

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost September 24, 2023

Have you ever examined how foreign God's grace is to our human understanding? We like to see "the best man win." We like to hiss the villain and cheer the hero. Evil must lose and good must win. You should get what you deserve.

This is all well and good in the economy of this world but in the light of God's perfect and holy law, you and I deserve nothing but death on account of our many sins. There is no way around it. In the end, evil must lose and good must win!

Thanks be to God that in Christ, evil was forever defeated on the cross and the goodness of Christ won in the resurrection. Christ's life and resurrection become ours not because of God's justice but because of His grace. We receive the benefits of forgiveness, life, and salvation even though we deserve nothing but punishment and death. Thank God for the generosity of His Grace.

Paul Speratus put it this way in his magnificent hymn, *Salvation unto Us Has Come*, published in the first Lutheran hymnal in 1524 just seven years after the posting of the 95 Theses. It is said that Luther was moved to tears when he first heard this hymn. You can read the hymn in its entirety in *Lutheran Service Book* 555.

It was a false, misleading dream
That God His Law had given
That sinners could themselves redeem
And by their works gain heaven.
The Law is but a mirror bright
To bring the inbred sin to light
That lurks within our nature.

Salvation unto us has come
By God's free grace and favor;
Good works cannot avert our doom,
They help and save us never.
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone,
Who did for all the world atone;
He is our one Redeemer.

Stanzas 3 & 1
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Salvation unto Us Has Come

Lutheran Service Book 555, Lutheran Worship 355, The Lutheran Hymnal 377

Stanzas 1-6



1 Sal - va - tion un - to us has come By God's free grace and fa - vor;
2 What God did in His Law de - mand And none to Him could ren - der
3 It was a false, mis - lead - ing dream That God His Law had giv - en
4 From sin our flesh could not ab - stain, Sin held its sway un - ceas - ing;



Good works can - not a - vert our doom, They help and save us nev - er.
Caused wrath and woe on ev - 'ry hand For man, the vile of - fend - er.
That sin - ners could them - selves re - deem And by their works gain heav - en.
The task was use - less and in vain, Our guilt was e'er in - creas - ing.



Faith looks to Je - sus Christ a - lone, Who did for all the
Our flesh has not those pure de - sires The spir - it of the
The Law is but a mir - ror bright To bring the in - bred
None can re - move sin's poi - soned dart Or pu - ri - fy our



world a - tone; He is our one Re - deem - er.
Law re - quires, And lost is our con - di - tion.
sin to light That lurks with - in our na - ture.
guile - ful heart— So deep is our cor - rup - tion.

5 Yet as the Law must be fulfilled
Or we must die despairing,
Christ came and has God's anger stilled,
Our human nature sharing.
He has for us the Law obeyed
And thus the Father's vengeance stayed
Which over us impended.

6 Since Christ has full atonement made
And brought to us salvation,
Each Christian therefore may be glad
And build on this foundation.
Your grace alone, dear Lord, I plead,
Your death is now my life indeed,
For You have paid my ransom.

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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 116:12–13, 15–16; antiphon: Psalm 116:7

- L** I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the Lord.
- C** **What shall I render to the Lord
for all his benefits to me?**
- L** I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord,
- C** **Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his saints.**
- L** I O Lord, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds.
- 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** I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the Lord.

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: Lord God, heavenly Father, since we cannot stand before You relying on anything we have done, help us trust in Your abiding grace and live according to Your Word; 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 55:6–9

⁶“Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
⁷let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

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

Gradual Psalm 34:9, 19, alt.

- L** Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing!
- C** Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

Psalm 27:1–9

- L** ¹The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
- C** ²**When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.**
- L** ³Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.
- C** ⁴**One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.**
- L** ⁵For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.
- C** ⁶**And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me,
and will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.**
- L** ⁷Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!
- C** ⁸**You have said, “Seek my face.”
My heart says to you, “Your face, LORD, do I seek.”**
- L** ⁹Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger,
- C** **O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not,
O God of my salvation!**

Philippians 1:12–14, 19–30

¹²I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

¹⁴And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. . .

¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

²⁷Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Verse of the Day Ephesians 2:8

L Alleluia, Alleluia. By grace you have been saved through faith, Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. Alleluia.

Matthew 20:1–16

L The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 20th chapter.

C Glory to You, O Lord.

¹[Jesus said:] “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ ⁵So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ ⁷They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ ⁸And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ ⁹And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, ¹²saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ ¹³But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first last.”

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

Salvation unto Us Has Come

Lutheran Service Book 555, Lutheran Worship 355, The Lutheran Hymnal 377
Stanzas 7-10

7 Let me not doubt, but truly see
Your Word cannot be broken;
Your call rings out, "Come unto Me!"
No falsehood have You spoken.
Baptized into Your precious name,
My faith cannot be put to shame,
And I shall never perish.

8 The Law reveals the guilt of sin
And makes us conscience-stricken;
But then the Gospel enters in
The sinful soul to quicken.
Come to the cross, trust Christ, and live;
The Law no peace can ever give,
No comfort and no blessing.

9 Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone
And rests in Him unceasing;
And by its fruits true faith is known,
With love and hope increasing.
For faith alone can justify;
Works serve our neighbor and supply
The proof that faith is living.

10 All blessing, honor, thanks, and praise
To Father, Son, and Spirit,
The God who saved us by His grace;
All glory to His merit.
O triune God in heav'n above,
You have revealed Your saving love;
Your blessed name we hallow.

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Devotional thoughts:

Retirement has its perks. One unexpected perk is time to study scripture in more depth.

You may think that as a pastor, I spent 40+ years pouring over my Bible, commentaries, Greek New Testament, and Hebrew Old Testament. I suppose in some sense that is true. But in reality, the demands of the pastoral office were such that when I became interested in some portion of Scripture, I would be forced to move on. Like many other vocations, calendars and deadlines were my taskmasters.

Recently, I sought to answer the question, "What is a denarius?" The simple way to answer that question is to look at the footnote in the text for today's Gospel lesson. The ESV explains, "A denarius was a day's wage for a laborer." Before my retirement, I would have been satisfied and moved on. But now I have the freedom to go down this rabbit hole and ask the question, "How do we know that?" What followed was a fascinating journey resulting in a new appreciation for this parable of "The Laborers in the Vineyard."

It turns out the reason commentators say, "A denarius was a day's wage for a laborer" is because Jesus indicates those who worked all day agreed to work for a denarius. Do you see the circular reasoning? In reading the parable of "The Laborers in the Vineyard," I wanted to know what a denarius is. The footnote says, "It's a day's wage." It's a day's wage because it is in the parable! This was not very satisfying, so I went on my quest for a better answer. What I discovered was surprising indeed.

I learned that the Romans introduced a coin called a denarius more than 200 years before Jesus was born. It continued to be minted and used until the middle of the eighth century when it morphed into a penny with the same weight of silver. So the penny you have in your purse or pocket is the direct descendant of the denarius. (This is true unless you live in Canada, where the penny was abolished in 2012.) For this reason, the King James Version of the Bible accurately translates a denarius in this passage as “a penny” which can be misleading for modern readers.

So how did a day’s wage become a penny? As you can guess, the value of a denarius changed over time, constantly being devalued. In Jesus’ day, a denarius contained 3.9 grams of 98% pure silver. That is the equivalent of \$3.30 in our time. That’s better than a penny but was it a day’s wage? The surprising answer seems to be no! Most likely, it was actually more than a day’s wage.

Herod, who ruled the Holy Land at the time of Jesus’ birth, paid his soldiers only 1.73 denarii per week! Roman soldiers did better. They were paid 4.3 denarii for a seven day week! It turns out that a denarius is not a day’s wage. It is more than 50% greater than a day’s wage! The surprising discovery is that the master of the house was generous to all the workers. He was generous to those who worked for an hour but he was also generous to those who worked all day!

The application is obvious. In God’s kingdom, generosity is the order of the day. No one gets what they deserve! They all receive mercy and grace!

I have often heard it said, “It isn’t fair that someone can come to faith at life’s end and receive the same gift of heaven granted to people who have had to suffer through church for their entire lives.” I suppose it wasn’t said with those exact words, but it was implied.

These thoughts betray a lack of understanding of grace. The reason they don’t understand grace is that they don’t understand sin and its deadly consequences. As we prayed in the collect, “we cannot stand before You relying on anything we have done.” Or as Paul Speratus wrote, “It was a false, misleading dream” that we can earn salvation. We all sin. We all fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). There is none that doeth good, no not one! (Romans 3:12). The wages of sin is death! But the free gift of God is eternal life (Romans 6:23).

As we sing in the old-time hymn, Rock of Ages:

Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill Thy Law’s demands;

All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling.

LSB 761 from stanzas 2 & 3, Augustus Toplady, Public Domain

What should have been the response of those who worked all day? They should have rejoiced at the generosity of the master, first to them and then to the rest. Instead, they revealed humanity’s warped sense of fairness. They were happy to receive more than they deserved but no one else should ever have more.

May God preserve us from such thoughts. May God grant us happiness and joy at His generosity, mercy, and grace in Christ. May we join St. Paul in declaring, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15 KJV).

“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** O Lord, grant that we would rejoice in the light of Christ and His salvation, and that sinners would find refuge in His mercy and comfort in His forgiveness.
- C** Amen.
- L** Heavenly Father, embolden your people to confess the truth steadfastly and to witness boldly to our only Savior, Jesus Christ.
- C** Amen.
- L** Merciful Lord, we give You humble thanks for instituting holy marriage and for the blessing of family. Grant that these gifts would be cherished and honored in our society and especially within the household of faith.
- C** Amen.
- L** O Lord, grant that we would ever cherish Your message of law and Gospel. Let us faithfully teach truthfully concerning sin and grace.
- C** Amen.
- L** Righteous God, You give leaders to every nation and people. Grant us good and wise public servants defend the innocent and punish evil. Guard those who protect us, especially our armed forces, police and firefighters.
- C** Amen.
- L** Heavenly Father, Your Son came to heal the sick and forgive sinners. Hear our prayers for those who suffer in any way. Restore them according to Your gracious will, and strengthen their trust in Your faithfulness and love. Let Your blessings rest upon all medical personnel and first responders who come to our aid in time of need.
- 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.

Hark, the Voice of Jesus Crying

Lutheran Service Book 826, Lutheran Worship 318, Lutheran Hymnal 496



1 Hark, the voice of Je - sus cry - ing, "Who will go and work to - day?
2 If you can - not speak like an - gels, If you can - not preach like Paul,
3 If you can - not be a watch - man, Stand - ing high on Zi - on's wall,
4 Let none hear you i - dly say - ing, "There is noth - ing I can do,"



Fields are white and har - vests wait - ing— Who will bear the sheaves a - way?"
You can tell the love of Je - sus, You can say He died for all.
Point - ing out the path to heav - en, Of - f'ring life and peace to all,
While the mul - ti - tudes are dy - ing And the Mas - ter calls for you.



Loud and long the Mas - ter call - eth; Rich re - ward He of - fers thee.
If you can - not rouse the wick - ed With the judg - ment's dread a - larms,
With your prayers and with your boun - ties You can do what God com - mands;
Take the task He gives you glad - ly, Let His work your plea - sure be;



Who will an - swer, glad - ly say - ing, "Here am I, send me, send me?"
You can lead the lit - tle chil - dren To the Sav - ior's wait - ing arms.
You can be like faith - ful Aar - on, Hold - ing up the proph - et's hands.
An - swer quick - ly when He call - eth, "Here am I, send me, send me!"

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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 Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 25 – 30, 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 Ephesians 2:8

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. By grace you have been saved through faith, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. Alleluia.

Introit Psalm 116:12–13, 15–16; antiphon: Psalm 116:7

- L** I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the Lord.
C What shall I render to the Lord
for all his benefits to me?
L I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord,
C Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his saints.
L I O Lord, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds.
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 I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the Lord.

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.

The psalmist asks, “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?” This prompts me to ask, “What are the benefits you have received from the Lord?”

Or as sung by Tennessee Ernie Ford in a song I remember from my youth:

Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God hath done;

This is a good reminder. As the hymn begins:

When upon life’s billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

We each have blessings from God. Some are commonplace and we take them for granted until they are gone. As Luther says,

He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.

He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.

He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.

Yet even beyond these, Psalm 116 reminds us that the greatest blessing of all is God’s mercy and salvation. God is not required to listen to our pleas. He could have abandoned us to our own destiny. But He chose to send His only-begotten Son to be our savior, to pay for our sins upon the cross, and to grant us eternal life and salvation.

“What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?” Nothing I do can ever repay God for all He has done for me. I will simply offer to Him the sacrifice of my thanksgiving.

L Let us pray. O Lord, our God, thank you for all Your benefits to me. Grant that I may always offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving as I drink from the cup of salvation through Jesus Christ my 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 Ephesians 2:8

L Alleluia, Alleluia. By grace you have been saved through faith, Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. 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. Lord God, heavenly Father, since we cannot stand before You relying on anything we have done, help us trust in Your abiding grace and live according to Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
C Amen.

There are two religions in the world. The first one that seems logical and is the bases for all other religions is the idea that everything depends on what you think, say, or do. God, the supreme being, karma, or whatever will reward your good life and ultimately punish evil.

Unfortunately, this was the religion of the Pharisees and it is the religion of some who call themselves Christians. It is expressed in words like these, “I will go to heaven because I am basically a good person.”

When people compare themselves to the evil around us, it is no doubt that they could be misled into believing such an idea.

However, the real point of comparison is the holy and totally righteous God. As Jesus says, you “must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). To this, we respond, but nobody is perfect. Exactly right!

No one is perfect but this is what God requires. This leads us to the second religion, true Christianity. In this religion, people cannot rely on anything that they have done. Everything depends on what God has done for you in Christ. It is not a religion of what we do but it is the religion of God’s grace. Jesus has been perfect for us. He gives you His righteousness and takes your sin upon Himself on the cross. Now you are perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect because that perfection has been given to you as a gift and you have received it by faith.

Prayer: Lord God, heavenly Father, since we cannot stand before You relying on anything we have done, help us trust in Your abiding grace and live according to Your Word; 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 Ephesians 2:8

L Alleluia, Alleluia. By grace you have been saved through faith, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. 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 27:1–9

L ¹The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

- C** ²When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.
- L** ³Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.
- C** ⁴One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.
- L** ⁵For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.
- C** ⁶And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me,
and will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.
- L** ⁷Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!
- C** ⁸You have said, “Seek my face.”
My heart says to you, “Your face, LORD, do I seek.”
- L** ⁹Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger,
- C** O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not,
O God of my salvation!

I have often read Psalm 27 at the bed side of those in the hospital or facing death. It has become one of my favorite psalms.

The first verse reads, “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

In the hospital as in all of life, there are many things to fear: surgery, illness, pandemics, unemployment. The list goes on and on. Psalm 27 reminds us that we may choose to be afraid but with the Lord on our side, we never need to fear.

Although not in our reading for this week, Psalm 27:13 says, “I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!” Although David wrote this centuries ago, he is in the land of the living today because of Jesus, our savior. We too look forward to living forever in heaven because Jesus died and rose again.

Finally, the Psalm concludes in the NIV, “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord” (Psalm 27:14 NIV). During difficult times, wild fires, hurricanes, and national unrest, David reminds us to wait for the Lord. May He grant us patience and faith to be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for being at our side in times of stress and anxiety. Help us to have confidence that one day we will join You and all the saints in eternity in the land of the living. Grant us that until then, we may be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord, through our Savior, Jesus. Amen.

Thursday

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

Verse of the Day Ephesians 2:8

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. By grace you have been saved through faith, Alleluia.
- C** Alleluia, Alleluia. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. 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 55:6–9

⁶“Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
⁷let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah reminds us that there is a time or day of grace. This time can come to an end. Before that happens, now is the time to seek the Lord while He may still be found. There may come a time when it is too late.

As a pastor, God has granted me a few opportunities to witness people coming to faith as death was near. This has been a great blessing to me.

One such time occurred when a neighbor was diagnosed with cancer. A few weeks before, he declared to me, “Phil, I don’t believe anything.” I certainly was sorry to hear that but at the time we were not in a position to discuss the issue.

A few weeks later, a knock came at my door. It was late in the evening. His wife stood there in tears. She explained to me that they had just received the terrible news. Six weeks later, he was gone.

I went that night and shared the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus with this gentleman. In the following weeks, I had more opportunities. While they were preparing to take him from his home to the hospital for the last time, stood next to him and asked if he believed this. He assured me that he did. I then asked if he had been baptized. He said that he had. I am confident that I will see him again in heaven.

As I reflected on that event, I realized that this man worked in a very dangerous profession. I also knew that he often traveled many miles by car to visit family and friends. It was entirely possible that he could have suddenly lost his life without warning as often happens to people. However, God granted him cancer. This gave him the opportunity to reflect on eternity. God also worked it out that when the time was near, he was living next door to a pastor. I certainly do not know all the other factors that God used for this man’s conversion but I am thankful that he came to faith while there was still time.

Prayer: O Lord God, grant us wisdom to see You while You may be found. Amen.

Friday

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

Verse of the Day Ephesians 2:8

L Alleluia, Alleluia. By grace you have been saved through faith, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. 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.

Philippians 1:12–14, 19–30

¹²I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

¹⁴And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. . .

¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

²⁷Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Philippians is a treasure trove of insight into the life of faith. This section of Philippians is just one example. However, verses 22 & 23 jump to the forefront for our consideration.

I once met a woman that was so overcome by grief at the loss of her husband that she desperately wanted to depart and be in heaven with him. Over the years, I have encountered a number of Christians who have expressed similar feelings. They are not alone. The Apostle Paul echoes their sentiment with these words, “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”

We all join Paul in the knowledge that life in eternity with Jesus in heaven is better than the life we experience here in time. Then why aren’t we there? Why hasn’t God brought my life to a conclusion?

Paul gives us the answer. It applies to him and to all of us. He writes, “To remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”

There is a reason that you are not in heaven today. God has some plan or work for you to complete here on earth for Him. There is someone who needs your service. There are people who will receive a blessing because you are here.

The same was true for Jesus. His ministry continued for three years. He didn’t immediately go to the cross because it wasn’t the right time.

So it is also for each of us. Jesus is the Savior. He died on the cross for your sins. He opened heaven’s door for you. One day, just as He said to the thief on the cross, we will be with Him in paradise. Until that time, there is someone who needs you to be here. You may not know who it is but God does.

Prayer: O Lord, give us the assurance that our time here on earth is valuable to you and the people around us. When it is Your will, grant us the knowledge of the necessity of our service. Until that time, grant us faith to trust that you have an ultimate purpose for our activities here on earth, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Saturday

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

C Amen.

Verse of the Day Ephesians 2:8

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. By grace you have been saved through faith, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. Alleluia.

Gradual Psalm 34:9, 19, alt.

- L** Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing!
C Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

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. |

Ephesians 2:8 could be considered that theme verse for this week. Everything about our lessons this week reflected on salvation by grace through faith for Christ's sake.

You may ask, "Isn't this true every week?" Indeed it is! However, this week its presence was so overwhelming that it can't be ignored.

Why does God love you so much? No one knows. As Isaiah reminds us, God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8, 9). Nevertheless, He does because God is love.

Ponder these words from 1 John 4:7-19:

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹In 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. ¹⁰In 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.

¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us.

Prayer:

- 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.

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