Sermon for October 4th, 2026
EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Deuteronomy 10:12-21

12 "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, **13** and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? **14** Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. **15** Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. **16** Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. **17** For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. **18** He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. **19** Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. **20** You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. **21** He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. **22** Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.

Psalm 34:8-22

8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
9 Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no lack!
10 The young lions suffer want and hunger;
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

11 Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
12 What man is there who desires life
and loves many days, that he may see good?
13 Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.
14 Turn away from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
and his ears toward their cry.
16 The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.
17 When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears
and delivers them out of all their troubles.
18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves the crushed in spirit.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.

20 He keeps all his bones;
not one of them is broken.
21 Affliction will slay the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

1 Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,

2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, **5** that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— **6** even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— **7** so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, **8** who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Matthew 22:41-46

41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, **42** saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." **43** He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

44 "'The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet"'?

45 If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" **46** And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Our text for meditation this Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

The Corinthian church, to whom St. Paul is writing, was a complete and total mess. Right after this positive greeting, in the very same chapter, the Apostle complains about the factionalism that was arising in the congregation, with one man saying "I follow Paul," another saying "I follow Apollos," and another saying "I follow Cephas."[1] In other words, they were fighting over their favorite "influencers" in the Church and dividing the church over it. But their situation is worse than mere factionalism, for while they were arguing over which Christian teacher is the best they were tolerating crass incestuous sexual sin.[2] They were also suing one another over frivolous matters, eating foods sacrificed to idols as a show of piety, getting drunk at Communion, having chaotic Sunday services

1 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, through to the fourth chapter.
2 1 Corinthians 5

with people speaking randomly in tongues, and some of their members also denied the Resurrection of the dead.[3] Needless to say, the Apostle rightly spends most of his Epistle being upset with them.

So then, knowing how the *rest* of the Epistle goes, this introductory praise in our reading becomes quite jarring. If St. Paul intended to spend most of his writing condemning their sins, squabbles and scheming, then how on earth could he thank God for anything good here? Not only that, but why would he *always* thank God for them? They're an insult to Christianity, not something praiseworthy!

The Continuing Work of Christ

The reason for his gratitude is simple: Christ saved them. St. Paul looks to our Lord's merit more than their dysfunction, and all he sees in that regard is improvement. Initially these people were all pagans, living in sin without a care as to the wickedness of their lifestyles; they bowed down to false gods, fornicated, stole, fought, killed, engaged in homosexuality and drunkenness, etc.[4] Then they heard and believed in the Gospel, and everything changed. The sense of the text here is that as soon as the Corinthians began bearing testimony of their faith in Jesus, our Lord increased them in "all speech and all knowledge." By beginning with a comment on just how far they have come from their prior unbelief, St. Paul lets us know that his subsequent chastisements are *not* coming from a place of malice. The Corinthians are messed up; they are a lot *less* messed up than they used to be.

Not only did Christ save them, He continued to work in their hearts. St. Paul addresses the Corinthians as a people who are not only saved, but being sustained by our Savior in the faith by the continued forgiveness of their sins. He speaks confidently to them, saying that when Jesus returns they shall be guiltless. Think of it, a church with so many problems and sins being counted as guiltless! But so it is, for Jesus is always forgiving those who approach Him in penitence. His mercies are new every morning,[5] He brings forgiveness in His Name by the words of absolution and He brings even more at the Sacrament of the Altar! Though the Apostle is about to dig deep into the dysfunction of the Corinthians, he prefaces the entire letter with gratitude and an unshakeable belief that they will be preserved intact by our Lord until His Return.

Seeing the Improvement First

My friends, do you ever look back and think of yourself this way? So many Christians look at their pasts full of sin and all they can do is feel shame and remorse. But you should instead be praising our Lord for saving you and taking that guilt away. So many believers think about their deficiencies *now*, but if they considered where they are now as believers compared to *before* they were saved, then joy would surely replace their shame. Do not think of yourself as a horrible wretched worm of a sinner: God put that old sinner in the past and replaced it with a Saint at your baptism. Do not look upon your current problems to tell you who you are: look at what Christ does for you in sustaining your faith, and entrust Him to make you better.

We must see ourselves this way to fully understand the power of the Gospel. Christ dying and rising for us sinners means that we can no longer see ourselves as though we were damned. Problems with sin in our lives, like the Corinthian church, must upset us not because it means we are in perdition, but because we earnestly want to be conformed to the way *God* sees us. He calls you a saint, and justifies you before Him; now is the time to *live* like it, and to go to our Lord for help getting there.

Just as importantly my friends, do you see your fellow Christians this way? When you see the believer who is struggling with sin, do you write him off as a bad person, or do you see him as a dear

3 1 Corinthians 6-15
4 1 Corinthians 6:9-11
5 Lamentations 3:22-23

brother who needs some help? Do you pour scorn upon his head the way a Pharisee would, or do you thank God that he is better than he was before he became a Christian? In this very Epistle, St. Paul tells us to imitate him as he imitates Christ,[6] so we are bound to extend the same kindness to other believers that he extends to the Corinthians. This means that when another Christian – or even a congregation – is messed up, we do not look to their failures first, but instead we start with the faithfulness of our Lord. We rest confident that God will help them before we have anything to do with correcting their errors.

This of course takes much patience. You and I might encounter a brother or sister in Christ who has lapsed into their old drug habit or struggled more recently with pornography, or any other sin that may arise. We might be frustrated with their shortcoming, expecting better of them; after all, the same way *we* want to be conformed to the way God sees us, we rightly expect other believers to do likewise. But at the same time my friends, we are sinners too. We must correct our erring brothers gently, for we would wish them to do the same if we fell into sin.[7]

Conclusion

It may strike us as odd that St. Paul speaks so positively to a congregation with so many problems, but that is precisely his point. If we look to our own merit or righteousness to be the measure of our Christianity, then all we shall see is loss and despair. But if we look to the works of Christ, who died for us and rose again for us and grants us His Body and His Blood, then all we shall see is salvation and improvement. And if we can look to Him with such confidence for caring for our *own* lives, then we most certainly can do so when seeing the lives of other believers. May we treat them accordingly, even when we have to speak frankly as to their shortcomings.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

6 1 Corinthians 11:1
7 Galatians 6:1

Sermon for October 11th, 2026
NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Genesis 28:10-22

10 Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. **11** And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. **12** And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! **13** And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. **14** Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. **15** Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." **16** Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." **17** And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

18 So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. **19** He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. **20** Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, **21** so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, **22** and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you."

Psalm 84

1 How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
2 My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

3 Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.
4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! *Selah*

5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
6 As they go through the Valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
7 They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.

8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*
9 Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed!

10 For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.
12 O LORD of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you!

Ephesians 4:17-28

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. **18** They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. **19** They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. **20** But that is not the way you learned Christ!— **21** assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, **22** to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, **23** and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, **24** and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. **26** Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, **27** and give no opportunity to the devil. **28** Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. **29** Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Matthew 9:1-8

1 And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. **2** And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." **3** And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." **4** But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? **5** For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? **6** But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home." **7** And he rose and went home. **8** When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

Our text for meditation this Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Martin Luther wrote voluminously, publishing a great deal of books, commentaries, and translations. The total collection, called *Luther's Works*, spans approximately 79 large volumes and it is prohibitively expensive. But that said, there is a book of Luther's that he *didn't* write: the *Table Talk*. The *Table Talk* is a collection of things he said in conversation with his friends; after he went to be with the Lord, his colleagues and associates got together and wrote what they remembered him saying. Occasionally, you might hear some anti-Lutheran polemicist claim that there are heinous things written in it, as though the Reformer was secretly evil or something. But the reality is, the *Table Talk* is a great treasure for Christians everywhere, with right doctrine casually explained. Pertinent to our Old Testament reading for today, let us hear about a personal visionary experience Luther had:

> I shall relate the following circumstance:—I being on Good Friday last in my inner chamber, in fervent prayer, contemplating with myself how Christ my Saviour hung on the Cross, how he suffered and died for our sins, there suddenly appeared upon the wall a bright shining vision, and a glorious form of our Saviour Christ, with the five wounds, steadfastly looking upon me, as if it had been Christ himself corporeally. Now, at the first sight, I thought it had been some good Revelation: yet I recollected that surely it must needs be the juggling of the devil, for Christ appeareth unto us in his word, and in a meaner and more humble form; therefore I spake to the vision in this manner: "Avoid, thou confounded devil; I know no other Christ than he who was crucified, and who in his Word is pictured unto me." Whereupon the image vanished.[1]

Now, there are many who might encounter Luther saying this who would be offended. Who in their right mind would see a vision of our Savior and hand-wave it away like that? But as our reading for today shows us, the Reformer was absolutely correct to do and say what he did. As the "Jacob's Ladder" passage shows us, it is not spiritual experiences which enlighten us, but the Word of God – for faith comes by hearing, and hearing by that very Word.[2]

Jacob's Ladder

Jacob, the third Patriarch of Israel, had fled to Haran to escape the wrath of his brother Esau.[3] You see, he defrauded Esau of both his birthright and the family blessing, and so Esau planned to murder him. His mother Rebekah hears of her son's homicidal plans, and so she has Jacob flee to her brother Laban's estate. When we begin our passage, Jacob is in the middle of that journey. He is tired enough to sleep with his head on a rock for a pillow, completely exposed to the elements. It is remarkable that he fell asleep so quickly, as his mind must have been reeling being so full of thoughts about his sin and Esau's hateful reaction.

Yet sleep he did, and as soon as he was deep in slumber he had this dream of the ladder,[4] the angels and the Lord. The vision shows him a ladder with angels going up and down, almost as though they were taking shifts on earth to do the Lord's will. This is a marvelous way to get the future Patriarch's attention, I am sure. He looks upward into Heaven and sees the Lord standing there – most likely a pre-Incarnation appearance of our Lord Jesus who gives him the message from on high. Now my friends, I am sure that you are wondering: what is the meaning of the ladder? Why are angels going

1 From the condensed version of the *Table Talk,* found here: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/9841/9841-h/9841-h.htm
2 Romans 10:17
3 Genesis 27:41-28:5
4 It is more likely to be a large staircase, but we will not question the translators here.

up and down it? Are we supposed to learn something from this imagery?

My answer to those questions is that the ladder means *nothing* to us. Yes, angels exist and they do things here on earth. That is taught all over Scripture, and this dream of Jacob's does not contribute meaningfully to our understanding of how that works. Do angels need to walk down stairs to get to earth? I doubt it – they're angels, marvelously powerful beings who are not constricted by space and material the way we are. Do we Christians need to ascend such a ladder to get to Heaven? God forbid! Yet tragically, such an interpretation of this vision was offered by many of the Church Fathers, who decided that the vision formed a basis for their monastic obsession.[5] You see, according to their madness, each step on the stair supposedly represents some work of inner self-perfection a monk must obtain in his journey to Heaven. Perish the thought!

You see my friends, the experience matters little. Moses dedicated only one (one!) verse to what it is Jacob saw. This means that no matter how much we wish we knew, we shall not know the explanation for the ladder or why it was there. Of course, that will not stop foolish Christians from trying. Throughout history there have been endless cases of believers trying to use the Bible like it is a grimoire of black magic. They see Jacob's Ladder and decide they can mystically monk themselves into climbing to Heaven instead of trusting in Jesus for their salvation. They see the vision of the chariot in Ezekiel[6] and decide it's time to summon angels. They hear about the witch of Endor calling up Samuel's ghost and figure it would be a good idea to do some necromancy themselves.[7] For crying out loud, in the Renaissance there were theologians trying to invent "Christian Kabbalah" to chase after spiritual things made up by jewish rabbis.[8] All of this because they choose to chase emotional and mystical experiences over simply believing the Word of God. That there were angels on a ladder in a dream means nothing more than angels being on a ladder in a dream: it tells Jacob that he ought to pay careful attention to what he hears, and nothing more. But the fools of history, beset with a need to feel *special* or give heed to human pride, desire earnestly to pry into these things.

Jacob's Message

That there is only one verse dedicated to what the Patriarch saw in this dream tells us that it is of little consequence compared to the *message* that Jacob received. God speaks to him with great promises. Jacob will not be a wanderer and a fugitive his entire life; to the contrary, our Lord is *with him* and promises to bring him back to the Promised Land. Our Lord says to Jacob that he will have innumerable descendants on the earth, and one day one of his offspring will bless everyone – this offspring, as the word is singular, is Christ. In other words, God Himself gives Jacob the Gospel message in a prophetic form.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ.[9] Jacob responds to this Gospel message, not to seeing some angels going up and down. Hearing that God will bless him and bring a Savior to the world through his line is what inspires his offering of oil, which was a precious scarce resource for a man on the run. Hearing that God will *do* something for him is more valuable than peering into heavenly realities. Oh sure, Jacob could have decided to be some professional soothsayer and misused the Divine revelations the way the prophet Balaam did. He *could* have started some ancient equivalent to what greedy televangelists or "I went to Heaven" book-sales grifters do. For that matter, he could have started a cult – plenty of cults start with a man claiming he had a vision after all. But Jacob does none of these things because he now has faith in the one true God who proclaimed grace over him.

---

5 Gregory Nazianzus John Chrysostom, John Climacus, Guigo II and many others held this view.
6 Ezekiel 1, 10
7 1 Samuel 28
8 For a brief summary: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Kabbalah
9 Again, Romans 10:17

Jacob was not just fleeing because his brother wanted to kill him. Jacob was fleeing because his brother wanting to kill him was a consequence of his sins. He defrauded Esau *twice,* of both his birthright and blessing! But when God appears in this vision, our Lord has no condemnation to give him. Jacob was forgiven and considered *spotless* before our Lord, being justified by his faith in the promises he was hearing. So strong was this conversion, that he adds to his offering of oil by saying "since this is what God has offered me freely, then I am his and will tithe all that I receive." It was not the ladder which inspired this faith, he does not even mention the ladder when he makes his promise! But the *message* our Lord gave him that offered pardon and blessing. Just like his grandfather Abraham, he believed and was justified.[10] We must do likewise!

Conclusion

Luther held on to the promise that Jesus is to appear in the clouds on the Last Day.[11] Unlike the mystics, visionaries, cultists and hucksters, he held strongly to the Word's pronouncement that one only sees Christ in the Eucharist and when He returns in the clouds with the trumpet blast.[12] He stubbornly refused to hear any tall tales about visions, visits from dead saints, or even stories of Christ Himself appearing in someone's washroom. Luther had the Word and he held to it, meaning he had the same justifying faith that Jacob had. Even though Jacob *did* have such a vision, he held more closely to the message he received – to the Gospel! Let God take care of mysterious spiritual realities, we can learn about them after the Resurrection. In the meantime, may we share the faith of both the Patriarch and the Reformer, and rejoice that we belong to our Lord in accordance with the promises given in His Word.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

10 Genesis 15:6
11 https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1951/12/martin-luther-and-the-end-of-the-world
12 1 Thessalonians 4:16

Sermon for October 18th, 2026
TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Isaiah 55:6-9

6 "Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
7 let 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.
8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Psalm 27:1-10

1 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?
2 When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.
3 Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.
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.
5 For 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.
6 And now my head shall be lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!
8 You have said, "Seek my face."
My heart says to you,
"Your face, LORD, do I seek."
9 Hide not your face from me.
Turn not your servant away in anger,
O you who have been my help.
Cast me not off; forsake me not,
O God of my salvation!
10 For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
but the LORD will take me in.

Ephesians 5:15-21

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. **17** Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. **18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, **19** addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, **20** giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **21** submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Matthew 22:1-14

1 And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, **2** "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, **3** and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. **4** Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast."' **5** But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, **6** while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. **7** The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. **8** Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. **9** Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' **10** And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. **12** And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. **13** Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' **14** For many are called, but few are chosen."

Our text for meditation this Twentieth Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Occasionally you may hear someone say that the Old Testament is so different that it could not possibly have the same religion presented by the New Testament. Some people go so far as to say that the God of the Old Testament is a *different* deity than the God of the New Testament; this is known as the heresy of Marcionism, named after Marcion of Sinope – a man who was disturbed by some of the

harsher things he read in Scripture. He saw the wars of Israel, the conquest of Canaan, the Great Flood, and more painful consequences of sin and decided that there simply *must* be a different deity behind it. He proclaimed that there was no Gospel in the Old Testament, or if there was it was only a small shadow.

We hear things like this all the time from ignorant people, don't we? They seem to be blind to the fact that the Gospel is *all over the Old Testament!* Yes, the Old Testament has quite a lot to say about human failures, but that does not mean that there was no mercy nor promise of Grace. In our reading, Isaiah presents the road to salvation for any who would live. Though he does not speak of our Lord Jesus by name, he still patterns out the way forward that sounds familiar to any Christian. Let us demonstrate it by commenting on the text.

6 *"Seek the LORD while he may be found;*
call upon him while he is near;

Isaiah starts by saying God may be found. He is not visible to our eyes, we do not hear His voice with our ears, there is no scent to Him and we cannot touch Him, but He may be found. He dwells in unapproachable light, yet He can be known by His creatures. How then do we seek Him? Before anyone can answer, Isaiah speaks plainly: we must call upon Him. We cannot see God, but God can see us. We cannot hear His voice, but He can hear our prayers. This is the first step in seeking our Lord; starting in any other way is a fool's errand, for we are lost in our quest if we do not have His help. Here his preaching is identical to the New Testament, for just as Christ and the Apostles teach us how much our Lord listens to our prayers, so does Isaiah teach likewise.[1]

Isaiah writes as though there is a time limit, a window of opportunity that a man cannot miss or else he shall be lost. How long is this time limit? Your lifespan, my friends. We have until Christ returns or the day we shed our mortal coils to seek His Face. Isaiah says we must call upon Him while He is near: since He is omnipresent, He is *always* near. There is no place that is hidden from Him, and nor is He afar off. But do not delay to call upon Him, for you do not know how many breaths are allotted to you. Some men live a century, some pass on in their youth, and yet others make it to fifty. As you do not know when your time will come, you have no good reason to put off seeking our Lord and His salvation. This immanent judgment is present all over the New Testament as well – for crying out loud, that is the whole point of the Book of Revelation!

7 *let 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.

Truly seeking our Lord starts in earnest with prayer. But then one must repent, and in order to do that you have to look where God has revealed Himself. He listened to us, now it is time for us to listen to Him. This is done by consulting the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit inspired it all and kept it free from any kind of error, making it the perfect record of what God has said to mankind. After seeking His help in our spiritual quest, we must now pay attention to what the Word says – just as the Apostles constantly exhort us to do.

And what does the Bible say? While there are many events and genealogies recounted in the text of Scripture, the message specifically given to each and every one of us is this: we are sinners, and we must turn to our merciful God for forgiveness. It teaches us that God is the all-powerful Judge over all reality, but also that He is the all-compassionate Father who forgives us when we repent. The Word teaches us what to repent *of* as we learn the Ten Commandments: idolatry, blasphemy, dishonoring our

1 Matthew 6:25-34, Philippians 4:4-7, 1 Peter 5:7, and St. Paul's speech at the Areopagus in Acts 17

parents, murdering, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting. These are all Commandments which Christ Himself repeats,[2] and the Apostles proclaim likewise.[3]

Isaiah promises that God will abundantly pardon. This is to say, He is not just canceling the record of one's sins and taking away the punishment. That would be *mere* forgiveness. *Abundant* forgiveness tells us that the penitent is given *more* than that. I could forgive a man for slandering me, but still decide to avoid him in case he is tempted to slander me again. Someone might forgive a murderer for killing their loved one, but the murderer still has to pay his debt to the public for justice's sake. Yet the way that God forgives means that the one He pardons is considered part of the family. They are counted as though they had never sinned, and so they receive precious promises of eternal life and healing despite not deserving any of it. This foreshadows the revealing in the Gospel that we are justified by faith and promised a Resurrection unto eternal life.[4]

Furthermore, Isaiah preaches this message of repentance and salvation to people knowing that there is no way they could be saved otherwise. They must hear the message to believe, just as St. Paul says faith comes by hearing.[5] The prophet knows that the people are dead in their trespasses and sins, unable to save themselves – and this is exactly what our New Testament teaches![6] Isaiah proclaims a message wherein God is the only Actor in our salvation, we must wait upon and receive His offer, and this is the very impetus for proclaiming the Gospel today.

8 *For my thoughts are not your thoughts,*
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
9 *For as the heavens are higher than the earth,*
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Here our Lord shows us that the depths of His ways and wisdom are unsearchable.[7] His thoughts are higher than ours and He invites us to consider this in the context of forgiveness. Isaiah wrote to a people who could not understand why God would forgive people without them having to make sacrifices. They would not countenance loving someone who did them wrong. Yet just as Scripture tells us that Christ died for us while we were His enemies,[8] so too does Isaiah proclaim a God who loves people even when they are engaged in inexcusable iniquity. For such is His love that it goes beyond our understanding, but we are exhorted nonetheless to believe, repent and rejoice.

Conclusion

My friends, this is just one instance of Marcion and Marcionism being utterly, completely wrong. There is only one God who gave us both the Old and New Testaments, the Law as well as the Gospel, and there is a veritable *ocean* of passages that reflect this. But if anyone should say to you that the Old Testament does not contain the wealth of mercy and forgiveness that is found in the New, please show them this passage! And may their hearts swell upon hearing of our Lord's free offer of salvation, which endures from even during Isaiah's life to this very day.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

2 Matthew 19:16-19
3 The books of Ephesians and 1 Corinthians stand out in repeating these core rules.
4 Romans 3:20, 1 Corinthians 15
5 Romans 10:17
6 Ephesians 2:5, Colossians 2:13
7 Romans 11:33
8 Romans 5:10

Sermon for October 25th, 2026
REFORMATION SUNDAY

READINGS

Revelation 14:6-13

6 Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. **7** And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."
8 Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." **9** And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, **10** he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. **11** And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."
12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.
13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

Psalm 46

1 God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*
4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.
6 The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
7 The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*
8 Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.
10 "Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!"
11 The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

Romans 3:19-28

19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every
mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **20** For by works of the
law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.
21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the
Prophets bear witness to it— **22** the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who
believe. For there is no distinction: **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** and are
justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25** whom God put
forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness,
because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. **26** It was to show his righteousness
at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No,
but by the law of faith. **28** For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Matthew 11:11-19

11 "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the
Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. **12** From the days of John
the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. **13**
For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, **14** and if you are willing to accept it, he is
Elijah who is to come. **15** He who has ears to hear, let him hear.
16 "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and
calling to their playmates,

17 "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' **19** The Son of Man
came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax
collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

Our text for meditation this Reformation Sunday is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction: The Problem

About one hundred and fifty thousand people perish every day. That is six thousand two hundred and fifty every hour, or one hundred and four per minute, or close to two per second. While two thirds of these are due to age-related health problems or cancer, it still adds up to fifty six million per year... that's a lot of death.[1] To put this in perspective, that is just a few million away from the death toll of World War II, which stood at sixty million. The world loses a World War Two's worth of people every year.

Each one of these deaths is more than just a death. Not one of them is as simple as "this person was here and then he was not." Each person to pass on lived with varying degrees of pain, sorrow, oppression, poverty, disability, confusion, and strife. Mothers who live with decades of tears shed seeing their children die in war. Old men who waste away in body and mind as Alzheimer's and cancer erode everything to them. Young men broken by labor or thrown to the wolves in prison, young women carried off into the hands of traffickers. And the children – my friends, they are the most assaulted demographic: history is nothing more than a pile of dead children. And of all these, each time someone dies there is a great deal of sorrow welling up in the hearts of all who will miss them, often enough to

1 As of this writing, fifty million have died in 2026 so far: https://www.worldometers.info/

match the pain and suffering which *caused* their death in the first place.

Death is the problem. A pious soul might try to correct me here and say that our sin is the problem because it *causes* death, but that is simply not the case. Death was one of the punishments chosen by God on account of mankind's fall in the Garden of Eden. He *could* have chosen any other chastisement upon us and let our initial immortality remain, but that would be unjust. High treason is punishable by death in any just society: why wouldn't the Almighty King and Creator of all reality maintain that very rule for His own people? It would be unjust not to! And since Adam's sin corrupted our nature, we all end up sinning and thus we all are under the sentence of death: as St. Paul says in this very Epistle, "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."[2]

In the back of everyone's mind, they understand that this is the reality of the human condition: death is the problem. Because of this, two things are true for every man. First, every human being worships something; in light of the dangers and torments of the world, we trust in whatever we believe to be the source of all our good. There is no such thing as a true atheist. Second, every human being has a *savior*, someone or something that they trust in to alleviate the human condition. That second dynamic in man's life is the focus of our meditation for today and why it is so pertinent to the Reformation.

A savior or The Savior

Death is the problem, as well as all the suffering that it brings. Every individual has faith in a savior then to get them past this problem. The question every one of us must ask before we go to the grave is "Who is my savior?" Who do I look to for solving this problem? Now at this point I could go on and on about the proffered saviors of ancient and modern false religions. I could bring up krishna, shiva, allah, odin, ahura mazda, and more. I could point out the heretical false versions of the true God, from the false deity of the jews to the false gods of mormonism to the jehovah's witnesses and all sorts of other cults. But the problem is, none of these false religions and heretical cults offer salvation; they offer *transaction*. Do this to merit a good afterlife. Do that to earn resurrection. Follow this laundry list of stupid rules and don't forget to tithe endlessly so that you get a better reincarnation or whatever. False gods do little more than help someone work toward their goal.

This means my friends that for every man there are only two saviors to choose from: Jesus or the self. If a man refuses to believe in Jesus, all he has left is himself to get past the human condition. The people who believe in false religions find themselves bending over backwards to follow the maze of rules put out by the religious authorities in a crazed effort to pay off bad karma, follow the Law prescribed by Moses, get permission from allah to enjoy seventy two virgins, or stop existing altogether as siddhartha said. Because all of these religions are false, all their rules and all the works people do to follow them are completely futile. For the secular person, someone who claims no religion, this means acquiring lots of money, prestige, power, and pleasure so they can say they "had a good run" or "built a legacy." This is obviously fruitless, since the secular one's efforts still result in death.

Jesus is different. Jesus Christ came down from Heaven to die on a cross as a propitiation, a *satisfaction*, for the wrath of God on mankind. Knowing that no man could be justified – that is, declared righteous and meriting eternal life – by their own deeds, He came down to save us. Our Heavenly Father knew that no man can be his own savior, so He sent His only Son to be *The* Savior for us. Jesus died upon that Cross to pay the penalty we earned by our sins; He rose again so that whoever trusts in Him for salvation will not experience death, and in fact will live forever.[3]

Jesus is the Savior who *actually saves*. And if He saves you, then you do not save you. In our reading, the Apostle says that the only way we can be justified, declared innocent in God's courts, is if we receive the redemption won for us by faith in Jesus who accomplished it. This is the righteousness

2 Romans 5:12

3 Romans 4:24-25, John 11:24-26

that has been manifested apart from the works of the Law, the righteousness of Christ who needs no Law because He is perfect and without sin. If you entrust your soul to Jesus, then God sees none of your sins and all of Jesus's perfection imputed to you. It is for this reason that our Lord teaches us that salvation is a simple matter, saying that whoever believes and is Baptized shall be saved.[4] So our Lord is the God of Justice, who does not permit that sin should go unpunished, but still expresses His infinite love for us by making the free offer of salvation unto all.

The Reformation and the Savior

The Reformation that we celebrate was nothing more than the rediscovery of this passage. It is the rediscovery that Jesus is the Savior, and if He is our Savior then we are justified by faith alone in Him. While there were always theologians and Church Fathers who understood this,[5] false teachers entered in and began to teach salvation by works.[6] They taught that faith in Jesus merely gave you a chance to earn eternal life through moral living, harshness to your own body, and servitude toward their priestly orders. Faith to them was nothing more than a foot in the proverbial door; in all other respects, their false Christianity was no different from the rest of the world, because it expected you to be your own savior – not Jesus.

They call it "justification by faith plus works,"[7] but this is a falsehood. Either you are justified by faith or you are justified by your works. Either Christ is your Savior and you trust in Him to bring you eternal life, or you are your savior and must spend the entirety of your life destroying yourself over an impossible task. There is no in-between option. If it *were* the case that faith worked in conjunction with our own efforts, then that is *still* justification by works; Christ never fails, but we fail all the time. If we remain the failure-point in the question of whether we are saved, then there is no room for faith. Do not permit anyone to throw "faith plus works" in your face, even if they try to quote Bible verses at you. Do not submit to it, for it is either one or the other. Scripture attests that there is only *one* name under Heaven by which men are saved, the Name of Jesus.[8] There is no room on His Throne for you to park your butt next to Him, and He will not permit you to put your name next to His. Either Christ is your Savior and he saves you, or you are your savior and you fail and end up damned.

Tragically, this false teaching of works-righteousness became the majority opinion in the Church, and from it flowed all the abuses we see in Church history. Wicked men were able to creep in unawares as St. Jude warned,[9] and enter into positions of authority from which they could push Christians around. Over just a few centuries, believers were taught more and more rules that the heretics said had to be obeyed in order to get to Heaven. Do the penance, kiss the painting, pray to the saints, stare at your navel, fast for half the year, go on a pilgrimage, eat fish on Fridays, abstain from sleeping with your spouse, confess that Mary was assumed into Heaven, submit to either the Pope or the Eastern Bishops – and the list goes on and on and on forever and ever, making it harder and harder for the average Baptized believer to even *breathe,* let alone feel anything like confidence in their eternal fate. And this is in addition to the Ten Commandments and all the commands given to us in the New Testament! Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees, saying "they tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger."[10] The scribes and Pharisees look like *anarchists* compared to the churches of Rome and of the East!

You may wonder, how did this happen? Nothing in Scripture teaches us to do so many things to

4 Mark 16:16
5 Men like Jan Hus, Bernard of Clairvaux, Augustine, the Apostolic Fathers, Irenaeus, etc.
6 Hermas, the desert fathers, Coelestius, and so many more – we have 1700 years of this wickedness proliferating.
7 If they are trying to be more marketable, they call it 'faith working through love," but if you look into what they mean by that, it is the same thing.
8 Acts 4:12
9 Jude 1:3-4
10 Matthew 23:4

be saved, our reading is clear that we are justified by faith alone, and the first two centuries of Christian writing were in near-total lockstep with these teachings. Why is it that so much of the Church went along? Why didn't more people resist like Jovinian, Hus, Luther or Chemnitz? The reason is simple my friends: pride. The false doctrine of salvation by works appeals to the sinful pride of men. St. Paul says that our boasting is excluded; the sinful part of us balks at that and demands that there be a role for us to play. St. Paul says it is by the law of faith which we are saved, not by the law of works, but the part of us that wants to *boast* says that this simply will not do. So millions and millions of wayward Christians are willing to submit to corrupt, perverted and money-laundering priests if it means they can say they are good people. The majority of the Church remains astray under the cold iron shackles of endless stupid rules and limitless guilt because their pride wants to say "I got to Heaven for being so good." This problem metastasized until the 16th century, when finally original Christianity came roaring back all over Europe and the Word of God was made available for everyone.

Conclusion

Christ said that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church, with the Gospel continuing to march forward despite whatever the devil puts in as an obstacle. So in the face of that pernicious and persistent hell-gate that is works righteousness, God raised up the Reformers. Luther, Melanchthon, Chemnitz, Chytraeus and all the other Evangelical heroes[11] stood up to proclaim the same message that our reading has proclaimed for two thousand years. We proclaim, as the Reformers and the medievals and the early Fathers and the Apostles before them did, that man is justified by faith alone in Christ. For Christ is the only Savior who *actually saves*, and this precious truth must ring out against all false religions.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord and only Savior. Amen.

11 Our denomination wasn't called "Lutheran," but Evangelical at the start.