

The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

February 8, 2026

Holy Spirit, Ever Dwelling

Lutheran Service Book 650, Lutheran Worship 164, The Lutheran Hymnal n/a

1 Ho - ly Spir - it, ev - er dwell - ing In the ho - liest
2 Ho - ly Spir - it, ev - er liv - ing As the Church's
3 Ho - ly Spir - it, ev - er work - ing Through the Church's

realms of light; Ho - ly Spir - it, ev - er brood - ing
ver - y life; Ho - ly Spir - it, ev - er striv - ing
min - is - try; Quick - 'ning, strength - 'ning, and ab - solv - ing,

O'er a world of gloom and night; Ho - ly Spir - it,
Through us in a cease - less strife; Ho - ly Spir - it,
Set - ting cap - tive sin - ners free; Ho - ly Spir - it,

ev - er rais - ing Those of earth to thrones on high; Liv - ing,
ev - er form - ing In the Church the mind of Christ: You we
ev - er bind - ing Age to age and soul to soul In com -

life - im - part - ing Spir - it, You we praise and mag - ni - fy.
praise with end - less wor - ship For Your gifts and fruits un - priced.
mu - nion nev - er end - ing, You we wor - ship and ex - tol.

L In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

L Our help is in the name of the Lord,

C **who made heaven and earth. (Psalm 124:8)**

L Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

C **Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. (Psalm 19:12, 13)**

L If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord who could stand?

C **But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared. (Psalm 130:3–4)**

L Let us, confess before God that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and as His people let us take refuge in His infinite mercy seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, saying:

C **God, be merciful to me, a sinner, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.**

(Luke 18:13)

L Almighty God, merciful Father, in Your holy Church, You daily and richly forgive us our sins and grant us new life through Your Spirit. Be in our midst, enliven our faith, and graciously receive our prayer and praise; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C Amen.

Introit Psalm 119:9–16; antiphon Psalm 119:12

L Blessedè are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes!

C **How can a young man keep his way pure?**
By guarding it according to your word.

L With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!

C **I have stored up your word in my heart,**
that I might not sin against you.

L Blessedè are you, O Lord;
me your statutes!

C **With my lips I declare**
all the just decrees of your mouth.

L In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.

C **I will meditate on your precepts**
and fix my eyes on your ways.

L I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

C **Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;**
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

L Blessedè are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes!

Kyrie

L O Lord,

C **Have mercy on us.**

L O Christ,

C **Have mercy on us.**

L O Lord,

C **Have mercy on us.**

Gloria in Excelsis ~ Glory to God in the Highest

L Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

C **Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father: We worship You, we give You thanks, and we praise You for Your glory.**

L Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, You are Lord and God, You are the Lamb of God:

C **Lord Jesus Christ, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.**

L Lord Jesus Christ, You are seated at the right hand of the Father; and we ask you to graciously receive our prayer.

C **For You alone are the Holy One,
You alone are the Lord,
You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

Collect of the Day

L Let us pray: O Lord, keep Your family the Church continually in the true faith that, relying on the hope of Your heavenly grace, we may ever be defended by Your mighty power; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

Isaiah 58:3–9a

³“Why have we fasted, and you see it not?
Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?”
Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure,
and oppress all your workers.
⁴Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to hit with a wicked fist.
Fasting like yours this day
will not make your voice to be heard on high.
⁵Is such the fast that I choose,
a day for a person to humble himself?
Is it to bow down his head like a reed,
and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?
Will you call this a fast,
and a day acceptable to the LORD?

⁶“Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

⁸Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
⁹Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’

- L** This is the Word of the Lord.
- C** Thanks be to God.

Gradual Psalm 117:1–2a; 96:8

- L** Praise the Lord, all nations!
- C** **Extol him, all peoples!**
- L** For great is his steadfast love toward us,
- C** **and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.**
- L** Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
- C** **bring an offering, and come into his courts!**

Psalm 112:1–9

- L** ¹Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!
- C** **²His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.**
- L** ³Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.
- C** **⁴Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous.**
- L** ⁵It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice.
- C** **⁶For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever.**
- L** ⁷He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD.
- C** **⁸His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.**
- L** ⁹He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor;
- C** **his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor.**

1 Corinthians 2:1–14

¹And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

⁶Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love him”—

¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

¹⁴The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 5:16b

L Alleluia, Alleluia, Let your light shine before others.,

C So that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Alleluia.

Matthew 5: 13–20

L The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 5th chapter.

C Glory to You, O Lord.

¹³[Jesus said:] “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

L This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to You, O Christ.

The Apostles' Creed

C I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven

and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen

May We Thy Precepts, Lord, Fulfill

Lutheran Service Book 698, Lutheran Worship 389, The Lutheran Hymnal 412



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Devotional thoughts:

An extremely rare event occurred on December 9, 1950 and in a roundabout way, it relates to our Gospel lesson today. A song written by Frank Loesser was published in early 1950. It was written for the Broadway musical, *Guys and Dolls* which opened on November 24 that year.

Surprisingly, before *Guys and Dolls* opened, four different versions of this song were released by record companies. The most popular version was a recording by Perry Como and Betty Hutton made on September 12. On September 13, it was recorded by Margaret Whiting and Jimmy Wakely. On that same day, the version that I'm most familiar with, was recorded by Doris Day! Next, a version by the The Andrews Sisters was recorded and released. Amazingly, on December 9, 1950, all four versions of the song were on the *Billboard* chart of best selling popular records.

Raise your hand if you know that name of the song. Here's one more hint. At least, two other versions were recorded that year!

Stay tuned to the end of the sermon and I will give you the answer. I won't be that cruel. The song is (drum roll) "I Love You a Bushel and a Peck." (A bushel and a peck And a hug around the neck). More on this later.

Our Gospel lesson for today begins with another great mystery. How can salt lose its taste since its chemical properties cannot change?

Some commentators have suggested that natural salt in Jesus' day was not pure. As a result, over time, when exposed to moisture, the genuine salt leached out leaving only impurities behind.

I have always believed that this was the answer to how salt could lose its saltiness. However, I have recently learned that there may be other answers to this question.

One of those answers states that Arab bakers would use salt blocks to line the floor of their ovens. It is said that after a period of time of being under intense heat, these blocks would eventually crystallize and undergo a change in chemical composition. The blocks would then have to be discarded and replaced with new ones. To be honest, I'm not qualified to evaluate either answer.

There is a third answer that I came across. It states that it is impossible for salt to lose its saltiness. Therefore, if it loses its saltiness, it's not real salt!

Jesus told His disciples, "You are the salt of the earth." They are to be as useful as salt is. If salt loses its taste and is no longer useful then it wasn't really salt. If a disciple stops being faithful and stops being useful, he really wasn't Jesus' disciple. Useless things are discarded. It is impossible for a true disciple to stop being faithful!

Salt by its very nature must be salt! Disciples by their very nature must be faithful. This serves as a warning to all of us.

Next, Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." This is where the song "A Bushel and a Peck" comes in. He went on to say, "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house."

This is the English Standard Version translation. I have been using it since shortly after the Lutheran Service Book adopted it. However, before that, I used the New International Version for about 20 years. The NIV says this, "Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl."

This is only the beginning of the conundrum. I was raised on the King James Version of the Bible and the Revised Standard Version. Neither of them says basket or bowl. They both say "bushel!"

The Greek word here for basket, bowl, and bushel is *modios* (μόδιος). Lexicons tell us that a *modios* is a dry measure equal to one peck. Remember the song?

To help you out, a Roman *Modius* held 16 *sextarii*. A *sextarius* was equal to about one pint. So a *modios* is about 2 gallons. This is the size of a peck!

So if you want to hide your lamp make sure that your basket, bowl, or bushel is neither larger nor smaller than two gallons! Yes, this is absurd. It is absolutely absurd to hide your lamp. That's what Jesus is saying.

You are the light of the world! The light of Christ has filled your heart. It is absolutely absurd to hide this from people.

Jesus went on to say, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Throughout history, Christian people have been known to a world living in darkness by the light of their works of love.

Jesus makes this clear to us in John 13:35 when He said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

How can you let your light shine? You do this by walking in love as Christ loved you!

Everything about Christianity revolves around love. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). John wrote in his first epistle:

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:7-12).

You may have noticed that we live in a world lacking in love. Every sin is a violation of love. God's law is the perfect formula for loving God and our neighbors. The Apostle Paul put it this way, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). Jesus summarizes God's law this way:

³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40).

This is what Jesus meant when He said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets by loving perfectly! He is the only one who ever could. No one else ever has or will.

But we must! Jesus said, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” The scribes and Pharisees were the most outwardly righteous people of their time. They followed every ritual of the Old Testament. They tithed. They prayed. They offered the proper sacrifices. They were totally lost! To enter the kingdom of heaven, you must do better than that. But no one can. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). “No one does good, not even one” (Romans 3:12).

What are we to do? Is the kingdom of heaven closed to us? No, Jesus came into the world to fulfill the Law and the Prophets for us. He loved perfectly for us. His righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees and He gives that righteousness to us!

Jesus took our sins upon Himself and paid for them by His sacrifice on the cross. He received the punishment that we deserve. By faith, we receive what He did for us. He is the Good Shepherd that lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7).

Prayers

L O Lord, You declared us to be the light of the world. Grant that we would never hide our lights under a basket. Rather give us wisdom and courage to let our lights shine before others so that they will give glory to our Father in heaven.

C Amen.

L O Lord, You taught us that You did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Grant us faith to trust that You perfectly fulfilled the holy law for us. Move us to strive to be faithful in keeping the letter and the spirit of the Ten Commandments.

C Amen.

L O Lord, by our sinful human nature we are unable to accept the things of the Spirit of God for they are spiritually discerned. Give us a full measure of Your Holy Spirit through word and sacrament that would have the mind of Christ.

C Amen.

L Lord, guide and give wisdom to our nation and its leaders, and to all judges and magistrates. Protect those who serve us as firefighters, police, disaster workers and medical personnel. Protect those in harm’s way because of the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East that cause innocent men, women, and children to suffer. Grant that the new found peace in Gaza would be sustained.

C Amen.

L Visit us in Your compassion, O Lord. Deliver the sick from their infirmity, the troubled from their afflictions, the grieving from their sorrow, and the dying from their fear. May all who cry to You receive grace according to Your will. Help each of us to bear our crosses with patience and grace.

C Amen.

L Lord, we bring all of this to You trusting in Your mercy. Grant us what we truly need and what is good for us and for our faith, and keep away whatever would harm us. Help us to place our worries in Your care, give us clear consciences, and fill us with Your peace; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

C I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

C 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.

L Let us bless the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

L The Lord bless us, defend us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

C Amen.

Almighty Father, Bless the Word

Lutheran Service Book 810, Lutheran Worship 216, The Lutheran Hymnal 52

1 Al - might - y Fa - ther, bless the Word Which through Your
2 We praise You for the means of grace As home - ward
3 Praise God, from whom all bless - ings flow; Praise Him, all

grace we now have heard. Oh, may the pre - cious
now our steps we trace. Grant, Lord, that we who
crea - tures here be - low; Praise Him a - bove, ye

seed take root, Spring up, and bear a - bun - dant fruit!
wor - shiped here May all at last in heav'n ap - pear.
heav'n - ly host: Praise Fa - ther, Son, and Ho - ly Ghost.

Service Notes:

One person may serve as Leader or this may be shared with a number of individuals.

Read one or more of the lessons. Hymns may be sung or read. Use as much or little of this service as you would like.

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Enhancing Your Worship

Meditating on God's Word and Works

I will meditate on your wondrous works. Psalm 119:27

My eyes are awake through the night watches,
That I may meditate on Your word. Psalm 119:148 NKJV

The Week of The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany February 9—14, 2026

Introduction

Most modern forms of mediation turn a person inward. Biblical meditation turns a person outward toward what God has said and done especially what He has said and done through Jesus for our salvation.

Each Sunday has its own special theme directing us to meditate on God's word and actions. This theme is found in the Propers of the Day (the parts of the service that change week to week). From Advent through the Easter season these themes focus our attention on the life of Jesus from His birth to His death and resurrection. There is always much more in the propers than can be covered in any Sunday service. God willing, I will use the propers for Sunday to provide you with a devotion each day to help you mediate on what God has done for you.

Monday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

Introit Psalm 119:9–16; antiphon Psalm 119:12

L Blessèd are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes!
C **How can a young man keep his way pure?**
By guarding it according to your word.
L With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!
C **I have stored up your word in my heart,**
that I might not sin against you.
L Blessèd are you, O Lord;
me your statutes!
C **With my lips I declare**
all the just decrees of your mouth.
L In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.
C **I will meditate on your precepts**
and fix my eyes on your ways.
L I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.
C **Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;**
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.
L Blessèd are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes!

Verse of the Day: Matthew 5:16b

L Alleluia, Alleluia, Let your light shine before others.,
C So that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Alleluia.

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.
L O Christ, **C** Have Mercy on us.
L O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

I've mentioned before that Psalm 119 is an ode to the word of God. Each one of the 176 verses mentions God's word in one form or another. Examples include word, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, and promise.

Psalm 119 is divided into 22 sections of 8 verses each. Inside each group of 8 verses, every verse begins with the same letter. These 22 sections are in alphabetical order according to the Hebrew alphabet. This is evidence of the incredible skill of the author and His dedication to God and His word.

Our introit for this week is the second of the 22 sections. Each verse in this section begins with the Hebrew letter Beth which is equivalent to our letter B. It begins with one of the most well-known verses of Psalm 119, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word."

This short question and answer is the key to life, both on this earth and in eternity. God's word gives us direction for living pure and wholesome lives now. It opens for us the gates of heaven because it reveals to us God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

God's word shows us our sin and our savior. It gives us perfect guidance for life. By studying God's word, we learn about God's love for us and how we are to properly love God and the people around us.

Let us not neglect God's word but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

L Let us 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.
C Amen.

Tuesday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 5:16b

L Alleluia, Alleluia, Let your light shine before others.,
C So that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Alleluia.

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.
L O Christ, **C** Have Mercy on us.
L O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

L Let us pray: O Lord, keep Your family the Church continually in the true faith that, relying on the hope of Your heavenly grace, we may ever be defended by Your mighty power; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

The Bible uses a variety of pictures to describe the Church. We are the Body of Christ (Colossians 1:24). We are the Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelations 21:1-2). We are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9). We are “the people of God” (1 Peter 2:10). We are God’s Temple (1 Corinthians 3:16). My favorite biblical picture of the Church is the family of God (1 John 3:1-2; Ephesians 2:18-19).

You may have noticed that the Church is never a business or corporation. It is not an outlet for retail religion. It is not an entertainment venue or a government lobbying establishment. It doesn’t have a targeted demographic. It is a refuge for repentant sinners, not a therapeutic center for normalizing sin.

When we ask the Lord to keep us in the true faith, we are asking that everything we believe and teach would be true and faithful to God’s word. We want to make sure that we never believe or teach anything false.

It means that we want to believe in the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We desire to know God’s law and rightly follow it. We know that salvation depends on truly believing that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. It also means that we want to truly understand what the Church is. We reject every false and misleading notion about who the Church is and what we should be doing.

We pray for God to defend us from being deceived concerning who we are as God’s family that will one day find a home in our Father’s house.

Prayer: O Lord, keep Your family the Church continually in the true faith that, relying on the hope of Your heavenly grace, we may ever be defended by Your mighty power; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 5:16b

L Alleluia, Alleluia, Let your light shine before others.,

C So that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Alleluia.

Psalm 112:1-9

L ¹Praise the LORD!
Blessèd is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!

C ²**His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.**

L ³Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.

C ⁴**Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous.**

L ⁵It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice.

C ⁶**For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever.**

L ⁷He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD.

C ⁸**His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.**

L ⁹He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor;

C **his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor.**

Kyrie

L O Lord,	C Have Mercy on us.
L O Christ,	C Have Mercy on us.
L O Lord,	C Have Mercy on us.

Psalm 112 is a beatitude. It declares that the man who fears the Lord and delights in His commandments is blessed.

This is contrary to what the devil, the world, and our own sinful selves want us to believe. They are constantly tempting us to believe that God and His commandments are holding us back.

When I was young, there was a debate about something called “little white lies.” I haven’t heard that term used very often recently. But the argument went something like this: It was okay to tell a “little white lie” if no one was hurt and you could realize some benefit from it. It was doubly okay to lie if the perceived benefit was for someone else and the lie was spoken out of love.

If that were the case then Psalm 112 should begin this way. “Blessed is the man who has no fear of the Lord and disregards His commandments.”

While I used the example of a “little white lie,” people use the same argument to justify any sin that seems convenient at the time. Looters justify their theft by telling themselves that the rich received their wealth unjustly and no one is really hurt by their stealing. The list goes on.

All sin can be traced back to the idea that God was mistaken when He established His commandments and I am a better judge of right and wrong than He is. It also embodies the false notion that God will not punish lawbreakers and bless the faithful.

Psalm 112 says just the opposite. God’s people know that God blesses those who fear, love, and trust in Him above all things. He blesses those who are gracious, merciful, and righteous. God does not bless thievery or selfishness. He blesses those who are generous and people who are willing to lend to those in need.

In the end, God is in charge. He blesses faithful people. Sometimes we have to wait for His blessings but we trust that they will come. Even if our present circumstance seems to be difficult, we trust God’s promises. The Apostle Paul puts it this way, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).

Prayer: Gracious Lord, thank You for blessing Your faithful people and those who delight in Your word. Grant us faith to trust that all of Your promises are true through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 5:16b

L Alleluia, Alleluia, Let your light shine before others.,
C So that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Alleluia.

Kyrie

L O Lord,	C Have Mercy on us.
L O Christ,	C Have Mercy on us.
L O Lord,	C Have Mercy on us.

Isaiah 58:3–9a

³“Why have we fasted, and you see it not?
 Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?”
Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure,
 and oppress all your workers.
⁴Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
 and to hit with a wicked fist.
Fasting like yours this day
 will not make your voice to be heard on high.
⁵Is such the fast that I choose,
 a day for a person to humble himself?
Is it to bow down his head like a reed,
 and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?
Will you call this a fast,
 and a day acceptable to the LORD?

⁶“Is not this the fast that I choose:
 to loose the bonds of wickedness,
 to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
 and to break every yoke?
⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
 and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
 and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
⁸Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
 and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
 the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
⁹Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
 you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’

Our church once hosted a concert by a husband and wife singing duo. They were popular in Lutheran circles and their concerts were well attended. Of course, they came with boxes of CDs that they autographed and sold after the concert.

Their faces beamed with smiles as they greeted their adoring fans and received glowing compliments while signing their CDs. As the people returned to their homes, I’m sure that they had nothing but good things to say about this talented couple.

Sad to say, I had the distinctly unpleasant experience of interacting with these “stars” when there were no fans around. They turned out to be rude, gruff, and ill-tempered with the “little people” who they expected to serve every one of their whims.

It turns out that my experience was not unique. I told a pastor friend the details of my encounter with them. He related similar interactions with this couple. He then shared with me an evaluation by another friend of ours. He described them as “pompous.” After reading our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah, I would say that my dealings with them illustrated another word, “hypocrisy.”

Our English word “hypocrite” is just a transliteration of the Greek word *hypokrités* (ὑποκριτής). It means actor, stage player, and by extension a pretender. We use it to describe a two-faced person. Jesus was particularly harsh in His judgment of religious hypocrites.

It’s not always easy to spot hypocrisy. I’m sure that the vast majority of this couple’s fans adored them. I wouldn’t want to do anything to burst their bubble.

However, God is immune to hypocrisy. He can see straight into the hearts of people.

Isaiah records the complaint of people who are asking God why He is ignoring their fasting and prayers. God answered that their fasting and prayers were not sincere. They were being hypocritical in their religious practices.

Fasting was a way to show humility and repentance before God. Yet God recognized that their outward fasting was simply a disguise for seeking their own pleasure and oppressing others. In the middle of fasting, they were quarreling and fighting. Their hypocrisy did not fool God. It was not acceptable to Him.

Fasting was a way to indicate a change of heart. That change had not happened.

The way for them to truly show a change of heart would be to free themselves from wickedness. They should be generous with those in need. When their hearts truly changed, they can pray to God and expect Him to hear and answer them.

Hypocrisy is always dangerous. But religious hypocrisy is soul destroying. Jesus warned the Pharisees and the scribes about it in Mark 7:6-7:

And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,
“This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.””

The antidote to hypocrisy is true repentance and faith that comes from the heart. You can't fake this. The Bible tells us, “The Lord looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7b).

Let our prayer for today be the words of David from Psalm 51:10-12.

Prayer:

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.

Friday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 5:16b

L Alleluia, Alleluia, Let your light shine before others.,

C So that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Alleluia.

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.
L O Christ, **C** Have mercy on us.
L O Lord, **C** Have mercy on us.

1 Corinthians 2:1–14

¹And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

⁶Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love him”—

¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

¹⁴The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “The natural person does not accept the things of the spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” These words are still important for us today.

Through the years, I have fielded questions from people who find it difficult to believe what the Bible says about sin and grace. Others reject God and everything that the Bible says about Him. None of this should be surprising. Natural people cannot understand spiritual things! It is only by the working of the Holy Spirit that we can come to faith and believe God’s word.

Even once we come to faith, some people still crave worldly wisdom rather than the wisdom of God. Sometimes this even affects pastors and their preaching.

It is reported that when rationalism first began to infect the Lutheran Church, a certain pastor fully embraced it. It is said that the text for his Christmas sermon was Luke 2:7, “She gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger.” Looking to make his sermon relevant, he preached on the importance of scientific cattle feeding. On Good Friday, his sermon was about the importance of having a will because a person never knows when he is going to die. These were two very practical sermons but not spiritual at all.

These examples may seem to be extreme but the same thing happens today. People complain to the pastor that his sermons aren’t relevant. So he decides to make them practical by preaching on “5 Ways to Improve Your Marriage” or “10 Ways to Become a Better Parent,” etc. Sermon series like these are often advertised on a church sign that I drive past regularly.

I wonder what the Apostle Paul would think. He described His sermons this way, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Jesus Christ must always be central to Christian preaching.

The Bible presents us with a variety of topics. We are compelled to proclaim the full counsel of God. But Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection and salvation through faith in Him must never take second place in Christian preaching.

Prayer: Almighty God, thank You for the gift of salvation. Preserve us from the foolishness of human wisdom and grant that we may always trust Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Amen.

Saturday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

Gradual Psalm 117:1–2a; 96:8

L Praise the LORD, all nations!
C Extol him, all peoples!
L For great is his steadfast love toward us,
C and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.
L Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
C bring an offering, and come into his courts!

Verse of the Day: Matthew 5:16b

L Alleluia, Alleluia, Let your light shine before others.,
C So that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Alleluia.

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.
L O Christ, **C** Have Mercy on us.
L O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

⁹But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love him”—

¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

In 1973, Clint Eastwood reprised his role as Inspector Harold Callahan, A.K.A. Dirty Harry, in the movie *Magnum Force*. The film ends with Callahan uttering this iconic line, “A man’s got to know his limitations.” It has been forever attached to Clint Eastwood and has entered the lexicon of often-quoted English phrases. This short sentence came to mind as I read 1 Corinthians 2:9-10.

There is great wisdom in recognizing human limitations in our ability to comprehend everything God does and what He intends to do. It is the height of folly to believe that even the most intelligent humans can grasp God’s power and abilities. Paul tells us that even our imagination is limited in its capacity to take in the magnitude of blessings and bliss that God has prepared for His people.

Jesus came to give us eternal life. But the only life that we experience on earth is life corrupted with sin. The eternal life that awaits us through faith in Christ is beyond our imagination. It is totally pure and unspoiled by sin. It is a life where love is perfect and our joy is complete.

May God grant us the ability to recognize our human limitations. May He also grant us the faith to understand that God uses His almighty power beyond limit to bless His people.

Prayer: O God, thank You for salvation through faith in Jesus. May we never presume to judge Your plans with human wisdom. Fill our hearts with joy and peace as we await eternity in paradise with You. Amen.

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