READ: Psalm 19 and Isaiah 34-36**

**MARK:** Psalm 19:13-14 – The purpose of hearing the preaching of God’s word is to not let sin reign over us but the light of God’s truth in Christ alone. Isaiah 53:3-4 – A word of promise to the feeble of Jerusalem and a word of promise to all who fear the works of sin and death. A Savior has come to you!

**LEARN:** King Hezekiah is a faithful king before the Lord who listens to the word of the Lord from Isaiah. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, sends Rabshakeh to harass the inhabitants of Jerusalem threatening that the siege that will befall them will cause them such misery that they will eat their own dung and drink their own urine (Is. 36:12). The armies of Assyria must have been a fearful sight to behold, yet Hezekiah remains faithful and relies on the Lord of Hosts to defend him and the city. Tomorrow you will find out how the Lord defended His people.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Almost every week we pray for our pastors and we pray for you civil leaders, that both may be faithful in their vocations. In this reading we hear of the benefits of both pastors and civil leaders who heed the Word of God and keep it. When perilous times approach we approach our Lord and God on our knees in prayer, repenting of our sin and begging that He would spare us from the reproach of our enemies.

**PRAY:** Lord take my hand and lead me upon life’s way. Direct protect and feed me from day to day. Without Your grace and favor I go astray, so take my hand oh Savior and lead the way. Amen. (*LSB 722:1*)

**December 21**

**READ: Psalm 20 and Isaiah 37-39**

**MARK:** Psalm 20:1 – The name of the Lord Jesus Christ grants protection.Isaiah 38:17 – The Lord has delivered us and put our sins behind His back.

**LEARN:**  Upon hearing that King Sennacherib was to come upon Jerusalem, King Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord to pray. Not even an arrow from Assyria came into Jerusalem. The angel of the Lord went out to fight the battle for them and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. The Lord fights the battle for us. Later, however, King Hezekiah unadvisedly showed all Israel’s wealth to envoys from Babylon thinking they would become allies. Instead it would be Babylon that would besiege Jerusalem and take away all its people and wealth.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** It is always better to trust in the Lord rather than earthly rulers to save. We have a good example here of King Hezekiah who pleads before the Lord. Hezekiah could have taken the low road and easy way out by surrendering to King Sennacherib but instead he remained faithful. We always do better to remain faithful in the face of any and all opposition. The Lord will fight for us.

**PRAY:** Oh Lord Christ, when pressure comes to surrender my confession in word and deed of You, grant me the faith to be faithful and remain trusting in You. Amen.

**December 22**

**READ: Psalm 21 and Isaiah 40-42**

**MARK:** Isaiah 40:1-2 – The comfort of the Lord is promised and will come. Isaiah 42:3 – The Lord handles us with gentleness.

**LEARN:** The Psalm reminds us that we give thanks for our ruling authorities. In the readings from Isaiah we hear of the Lord’s Servant who was sinless and without fault. At Jesus’ baptism, the Holy Spirit descends and rests upon Him and the Father speaks from heaven. The Father’s delight was declared as well the Transfiguration. The new song that that nations sing is a song of praise from those both near and far for the works of the Servant for the peoples of the nations.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Though the Lord brings great devastation on the nations and even His people, even in the midst of it runs the thread of His promise of restoration and life. Here in Isaiah, the Lord promises strength renewed and life restored. He will deal tenderly with His people and put a new song in their mouths. What restoration and new life has the Lord brought to your life through the promise of His Word?

**PRAY:** O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise. Make haste, O God to deliver me. Make haste to help me oh Lord. Amen.

**December 23**

**READ: Psalm 22 and Isaiah 43-45**

**MARK:** Psalm 22 is the Psalm referenced by Jesus on the cross. Isaiah 43 echoes baptismal promises to us.

**LEARN:** On the day before Christmas Eve we encounter two readings paired together that bring home the blessing of our Savior’s birth. Who for the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the shame and pain of the cross knowing that His perfect death would atone for the sins of the whole world. Time and again we hear the word of the Lord speak of knowing us in our mother’s womb. So far reaching and more is our Lord’s love for us. Isaiah 45 speaks of the hiddenness of God who is still there in the midst of the day of calamity and disaster. This *“Deus absconditus”* or hidden God allows disaster though not the source or cause of sin. He uses Satan for His divine means to bring about His saving will. This is most realized in the crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ where God’s good and gracious will was hidden in the cross. Christ’s perfect death brought forth our life.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Isaiah 43-45 promise that our Lord knows us in our mother’s womb and promises to be with us all throughout the ups and downs of life. He also hides Himself in the weakness of disaster, calamity, and sickness, revealing Himself in the Word and sacraments. No matter the shape or form of the disaster, calamity, sickness or what have you, the Word reveals God’s will and redemption of mankind as seen so poetically as Jesus recites the words of Psalm 22 accomplished from the darkness of the cross.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, You have made me Yours in the waters of Holy Baptism and promise to be with me all my days. See me through this life, death and lead me to Your side for all eternity. You are the One who has done it. Amen.

**December 24**

**READ: Psalm 23 and Isaiah 46-48**

**MARK:** Psalm 23 – All of it. Isaiah 48:12 – The Lord calls himself the first and the last just as Jesus does in the book of Revelation.

**LEARN:** The Lord will use King Cyrus of Persia to bring low Babylon. Babylon’s wisdom in their astrological devotion will fail. True wisdom comes from the Word of the Lord. The Lord chastened Israel and refined away from them their sins. He does the same for us. He chastens and He heals. When we follow in the Lord’s ways and pay attention to His commandments, peace is like a river (Isaiah 48:18).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The closing words of Isaiah 48 states that there is no peace for the wicked. Often times it is our sin that keeps us from having peace. The things we have done or the things we have left undone keep us from having peace. Sin haunts. This is why we confess our sins, seek to reconcile, and work to live at peace with everyone, especially those who are of the household of faith. Is there someone that you have sinned against or who has sinned against you that keeps you from peace? If so, even today, seek to be reconciled and live in the peace that the Christ-Child came to give.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, You came to bring peace on earth. Help me to accept the refinement the Father places upon me to form me more into Your likeness. Amen.

**December 25**

**READ: Psalm 24 and Isaiah 49-51**

**MARK:** Psalm 24:7-10 – We rejoice in God’s gracious presence by singing

**LEARN:** The Lord has chastened Israel but has not forgot her. In His great love He has engraved her (and us) in the palms of His hands on the cross. Normally, it was the slave who had the owner’s name engraved in the palm of the hand. This is the extent of the Lord’s love toward us, His rebellious people. He sends His Servant to be obedient where we were not. His Servant gives His back to those who strike and cheeks to those who pull out His beard (Isaiah 50:6).

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Unrepentance lulls us into spiritual sloth. It hardens the heart and begins to put walls up against the Word of the Lord. The longer we remain unrepentant, the thicker that wall becomes and the more drastic the measures the Lord will use to break through with the truth of His Word. Therefore it is spiritually more healthy to always confess our sin, be quick to repent, fast to forgive others and slow to sin. Repent, your Savior is at hand. Though a babe, He has come to save you.

**PRAY:** O Lord, on this day we celebrate Your incarnation, grant that we may wholeheartedly repent and prepare our hearts for Your gracious visitation. Amen.

**December 26**

**READ: Psalm 25 and Isaiah 52-54**

**MARK:** Psalm 25:7 – Remember not the sins of my youth. Isaiah 53:12 – Jesus bore the sins of many and makes intercession for us.

**LEARN:** Both the Psalm and Isaiah readings are powerful today. The Psalm as it is beautiful prayer to support us throughout all of life’s varied troubles. The reading from Isaiah because it takes us to the Passion account of our Lord. Isaiah 52 and 53 speaks of the suffering Servant King who then brings peace by His blood. This was the reason He was born – to die. He fulfilled every last bit of the prophesied Servant in Isaiah in Jerusalem some two thousand years ago. We rejoice in His gracious visitation and redemption won for us.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** The people of Isaiah’s time and those soon after would know the ravages of siege and war more than our 21st century minds ever will, I pray. In those times when all rights, dignity, and even life are wrenched away, all one has left is hope. The closest our generation has to knowing this are the few accounts of prisoners of war. The Suffering Servant King of Isaiah 52 and 53 is a prophecy of hope. How tightly the people of God must have held on to those words in years of siege, famine, war and death! May we, by faith, likewise hold on to the hope which we have in our Savior who has come and has promised to return.

**PRAY:** O Lord Jesus Christ, You suffered all for me that I might live. For Your sacrifice, may my life be a life of unending thanks and praise. Amen.

**December 27**

**READ: Psalm 26 and Isaiah 55-57**

**MARK:** Psalm 26:8 – Oh Lord I love the habitation of Your house.

**LEARN:** Isaiah 55 is a powerful chapter that bespeaks the Lord’s grace to us. Established is His relationship to us and what He does for us through His Word that comes down like the rain and snow. It accomplished His purposes so seek Him while He may be found. Where is He found? In the Word and sacrament alone. He is not found in apart from the place where He locates Himself in the Word and sacraments. Do not expect Him to come to you special visions, dreams, or feelings of the heart, but expect the evil foe to do just that.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Isaiah 56 speaks of salvation for foreigners. Contrary to popular opinions, Jesus was likely not 6’4” with long blonde hair, blue eyes and a chiseled nose and jaw-line. He would have looked like a middle-easterner. I think everyone reading this devotion would have been considered a “foreigner” in ancient Israel. The remarkable part of this chapter is that these foreigners, you and I included would offer sacrifices acceptable to the Lord God Almighty. Our sacrifices are our lives of faith lived out in thanks and praise.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, let us follow You alone throughout this life unto life everlasting. Amen.

**December 28**

**READ: Psalm 27 and Isaiah 58-60**

**MARK:** Psalm 27:10 – Words to mark to counsel those with godless parents. Psalm 27:14 – Words of encouragement.Isaiah 60:1 – A verse heard every Christmas Eve.

**LEARN:** Isaiah 59:21 speaks of the covenant that the Lord God has with His people. It is a great comfort to know that the promise of the Lord will not depart from His people. Many rulers and nations have sought to take that word of promise away by making Christianity illegal, killing pastors and priests, and destroying the written Scriptures. Yet the promises of God and His Word remains with His people. It does not depart them from this time forth and forevermore. A verse of Scripture learned is never a verse wasted.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** If you were given ten million dollars what would you do with that gift? Would you burn it up and be bankrupt in a few years or would you use it for God’s glory? It is the Lord who gives us all spiritual and material gifts. Both may be misused and both may be used for His glory. How might you use the multitude of varied gifts and abilities that the Lord has given you to glorify His name this coming year?

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, I thank You that You have called me out of darkness into Your marvelous light. Amen.

**December 29**

**READ: Psalm 28 and Isaiah 61-63**

**MARK:** Isaiah 61 – Proclaims the year of the Lord’s favor.

**LEARN:** The Servant/Messiah comes and proclaims the year of the Lord’s favor that does not end. Ended then is all mourning, devastations, calamities, captivities, sin and even death. We live in the Messianic age where Christ rules His church by His word and sacrament. In our hearing, His word of forgiveness and promise to us is fulfilled. His Word does it. His Word rules and grants us immeasurable favor and blessing from the hand of the Father.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** Often times when marital unfaithfulness occurs, the whole town knows about it and that person’s good name is forever marred in that place. Isaiah likens Israel’s worship of other gods to unfaithfulness in marriage. Rightly should God disown His people, but He does just the opposite. In Isaiah 62 He give them a new name and makes her to be righteous, though she was unfaithful to Him. The devil often does his most terrible work by defiling the marriage bed by making it unclean with unfaithfulness. What if we would return to the Lord with all our heart, forgive as we have been forgiven, and not keep silent until only righteousness springs forth? Marriages and joys would be restored.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, You came as Your church’s heavenly bridegroom to take her and make her holy by Your blood. Grant that Your righteousness goes forth from Your church into our homes and lives. Amen.

**December 30**

**READ: Psalm 29 and Isaiah 64-66**

**MARK:** Psalm 29 – The voice of the Lord sets forth creation out of chaos, shakes the mountains, and dwells among us as the Word made flesh. Isaiah 65:17 – The Lord creates a new heave and new earth.

**LEARN:** The book of Isaiah concludes with judgement upon those who continually provoke the Lord to His face by practicing paganism. Their arrogance will be judged and the faithful of the Lord will dwell in safety for all eternity though possibly not upon this earthly plane. The Lord will usher in a new heavens and a new earth where all these former things of sin and its corruption will not be remembered or even come to mind. The joy and peace of that day will be like a child sleeping, fed and content in the arms of his mother. Peace and comfort will be everlasting.

**INWARDLY DIGEST:**  Throughout the book of Isaiah we have heard the constant call to repentance, the Lord’s promise all the way through, the promise of a Savior to be born and the suffering of that Servant on our behalf. The book ends with the themes of law and gospel as were prevalent all throughout. What sticks with you from the book of Isaiah, judgement or gospel promise? Hopefully both! In this word you have read over the last month the Holy Spirit has done His work. Take a moment to reflect on what fruit that righteous work has done.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus Christ, sanctify me and purify me from all uncleanness. Quench my passion for sin and grant me everlasting life. Amen.

**December 31**

**READ: Luke 1:46-55 and Mark 1**

**MARK:** Mark 1:15 – Repent and believe, or in other words, have faith.

**LEARN:** Much happens in the first chapter of Mark. John the Baptist prepares the way. Jesus is baptized by John. Jesus calls his first disciples. A demon declares Him to be the “Holy One of God.” Jesus heals the many and preaches. Significant in the Gospel of Mark is his pace of writing and use of “immediately”. Mark depicts a Savior who comes to act and usher in His kingdom swiftly. Not a word is wasted in this Gospel. Hold on for the ride through Mark in the New Year!

**INWARDLY DIGEST:** In the synagogue there was a man with an unclean spirit who cried out, *“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God,”* (Mk 1:24). Why is it that you think Mark uses demons as the first ones who declare that Jesus is true God in the flesh?

PRAY: O God, O Lord of heav’n and earth, Thy living finger never wrote that life should be an aimless mote, A deathward drift from futile birth. Thy Word meant life triumphant hurled in splendor through Thy broken world. Since light awoke and life began, Thou hast desired Thy life for man. Amen. *(LSB 834:1)*

1. Reinhold Niebuhr [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A footnote in your Bible probably tells you that v. 4—about an angel stirring up the water to heal people—wasn’t in the earliest manuscripts. It’s probably best not to consider this angel part to be true, so we shouldn’t say that *the Lord* was healing people through the pool; it was just a superstition or something of the sort. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)