

The Last Sunday of the Church Year

November 26, 2023

No one knows the day or hour of Christ's return. He may come in the morning, or evening or midnight. Let us stay watchful by living in faith, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8: A Time for Everything

¹For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

²a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

⁴a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

⁵a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

⁶a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

⁷a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

⁸a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

The end of the Church Year is a time for sober reflection and joyful expectation of Christ's return. There is a time for frivolity and merriment but this is a time set aside for serious contemplation of our lives and the end times. As we see horrific news each day, the sinful world in which we live falls upon us. We cling to Jesus' promise to return and bring an end to these evil days. We pray that by the working of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament that we will persevere in faith to the end. May we always cling to the cross of Christ for hope and peace.

Thine Forever, God of Love

Lutheran Service Book 687, Lutheran Worship 256, The Lutheran Hymnal 338

(Alternate: **Lift High the Cross** Lutheran Service Book 837, Lutheran Worship 311, The Lutheran Hymnal n/a)



1 Thine for - ev - er, God of love! Hear us from Thy throne a - bove;
2 Thine for - ev - er! Oh, how blest They who find in Thee their rest!
3 Thine for - ev - er, Lord of Life! Shield us through our earth - ly strife.
4 Thine for - ev - er! Shep-herd, keep These Thy frail and trem-bling sheep;
5 Thine for - ev - er! Thou our guide, All our wants by Thee sup - plied,



Thine for - ev - er may we be Here and in e - ter - ni - ty!
Sav - ior, guard - ian, heav'n - ly friend, O de - fend us to the end!
Thou, the life, the truth, the way, Guide us to the realms of day.
Safe a - lone be - neath Thy care, Let us all Thy good-ness share.
All our sins by Thee for-giv'n; Lead us, Lord, from earth to heav'n.

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 39:4–5, 7–8, 12a; antiphon 2 Peter 3:13 NIV

L In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

C O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days;
let me know how fleeting I am!

L Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,
and my lifetime is as nothing before you.

C And now, O Lord, for what do I wait?
My hope is in you.

L Deliver me from all my transgressions.
Do not make me the scorn of the fool!

C Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears!
For I am a sojourner with you, a guest, like all my fathers.

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 In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

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: Eternal God, merciful Father, You have appointed Your Son as judge of the living and the dead. Enable us to wait for the day of His return with our eyes fixed on the kingdom prepared for Your own from the foundation of the world; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** **Amen.**

Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24

¹¹“For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹²As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. . . .

²⁰“Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²²I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

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

Gradual Revelation 7:14; Psalm 84:5

- L** These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.
- C** **They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**
- L** Blessèd are those whose strength is in you,
- C** **in whose heart are the highways to Zion.**

Psalm 95:1–7a

- L** ¹Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
- C** ²**Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!**
- L** ³For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.
- C** ⁴**In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.**
- L** ⁵The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

C ⁶Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

L ⁷For he is our God,

C and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

1 Corinthians 15:20–28

²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Verse of the Day: Revelation 22:13

L Alleluia, Alleluia I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, Alleluia.

C the beginning and the end. Alleluia.

Matthew 25:31-46

L The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 25th chapter.

C Glory to You, O Lord.

³¹[Jesus said:] “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

L This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to You, O Christ.

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

The King of Love My Shepherd Is

Lutheran Service Book 709, Lutheran Worship 412, The Lutheran Hymnal 431



1 The King of love my shep - herd is, Whose good - ness
2 Where streams of liv - ing wa - ter flow, My ran - somed
3 Per - verse and fool - ish oft I strayed, But yet in
4 In death's dark vale I fear no ill With Thee, dear



fail - eth nev - er; I noth - ing lack if
soul He lead - eth And, where the ver - dant
love He sought me And on His shoul - der
Lord, be - side me, Thy rod and staff my



I am His And He is mine for - ev - er.
pas - tures grow, With food ce - les - tial feed - eth.
gent - ly laid And home re - joic - ing brought me.
com - fort still, Thy cross be - fore to guide me.

5 Thou spreadst a table in my sight;
Thine unction grace bestoweth;
And, oh, what transport of delight
From Thy pure chalice floweth!

6 And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise
Within Thy house forever!

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Devotional thoughts:

Our Gospel lesson for the Last Sunday of the Church Year begins with Jesus saying, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.” This is quite a contrast to how it all began when a babe born in Bethlehem was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger!

Until the day when He returns, Christ’s body, the Church, will continue to be hidden from the eyes of the world. The Christian people will suffer tribulation, distress, and persecution just as Jesus did during His earthly

life. This will all change on the Last Day, that Great Day when Jesus will sit on His glorious throne with all the angels surrounding Him.

Not only will angels surround Him but all the nations of the earth will be gathered before the throne. The Great King, The Great Shepherd of the sheep, with eyes that penetrate the heart, will separate the people one from another as sheep from the goats with the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.

You and I and all believers will be on His right. We will hear Him speak the most breathtaking words that have ever touched our ears, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

What is the great gift that we and all believers receive? It will be the Kingdom, the kingdom of God prepared for us from the very beginning of creation!

You may be tempted to jump forward to the following words of Jesus when He says, "I was hungry and you gave me food, etc." However, please pause for a moment and ponder what Jesus has just said. In doing so, you will avoid much confusion about this passage of Scripture.

Did you notice that I called the kingdom a gift? Why did I use that word? Isn't the kingdom something that we earn by feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, and visiting those sick and in prison? I used the word gift because that is what Jesus says. He says that the kingdom is an inheritance! This one word is the key to understanding this entire passage of scripture. An inheritance is something earned and owned by someone and freely given to an heir who has no intrinsic right to claim it. In this case, the inheritance is given to God's children who have been adopted into His family by grace!

The Apostle Paul explains it this way in Galatians 4:4-7:

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

You can trace this theme of adoption and inheritance throughout the entire Bible. The Apostle John writes about it this way in 1 John 3:1-2

^{3:1} See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Now that we have cleared this up, we can progress to the rest of this lesson. Did you notice that when Jesus speaks to those on His right, He never mentions anything bad or evil that has been done by those standing there? Doesn't this seem odd to you? Are the people on the right perfect with no faults? The answer of course is, yes!

This is amazing to many people. Most people believe that God will judge people by their works. They say things like, "I've done more good than bad," or "I'm basically good," or "I'm not bad enough to go to hell" or "I'm better than those people who go to church." But it turns out that Jesus doesn't say any of those things to the people on the right! What is the answer?

Why are the people on the right perfect? It is because their sins have been washed away. Their sins have been forgiven. Because Jesus died on the cross and paid for their sins, God remembers their sins no more. In His eyes, these people are perfect. They receive the inheritance of eternal life.

Those on the left are different. Jesus doesn't mention anything evil about them. He simply states that they have never done the good things mentioned. In theological terms, they have committed sins of omission! Again, some may ask, how can this be? They must have done something good. The Bible answers that question as well. We learn in Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is impossible to please God.

So the solution is this. Those on the right are those who have faith. Their sins have been forgiven. All that remains on their record is the good things they have done in faith to the glory of God. Everything evil has been

washed away. On the other hand, those on the left have never done things that are truly good in God's eyes because they have never acted in faith. All that remains for them is sin.

The Church Year is a wonderful tool for guiding our faith. Next Sunday, we will begin our annual review of the life of Jesus with the first half, the festival half of the Church Year. We have just completed the second half of the Church Year that focuses on the life of the Church, the Christian people.

As this Church Year draws to a close, we are reminded that all things will end, even the world on which we live. You and I may live to see this end and the return of Jesus with all His angels. Or you and I may find our days running their course before Christ's return. Either way, we belong to the Lord. In life or in death, we are His. We have been adopted into His family. The inheritance of eternal life is ours. Because Jesus lives, we too shall live (John 14:19).

"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 4:6-7).

God's richest blessings to you in Christ.

Prayers

L Lord God, at the end of this Church Year, grant that we would look forward with joy and anticipation to the day when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him. Keep us steadfast in the faith until we day when we hear Jesus' gracious invitation, "'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

C Amen.

L Lord Jesus, our great and glorious king, until the day of day of Your return, move us in love to give food to the hungry, drink to those who thirst, and welcome to strangers. Let us never tire of clothing those in need and visiting those who are sick or in prison knowing that what we have done to the least of these Your brothers, we have done to You.

C Amen.

L Lord Jesus, You search for Your sheep and seek them out with Your Holy Word. Encourage Your pastors and Your people to seek the lost, bring back those who have strayed, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak.

C Amen.

L Heavenly Father, bless the homes of Your people, that parents may train their children with wisdom and love that children may know Your love and the salvation You have granted to them through faith in Your beloved Son, Jesus.

C Amen.

L O Lord of lords, You sustain every rule, authority, and power as You see fit, until this world's powers should pass away. Bless all in civil authority, that they would not provoke Your wrath but maintain order and justice for the peace of Your people.

C Amen.

L O God of peace, during this time of war in the ancient land of Israel and in Ukraine, we pray that You would grant a swift end to the conflict, that right and justice would prevail, and that You would grant Your mighty hand of protection to the innocent and helpless.

C Amen.

L Righteous God, You give leaders to every nation and people. Grant us good and wise public servants to defend the innocent and punish evil. Guard those who protect us, especially our armed forces, police, and firefighters.

C Amen.

L Almighty God, You have prepared Your kingdom for us from the foundation of the world. Preserve us in faith and love throughout our days, that we may care for Your servants and our neighbors with compassion and joy, looking toward that day when the Son of Man comes in His glory; through the same 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.

Crown Him with Many Crowns

Lutheran Service Book 525, Lutheran Worship 278, The Lutheran Hymnal 341

(Alternate: **Thine the Amen** Lutheran Service Book 680, Lutheran Worship n/a, The Lutheran Hymnal n/a)



1 Crown Him with man - y crowns, The Lamb up - on His throne;
2 Crown Him the vir - gin's Son, The God in - car - nate born,
3 Crown Him the Lord of love. Be - hold His hands and side,
4 Crown Him the Lord of life, Who tri - umphed o'er the grave



Hark how the heav'n-ly an - them drowns All mu - sic but its own.
Whose arm those crim-son tro-phies won Which now His brow a - dorn:
Rich wounds, yet vis - i - ble a - bove, In beau - ty glo - ri - fied.
And rose vic - to - rious in the strife For those He came to save.



A - wake, my soul, and sing Of Him who died for thee, And
Fruit of the mys - tic rose, Yet of that rose the stem, The
No an - gels in the sky Can ful - ly bear that sight, But
His glo - ries now we sing, Who died and rose on high, Who



hail Him as thy match-less king Through all e - ter - ni - ty.
root whence mer - cy ev - er flows, The babe of Beth - le - hem.
down - ward bend their won-d'ring eyes At mys - ter - ies so bright.
died e - ter - nal life to bring And lives that death may die.

- 5 Crown Him the Lord of heav'n,
Enthroned in worlds above,
Crown Him the king to whom is giv'n
The wondrous name of Love.
Crown Him with many crowns
As thrones before Him fall;
Crown Him, ye kings, with many crowns,
For He is king of all.

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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 Last Sunday of the Church Year November 27 – December 2, 2023

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 meditate 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.

Verse of the Day: Revelation 22:13

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, Alleluia.
C the beginning and the end. Alleluia.

Introit Psalm 39:4–5, 7–8, 12a; antiphon 2 Peter 3:13 NIV

- L** In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth,
the home of righteousness.
C O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days;
let me know how fleeting I am!
L Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,
and my lifetime is as nothing before you.
C And now, O Lord, for what do I wait?
My hope is in you.
L Deliver me from all my transgressions.
Do not make me the scorn of the fool!
C Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears!
For I am a sojourner with you, a guest, like all my fathers.
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 In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth,
the home of righteousness.

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. |

You may have heard it said, “Life is a journey, not a destination.” I suppose there may be truth in those words if by them it is meant that we should stop and smell the roses along the way. However, anyone actually thinking about this as a motto for life will immediately see the foolishness. Destination is everything.

During the pandemic, we longed to visit our children who lived in British Columbia, Florida, and Connecticut. However, we were forced to remain at home. I didn’t really care whether we would travel by car, train, airplane, or boat! I didn’t care about the journey. It was irrelevant. I just wanted to be at the journey’s end with my family.

The introit this week puts our focus on the all-important destination of life’s journey, the new heaven and the new earth. We read about it in Revelation 21. This destination is the time when we live with our family. We live with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We will live with God for all eternity. Compared to this destination, our journey here on earth is but a blink of an eye.

In this Psalm, David recognizes that his life on earth is nothing but a few handbreadths compared to eternity. When we measure our days properly, we discover that they are fleeting.

Our sojourn here on earth is watered by tears. If life is only a journey, we are to be pitied.

But God has delivered us from this passage through sin and death. He has prepared for us an inheritance in heaven. He sent His only-begotten Son to liberate us from this death march and make us His own when there will be no more dying, only light with the Lamb eternally.

- L** Let us pray. Visit, O Lord, the homes in which Your people dwell. Keep all harm and danger far from us during our journey through life. Grant that we may dwell together in peace under the protection of Your holy angels until we share eternally in Your blessings at our ultimate destination in heaven; 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: Revelation 22:13

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, Alleluia.
C the beginning and the end. 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. Eternal God, merciful Father, You have appointed Your Son as judge of the living and the dead. Enable us to wait for the day of His return with our eyes fixed on the kingdom prepared for Your own from the foundation of the world; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen

Pondering the end of the Church Year and Jesus' return to judge the living and the dead, it would be good for us to review the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed and its explanation by Martin Luther,

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.

What does this mean? I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

Prayer: Eternal God, merciful Father, You have appointed Your Son as judge of the living and the dead. Enable us to wait for the day of His return with our eyes fixed on the kingdom prepared for Your own from the foundation of the world; through Jesus Christ, 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: Revelation 22:13

L Alleluia, Alleluia I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, Alleluia.
C the beginning and the end. 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.

Psalm 95:1–7a

L ¹Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
C ²Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
L ³For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.
C ⁴In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.
L ⁵The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.
C ⁶Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
L ⁷For he is our God,
C and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

¹Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

²Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! (Psalm 95:1-2).

These words from Psalm 95 are an important guide to worship. Worship includes singing, joy, and praise. Last week we celebrated Thanksgiving. Many of us are thankful for food and drink, house, and home, spouse and children and all that we have to support this body and live. However, Psalm 95:1 is a powerful reminder that our most precious gift is salvation. May we never forget this whether we are in a worship service, our work place, out in nature, or at home.

Most churches will celebrate Thanksgiving with services today rather than tomorrow. Please pardon my Ebenezer Scrooge take on this. This appears to me as just another way to get God out of the way so that we can go about our real business of merriment on the holiday. I remember a few years ago when Christmas fell on a Sunday, many churches cancelled their services so that people could be with their families. This all seems topsy-turvy to me. The primary purpose of Thanksgiving is thanksgiving! That is, giving thanks to God!

Wherever and whenever you choose to worship, you may want to sing the Venite, Psalm 95:1-7—our psalm for the week. It is found in the service of Matins on page 220 of the Lutheran Service Book, or page 236 in Morning prayer. Versions in Lutheran Worship are on page 209 and 237. The Lutheran Hymnal has the Venite on page 33.

Prayer: Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! Amen.

Thursday

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

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Revelation 22:13

L Alleluia, Alleluia I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, Alleluia.

C the beginning and the end. 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.

Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24

¹¹“For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹²As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. . . .

²⁰“Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²²I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

These words of the Lord God, recorded by Ezekiel, are both a comfort and a warning to us at the end of the Church Year.

First, they are a great comfort to us as we remember that the Lord is my Shepherd (Psalm 32:1). I shall not want. They are a great comfort to us when we remember that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who came to seek and save the lost (John 10:14; Luke 19:10). He rescues us and feeds us. He binds up the injured and strengthens the weak.

However, it is also a warning to the arrogant and mean-spirited. The Lord God will not tolerate the self-centered and pushy sheep. No, He will judge them!

Thank God, that we are in His flock and that the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

Psalm 23 KJV

¹ The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Friday

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

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Revelation 22:13

L Alleluia, Alleluia I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, Alleluia.

C the beginning and the end. 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 15:20–28

²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule

and every authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

1 Corinthians 15 is the great Resurrection Chapter of the Bible. It is good to be familiar with it.

Jesus is the “firstfruits” of those who have fallen asleep. Notice that Paul references death for a Christian as not much more than falling asleep. Ever since that time, we have often considered death simply falling asleep in Jesus.

Firstfruits is a concept not much used in our culture. In Bible times, firstfruits was an offering given at the beginning of the harvest. Firstfruits happens in the Jewish calendar at about the same time as Easter in our calendar. When Paul calls Jesus, “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep,” he is saying that Jesus is the first to be raised from the dead! We, who believe in Jesus as our savior, will all certainly follow. On this day after Thanksgiving, we are thankful for the resurrection from the dead that will come on the last day.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in Your death on the cross, You completed Your work of bearing all our burdens and on the third day showed us in Your resurrected body the firstfruits of the new creation. Raise us up on the Last Day that we might live with You forever; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saturday

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

C Amen.

Gradual Revelation 7:14; Psalm 84:5

L These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.

C They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

L Blessed are those whose strength is in you,

C in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

Verse of the Day: Revelation 22:13

L Alleluia, Alleluia I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, Alleluia.

C the beginning and the end. 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.

Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24

¹¹“For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹²As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land.

There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. . . .

²⁰“Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²²I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

The shepherd theme is plentiful in the Bible. It is good for us to consider our Old Testament lesson from Ezekiel once again. God declares that He will seek out His flock and rescue His sheep.

These are comforting words, especially in a time when society seems to be dominated by the anti-religion crowd. God will never neglect us. We may feel lost in a flood of secularism but God will seek us out and feed us with rich pasture. God promises to bring back the strayed and bind up the injured. He will strengthen the weak and bring justice to the oppressed.

God fulfilled His promise when He sent the Good Shepherd to lay down His life for the sheep. We are thankful that we are the sheep of His pasture who are led beside the still waters to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Prayer: O Lord God, our shepherd, You gather the lambs of Your flock into the arms of Your mercy and bring them home. Comfort us with the certain hope of the resurrection to everlasting life and a joyful reunion with those we love who have died in the faith; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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