

Sermon for May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2026  
FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

READINGS

Isaiah 12:1-6

- 1** You will say in that day:  
“I will give thanks to you, O LORD,  
for though you were angry with me,  
your anger turned away,  
that you might comfort me.
- 2** “Behold, God is my salvation;  
I will trust, and will not be afraid;  
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song,  
and he has become my salvation.”
- 3** With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.
- 4** And you will say in that day:  
“Give thanks to the LORD,  
call upon his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples,  
proclaim that his name is exalted.
- 5** “Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;  
let this be made known in all the earth.
- 6** Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion,  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

Psalm 66:1-9

[Collect verses in **bold**]

- 1 Shout for joy to God, all the earth;**  
**2 sing the glory of his name;**  
**give to him glorious praise!**
- 3 Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!**  
**So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.**
- 4** All the earth worships you  
and sings praises to you;  
they sing praises to your name.” *Selah*
- 5** Come and see what God has done:  
he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man.
- 6** He turned the sea into dry land;  
they passed through the river on foot.  
There did we rejoice in him,
- 7** who rules by his might forever,  
whose eyes keep watch on the nations—  
let not the rebellious exalt themselves. *Selah*
- 8** Bless our God, O peoples;  
let the sound of his praise be heard,
- 9** who has kept our soul among the living  
and has not let our feet slip.

### James 1:19-21

**19** Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; **20** for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. **21** Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

### John 16:5-15

**5** But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ **6** But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. **7** Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. **8** And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: **9** concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; **10** concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; **11** concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

**12** “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. **13** When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. **14** He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. **15** All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Our text for meditation this Fifth Sunday after Easter is on our Old Testament reading.

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

### **Introduction**

What does salvation look like? Allow me to illustrate it with a memory of mine. When I was a young boy, we had a large back yard, and I fondly recall playing in it with my siblings. After school we had nothing better to do most days than simply hang out there in the sunshine. In fact, my parents made a point of making us go play outside as often as possible. Little did we know, there was another purpose for it. Our yard was big enough to have three separate fenced-off sections: the third section in the back, which we were forbidden from entering, was next to an abandoned road. Occasionally the bad types of people (vagabonds, gangsters, teenagers, etc.) would wander around that road, and my parents figured that if we were able to see such people around – and if they were trespassing on the property – then us kids would be able to alert them.

One day that happened...well, kind of. About thirty years ago my sibling and I were playing outside as usual one Saturday, when we saw a few men standing in the third section of the yard, having hopped the fence. They were taking pictures, writing things down, and speaking quietly to one another. Now, our parents had told us to go play outside and not bother them, but we couldn't just let these trespassers get away with whatever it was they were doing. So we did what any young dumb boys would do in such a situation: we threw rocks at them. One of the rocks landed square on a guy's forehead, and that's when chaos erupted.

Within seconds, shouting and confusion and threats filled the air, with the men telling us that they were going to tan our hides when they got close enough. We were genuinely worried that they were going to scale the taller fence and reach us as they started to get closer to it from that third section – but then my Dad showed up. He had a fierce expression and an even fiercer voice as he screamed bloody murder at the men who had trespassed. He swore the most violent, heinous threats at them, and when they complained about us throwing rocks, he shouted that he'd do far worse to them if they so much as laid a finger on us. He was holding something behind his back; I learned later that it was his Luger pistol.

Thankfully nothing drastic happened that day. The men backed down, and we learned that the men were a land survey team that our neighbor had invited to check out his property. Since they could not get a look at the back of his house normally, they went through our back fence. They apologized, the neighbor apologized, my Dad didn't press charges, and it was all water under the bridge. While me and my sibling both got in trouble for taking things into our own hands instead of letting our parents know, we never feared other people after that.

We learned that day that when Dad was home, we were safe. Sure, he punished us whenever we misbehaved. Yes, we received some harsh corporal punishment in our days. But from that moment on we understood that my father loved us enough, not just to work the hours he did to keep us fed, but he loved us enough to *take another man's life* if it meant keeping us safe from harm. And he was willing to do it even if we weren't exactly guiltless in how the situation got started. *That* is what salvation looks like – or at least, the other side of it.

### **Salvation by Mercy**

Salvation first includes mercy upon those who belong to God. When Isaiah writes our Old Testament reading, he is describing the same kind of fatherly love that God has for His people. In the preceding chapters, the prophet described how Israel was to go into captivity, and only a remnant of the people would remain.<sup>1</sup> But this is a promise of restoration both in the near future and when Messiah arrives.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime there is pain. Now this is something we can relate to, isn't it? Our own sins get us in trouble all the time, and often God is letting us feel the pain to teach us a lesson. But in His mercy, He does not destroy us, and instead promises to restore us to fellowship with Him and eternal life.

The prophet says to each believer in those times that they shall praise God for His restoration. Each one shall say, “for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me.” Just as a father does not stay angry with his child forever, neither shall God always have contempt on His people. Though their sins may be heinous, after their behavior has been corrected the Lord shall comfort, provide for, and strengthen those who trust in Him. This is a Gospel promise by the way, something that proves true for us Christians today just as much as it did for Isaiah's audience. Though we have many grave sins in our lives, and though God shall correct our bad behavior, the discipline of the Lord is a sign of His love and an assurance that He will shower far greater blessings on us.

### **Salvation by Justice**

But salvation has that other side to it, one that doesn't look quite so gentle. One of the blessings we receive is how God makes sure no one ever gets away with harassing and persecuting us. Isaiah writes that we shall sing, “I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.” For his original audience, do you know how the people were reassured of this strength and salvation? By God's willingness to crush all the nations who oppressed and persecuted the faithful.

Immediately after what he writes in our Old Testament reading, Isaiah is instructed by God to write twelve (12) chapters against all of Israel's enemies. Almost one fifth of the entire book of Isaiah is dedicated to this long section describing the coming vengeance of the Lord against whoever attacked His people, along with further assurance that the faithful will outlast all of their persecutors. To summarize the section: Babylon will disappear, Jacob will continue, Assyria will be broken, Philistia will be destroyed by its roots, Moab will be reduced to a remnant like Israel, Damascus will be turned to ruins, Cush will be devoured by scavengers, Egypt will be enslaved, Tyre and Sidon will be

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1 Isaiah 10

2 Isaiah 11

forgotten.<sup>3</sup> When Isaiah proclaims “make known His deeds among the peoples,” he does this himself by telling all of these countries that God will absolutely *obliterate* them.

This promise is not just for the children of Israel and Judah though. This promise of salvation by Divine judgment against God's enemies is for you and I as well, for the Church is the true Israel and loved in much the same way as she was in the Old Testament. Every group that persecutes Christians either repents or is destroyed. When Christ returns He shall destroy the true enemy of our souls, the devil, as He has satan tossed into the lake of fire.

### **Conclusion**

Christian salvation is fatherly in nature, which means that we benefit from the kindness and severity of God.<sup>4</sup> Any good father is willing to raise his children up, provide for them, deliver them from trouble, and even die for them. God has shown us this love by providing us with all our needs, sanctifying us, and sending His only Son to die on a cross for our sins. Yet this Fatherly salvation *also* includes with it a fiery desire to deliver us *from* our enemies, one which does not permit that evil should ever have a permanent victory. We are saved unto eternal life, and from the forces of eternal death. Let us then love our Heavenly Father, and forevermore recognize that we are safe with Him.

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

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3 Isaiah 13-23

4 Romans 11:22

Sermon for May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2026  
SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

READINGS

Numbers 21:4-9

4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. 5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." 6 Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Psalm 107:1-9

[Collect verses in **bold**]

- 1 Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever!  
2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,  
whom he has redeemed from trouble  
3 and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.  
4 Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to a city to dwell in;  
5 hungry and thirsty,  
their soul fainted within them.  
6 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress.  
7 He led them by a straight way  
till they reached a city to dwell in.  
8 **Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wondrous works to the children of man!**  
9 **For he satisfies the longing soul,  
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.**

James 1:26-27

26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

John 16:23-30

23 In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

25 "I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer

speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. **26** In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; **27** for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. **28** I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” **29** His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! **30** Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.”

Our meditation for this Sixth Sunday in Easter is on our Epistle reading.

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

## Introduction

When St. James says the word “religious,” what he means is something along the line of “ceremonial observance.”<sup>12</sup> In the modern sense, we can think of it in terms of liturgy, hymnody, vestments, candles, Church calendars, and so forth. In St. James's day, “religion” was often bound up in the Mosaic Law, with the sacrifices and cleanliness codes and liturgical readings found in the synagogues. In the first century A.D., especially among Jews, religion as “ceremonial observance” was absolutely *everything*, the highest priority in life. “Religion” determined what people ate, what they wore, what sort of company they kept, where they lived, what they spent their money on, how they prayed, and every other outward aspect of their lives. But this is the very crux of it, that religion was an *outward* matter rather than an inward one.

## Christ's Religion

Our Epistle reading reflects a deep change in the sense of religion. Under the Mosaic system, for over a thousand years the people of God understood religion to be the ceremonial observance of things that made them unique among the rest of humanity. They were to dress different, eat different, speak different and celebrate different days. Unlike the pagans that surrounded ancient Israel, the holy nation was supposed to be so unique in their lifestyle – and prosperous, since they were blessed when they were obedient – that their very existence bore witness to the true God. Unfortunately, human sinfulness got in the way and frustrated this plan. Simply put, the Law was impossible to keep and did nothing to regenerate people; the answer given to Israel for any sin they committed was animal sacrifice at the altar in the Temple, and every time there was a new sin...a new sacrifice was needed.

Eventually something had to give. Not only was the Old Covenant unsustainable by itself, Israel and Judah had gone into Exile at various times, dispersing their population across different empires. By the first century A.D., there were Jews living as far West as Spain to as far East as Persia. While the average Jew in that day might be able to restrict his diet and wear special clothing, the sheer distance to the Temple meant living in sin and guilt most days out of the year. Not only did the Law not save, but by this time God had shown it to be wholly inadequate even for daily life.

So something had to change. That change was planned from the beginning, and it is enacted by Jesus, who removed the sin problem by giving up His life for us on the Cross, thus instituting the New Covenant. Because all of our sins are forgiven, we are free from the shackles of sacrifices. Because we are justified by faith, we do not have to earn Heaven by some silly hamster-wheel of works.<sup>3</sup> Yet here, even under the New Covenant the emphasis is *still* placed on being a unique people. Jesus is the same

1 The word translated as “religion” is θρησκεία. Transliterated “threskeia,” Strong's #2356

2 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2356.htm>

3 Of course, Hebrews 11 teaches us that no one was *ever* saved by their works, but many people were convinced that this was the case by their misreading of the Law.

God who gave Israel the Old Covenant,<sup>4</sup> and He is very much still interested in getting the message out for nonbelievers to learn about the true God and convert. He *still wants* us to be religious. But now that the Old Covenant is fulfilled, there is no need to do this with different foods or clothing or hairstyles. Instead, Christ invites us to distinguish ourselves by being charitable and avoiding sin.

This becomes the “pure and undefiled” religion, – again, doing acts of charity and avoiding sin. These two dynamics have replaced the old Mosaic holiness code for us. Instead of offering up the firstfruits of our crops or presenting ourselves in Jerusalem for the Passover, Christians give alms to the poor and do favors for those in need. Instead of avoiding unclean foods and objects, Christians flee unclean *acts*, like fornication or gossip. It is sin and sinful beliefs (the temptation to which St. James says comes from the world) which stain someone, not shellfish or touching an open sore. It is charity which pleases God far more than any special clothing or unshaven beard. And it is both of these which mark the Christian as *different* from the rest of the world. Nonbelievers are supposed to see that we don't look very different from them, but we certainly *act* different, and this makes inroads to preaching the Gospel.

## Conclusion

What St. James has written here is as radical as the change from Old Covenant to the New, and it applies just as much now as it did when he wrote it. Suddenly, outward ceremonial observances mean very little in our religious life. Religion is no longer about keeping a laundry list of incidental minutiae concerned with our external presentation. It must all spring from the heart now, the inner man who is truly devoted to Christ who saved him; if a man believes that he is saved because his ceremonies or good works merit him Heaven, then his heart is deceived and his religion is worthless.

This applied in the first century when St. James wrote his Epistle. But if we are being honest, it applies far *more* today. St. James had to contend with the judaizers in his day, false teachers who wanted to turn Jesus into a mere footnote of history as they preached salvation by the works of the Mosaic Law. Today, believers must contend against similar groups of judaizers, but in addition to them we have the “high-church movement” which puts more emphasis on liturgy than the Gospel itself! There are organizations devoted to having the prettiest cathedrals, the nicest gold-woven vestments, conducting the Mass in dead languages, and claiming that if we do not observe their particular liturgy then we shall end up in hell. Ironically, despite all the earthly beauty of their vestments and chanting, so little of this is done with anything approaching faith in Christ from their hearts that their religion has become worthless to Him.

My friends, let us not take that route. We have been brought into the New Covenant by the shed blood of Christ, and we must take heart that our Lord has saved us. So then, let us not worship God with worthless religion, but do what is valuable, pure, and undefiled to Him. Let us be kind and generous, helping those in need while avoiding the temptation to sin.

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

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4 Jude vs.5: “Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.”

Sermon for May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

READINGS

Ezekiel 36:22-29

**22** “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. **23** And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. **24** I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. **25** I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. **26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27** And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. **28** You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. **29** And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you.

Psalm 51:1-17

- 1** Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.
- 2** Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin!
- 3** For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.
- 4** Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you may be justified in your words  
and blameless in your judgment.
- 5** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- 6** Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,  
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
- 7** Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8** Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
- 9** Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.
- 10** Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.
- 11** Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12** Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.  
14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.  
15 O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.  
16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;  
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.  
17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

1 Peter 4:7-11

7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

John 15:26-16:4

15:26 “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. 27 And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.  
16:1 “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. 2 They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. 3 And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. 4 But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

Our meditation for this Seventh Sunday in Easter is on our Psalm.

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

**Introduction: The Despair Machine**

When are you allowed to feel like you are forgiven? When is it that you can say your sins are in the past, nailed to the Cross, no longer applicable to you or how people treat you? When do you get to breathe in the fresh air of redemption, freed from the chains of guilt? The answer to this question is one which is crucial to your soul's fate, and it is one that the Church has almost always answered incorrectly.

Sadly, throughout most of her history the Church has acted as a despair machine, grinding the faithful in torment by the turning of its horrendous gears. People would get drawn in with the promise of salvation, forgiveness and eternal life, only to find themselves in a devastating loop of neverending penance. They were promised deliverance, but received a to-do list. The Church would proclaim that Jesus is Savior, but then censure any man claiming he was saved.

Allow me to give one example with two applications.

These days in our Lutheran churches, if a man commits the sin of fornication with his girlfriend, to be forgiven he must repent of that sin and confess to God. If his conscience continues to assail him, he can be confident that the absolution he hears at the beginning of the Divine Service is true. And if his conscience is \*still\* troubled, we have Communion, where our Savior arrives with His Body and

Blood to deliver even more and greater pardon. The Lutheran answer - the Biblical answer - to the question, "when can I feel like I am forgiven," is "right now and even more on Sunday." With this, the soul of the believer is refreshed and strengthened to renew the struggle against sin.

In the early Church though, a fornicator would not see such mercies. Typically, if a man confessed to such a sin he would not be allowed to receive Communion for ten years. For two of those years at least he would be required to stand outside the Church during every service, weeping and lamenting. For a number of years he would be permitted into the sanctuary but told he must kneel or prostrate himself the entire time. Then he may stand, but he does not get to take the Sacrament. Such a man, after his ten year penance process, may then be considered in full union with the rest of the Church. But if he commits a mortal sin once more, there are no second chances: he would be pronounced damned and forever be barred from even entering the sanctuary.

### **How the Machine was Built**

At first, these strict penances were only reserved for the "big three" sins as listed by Tertullian: apostasy, adultery and murder. So it would be strict, but if you did not leave the faith, cheat on your spouse or kill anyone then you were fine. But over time people started asking about the "lesser" versions of these sins: what about fornication, what about involuntary manslaughter, what about fighting, what about heterodoxy or false beliefs? So the Church added smaller (yet still harsh) penances. Then came more questions about other sins. Then came more penances. The list of "mortal sins" went from three to such a pile that the Church gave up counting. Eventually it became clear that the body of Christ was under the dreary delusion that our works not only *can* merit forgiveness from God, but that this is the sole means by which we obtain forgiveness. The forgiveness offered in our Baptism and the Lord's Supper were theologically *downgraded* in their effectiveness, to such point where eventually institutions taught that Christ's Body and Blood only rendered absolution for forgotten and unintentional sins, Baptism became a status we had to maintain rather than a repository of God's promises. Everything was penance, and the Christian Church preached a religion with no salvation; forgiveness was always something you had to earn, never something you could earnestly say you had obtained.

So one hard rule for three deadly sins became an endless Byzantine system of laws, punishments, and penances. What was the fruit of this mad spiral? The despair machine, full of millions who knew nothing about God's mercy. As our Confessions detail, by the time we reach the end of the medieval era people were only concerned with working to save themselves. The flagellants walked around ripping their flesh apart with whips, husbands abandoned their families to live in monasteries, and yet others simply gave into despair - giving in to the discouragement of the cruel system and deciding that they were to be damned. And if a man went to his priest with his feelings of despair over the shackles of works placed on him...the priest would reassure him that his sorrows were also damnable sin and he had to work those off too.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Vanity of the Machine**

The greatest sorrow in this is that it never had to be this way. The despair machine never had to be built, nor was there any need for the pressure the early or medieval Church to place people under such heavy burdens. Our God is a God of radical, incomprehensibly infinite mercy. King David wrote Psalm 51 after committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband Uriah – *two* of the "big three" sins that the early Church identified as the worst. While there were certainly earthly consequences to his sins, what did it take for him to be forgiven by God? Repentance, a confession, and belief that God would pardon - that is all it took! Yes, he suffered, but that was a consequence of his sin – not a prerequisite for his forgiveness. King David did not have to avoid making offerings at the Tabernacle. He was under no burden to tear his flesh apart with a whip, he did not have to go join a monastery, he did not have to fast and he did not have to say a single "hail Mary." Literally all he did

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04755a.htm>

was confess, and the prophet Nathan proclaimed his forgiveness.<sup>2</sup>

Psalm 51 presents us with a great truth: God Himself fulfills whatever requirements there would be for penance. After his conscience had been defiled by his grave sins, what does David ask in his prayer? "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." David did not need to spend ten years away from engaging in worship, nor did he have to whip himself to the point of bloodshed. To the contrary, he knew that none of that would do anything to bring redemption to him. For that matter, no amount of animal sacrifices would do it either. "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering." Only God Himself can merit forgiveness *for us my friends*, and the Psalmist knew this fact well.

### *The Objections*

Now, the same machine that produces so much terror and despair may make noise in protest against what I am saying. Someone might say "well of course that applied to David – he was the king of Israel, the anointed ruler who could not do penances because of his office, but we must!" Ah, but my friends you must understand that God is no respecter of persons.<sup>3</sup> If a king is forgiven in this manner, then so too is a commoner. Another objection might say that David faced consequences for his sins, and that this sufficed as penance, but this is not the Biblical witness either. Yes, he faced consequences as we all do, sometimes from the deed itself and other times God disciplines us directly, but these happened after David was forgiven already. He never had to earn pardon, and truth be told he never could in the first place – I must repeat myself: only God Himself can merit forgiveness for our sins.

A more harrowing objection is that the radical forgiveness offered freely by our Lord results in people sinning freely. The Church became less convinced of the Gospel over time, and because of this she became more and more frightened that people grasping forgiveness would result in more sin. But nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is, people who know they have been forgiven of their sins, being freed from a requirement of penance, are free to move forward in repentance. They can let that sin go more easily, for it no longer sticks to their soul with a guilt adhesive. They can face the consequences of their actions with a clear conscience, make amends without fear, and face the future with confidence that God loves them.

### **Conclusion**

*Only* God Himself can merit forgiveness for our sins. And what a blessed truth, He did just that by sending His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to die for us. Instead of saddling us with the burden of penances and sacrifices, Jesus says to us that His yoke is easy and His burden is light,<sup>4</sup> and He says this knowing full well that it is only because He took the burdens away that we could never bear. Every sin at every time and place, from David's adultery and murder to St. Peter's threefold denial of Christ to that lie you told your boss the other week, Jesus bore the penalty for all of these and took the debt away from us, so that He could nail it to the Cross.<sup>5</sup> Our Psalm reading is absolutely *saturated* with this recognition, for David knew that nothing a sinner can do will ever pay off our debts. There must be *someone* that took care of it, that he may repent with true contrition but be met with true mercy. Otherwise all the king has would be despair, but as it stands he writes triumphantly, "14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness." May we sing the same as we receive the same pardon and experience the same joy, for *right now* my friends you may confirm that you are forgiven.

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

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2 2 Samuel 12:13-14

3 Acts 10:34

4 Matthew 11:28-30

5 Colossians 2:13-14

Sermon for May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
PENTECOST

READINGS

Genesis 11:1-9

**1** Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. **2** And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. **3** And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. **4** Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” **5** And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. **6** And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. **7** Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.” **8** So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. **9** Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

Psalm 143

**1** Hear my prayer, O LORD;  
give ear to my pleas for mercy!  
In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!

**2** Enter not into judgment with your servant,  
for no one living is righteous before you.

**3** For the enemy has pursued my soul;  
he has crushed my life to the ground;  
he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead.

**4** Therefore my spirit faints within me;  
my heart within me is appalled.

**5** I remember the days of old;  
I meditate on all that you have done;  
I ponder the work of your hands.

**6** I stretch out my hands to you;  
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. *Selah*

**7** Answer me quickly, O LORD!  
My spirit fails!  
Hide not your face from me,  
lest I be like those who go down to the pit.

**8** Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love,  
for in you I trust.  
Make me know the way I should go,  
for to you I lift up my soul.

**9** Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD!  
I have fled to you for refuge.

**10** Teach me to do your will,  
for you are my God!

Let your good Spirit lead me  
on level ground!

**11** For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life!  
In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!  
**12** And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies,  
and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul,  
for I am your servant.

Acts 2:1-13

**1** When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. **5** Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. **6** And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. **7** And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? **9** Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **11** both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” **12** And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” **13** But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

John 14:21-27

**21** “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. **22** Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” **23** Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. **24** Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. **25** “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. **26** But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. **27** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Our text for meditation this Pentecost Sunday is on our Old Testament reading.

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

**Introduction**

Aside from our Lord Jesus, there have been exactly three men in history who could rightly be called “king of the world.” By “king of the world,” I mean that each of these men was in charge of all of humanity at some point during his lifetime. Each of these three men was the Patriarch over his neighbors, and had unquestioned authority. He had a priestly station as part of his reign as well, being the main religious authority over others; this was mostly an intercessory role, as presumably he would be performing sacrifices on behalf of everyone under his authority.

The first king of the world was Adam. He was the first to receive the command from our Lord to take dominion over all the earth,<sup>1</sup> wherein our Lord gave him authority over all living things. At first, his reign must have been wondrous, but this was stopped short by the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden. He and his wife ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and so the rest of his tenure was painful. He observed hard labors tilling the earth, and had to experience the fallout from his oldest son murdering the younger. For Adam, being king of the world was less about ruling and more about *surviving*, as he had to discover how humanity could make it through the harsher parts of living in a fallen world.

The next king of the world after Adam was Noah. Noah led his family through the lead-up to the Great Flood, and he was the first man to make offering after God extinguished all life outside of the Ark Noah built.<sup>2</sup> Like Adam, Noah and his family received a mandate to fill the earth, yet with more hard requirements for human behavior to ensure that things did not get as bad as they did before the Deluge.<sup>3</sup> Also like Adam, Noah's life was marked by his own sins and the resultant familial difficulties.<sup>4</sup> While Adam's reign was all about surviving and discovering how men must live, Noah's reign was an attempt at *recovering* the life that men were supposed to be living all along.

Presumably, Adam and Noah both did well in their office as king of the world. Adam could not have survived if he did not carry out the tilling and plowing that our Lord commanded of him,<sup>5</sup> and Noah was pious enough to work on an ark in obedience to our Lord for a hundred years. Despite their mistakes and the difficulties they faced, they at least fulfilled the basic requirements of their office. Unfortunately, the third king of the world had a different idea.

## **Babel and its Tower**

The city of Babel was founded by a man named nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah and the last king of the world in history.<sup>6</sup> In our text, nimrod leads humanity to Shinar for the express purpose of building the city. Already with the act of building a city there is a grave rebellion; God had commanded Noah and his descendants to fill the earth once more, and here they were refusing to do so! In defiance of our Lord's Word, they stayed put and made plans to make sure they could keep it that way.

They proposed, likely under nimrod's direction, to build a tower. Why a tower? To make a name for themselves. Now that's an odd reasoning. With humanity there in one place without anyone else in the world, who are they thinking should respect their "name?" Ah, but that is just it my friends, these people were trying to make a name for themselves *before God*. They wanted God to respect them and their decisions, even if those decisions were against His wishes. So not only were they defying His order to spread out over the whole world, they were spitting in His Face and daring Him to do something about it. It is no surprise that "nimrod" isn't the man's real name – it is a title that means "rebel:" he was leading all humanity to do this.

Why a tower though? Well my friends, the previous judgment from God was a global flood; a massive tower that reaches into the sky would be a way to "flood proof" humanity in case another Judgment came. Perhaps they were aware of God's promise to not flood the earth anymore, perhaps they had forgotten, perhaps they simply did not believe what God said. The point of the tower was ultimately something along the lines of "because we are united, You can't rule over us anymore."

The stink of this offense rose to Heaven as soon as nimrod and his friends made the proposition to everyone in humanity. Adam and Noah, the first two kings of the world, did their job despite all their

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1 Genesis 1:28

2 Genesis 6-9

3 Genesis 9:1-6

4 Genesis 9:20-27

5 Genesis 3:23

6 Genesis 10:6-14. It could be that nimrod was a further descendant, perhaps even being born after Noah's passing.

faults. Adam and Noah were faithful to the charge given to them. But Nimrod had other ideas. The final human king of the world decided that instead of faithfulness to God, he would try full-blown rebellion. By building the city and beginning to build the tower, he was declaring independence from our Lord and leading his fellow man into full-throated apostasy.

## Our Lord's Response

Now, my friends does God accept that rebellion? Does He say “well then, it looks like they don't need Me anymore” and does He then leave? Of course not. Every sin we commit is an act of rebellion against God, but it might not be *consciously* so. People sin all the time without even realizing it. But what Nimrod and his contemporaries were doing was a conscious, malicious, ugly gesture of earnest hatred towards our Lord. God wasn't going to let this slide.

“And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.” This is what our theologians call a *Theophany*, wherein God appears to mortals in a visible way. Moses does not record the details, but this was not a pleasant experience for the men and women in Babel. There must have been grave silence throughout the whole city as our Lord appeared from the sky with His angels, touched the ground, and deliberated with His servants about what to do. We can only imagine the fear on Nimrod's face as he, the king of the world, was confronted by the Divine King of the universe.

From there, a frightful thing happens. God confuses the languages of men; He had promised to never flood the entire world again, so a different universal punishment had to be inflicted on the rebels. Suddenly, children could no longer call for their fathers or mothers, for they no longer remembered their old *word* for father or mother. Husbands and wives no longer knew each other. The king himself, Nimrod, lost all the prestige his name once had; successive generations had to make up different titles for him like “marduk” or “Gilgamesh” or “Sargon,” while the vast majority of humanity since the Old Testament was completed simply calls him Nimrod, the rebel. The tower they were building was no longer a project that could be finished, because no one could speak with one another for planning things ahead, no one shared the words for their tools, and whatever slave labor they had was now *de facto* free because no one could give their slaves commands. Violence almost certainly rang out as a result of this, for communications breaking down over grain and water would assuredly lead to food riots. God promised He would never flood the earth again, but He still retained the ability to cause a misery that no tower could prevent, no matter how tall it was.

By confusing the languages of man, our Lord ensures that there will never be another mere man ruling the world. A single human being cannot be trusted to avoid doing what Nimrod did, for as God Himself says soon after the flood, “the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.”<sup>7</sup> If one of us was made the world dictator or monarch, even if he did not rebel as blatantly as Nimrod did, his rule would still be marked by intolerable tyranny. So no more absolute world monarchs. Though we have had many empires and powerful nations, all of them have receded or dissolved at some point, making any and all globalist projects delusional fantasies doomed to failure. Before Judgment Day we shall never be rid of conflict and irreconcilable differences, for God knows that a unified humanity would result in far greater evils. Sadly, this reality does not stop those who idolize power from trying, and so human history is marked by endless bloodshed.

## Conclusion

All this being said, there *is* a King who will rule over all who dwell on the earth someday. That is our Lord Jesus Christ. When He returns, He shall be the Monarch that rules with justice, grace, and

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7 Genesis 8:21

mercy forever and ever. And the best part, irony of ironies, He shall rule from a city that has a skyline above the atmosphere itself. When St. John was given a vision of Christ's return, after seeing Judgment Day he saw the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, and what were its dimensions? "The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. It's length and width and height are all equal."<sup>8</sup> When Jesus tells the Apostles and all believers "I go to prepare a place for you,"<sup>9</sup> this is the place He means, a city with its top not just *in* the heavens, but *beyond* them – over 1,300 miles tall. What Jesus does for humanity, nimrod did not even have the capacity to imagine.

My friends, the message is clear that we must not be like the children of man when they were at Babel. We must not covet world rule *or* entrust ourselves to a sinful man and give him authority. To the contrary, we must have confidence that we worship a Savior who does what nimrod the rebel never could. That man ruled over humanity and by his rebellion against God he doomed us all to even greater suffering than we already had: his earthly kingdoms rightfully decayed and were lost to the sands of time. But Christ Jesus, by His *obedience* to our Heavenly Father and submission to dying on a cross for all of our sins, gathers together all who would believe and brings us into an eternal Kingdom where neither moth nor rust destroy. This Pentecost Sunday, let us remember that this Kingdom to which we belong is not of this earth, and may we petition our earthly nations to bend the knee, honor and serve the one true King, and refrain from futile efforts to supplant Him.

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

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8 Revelation 21:16

9 John 14:2-3

Sermon for May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026  
TRINITY SUNDAY

READINGS

Isaiah 6:1-7

**1** In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. **2** Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

**4** And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. **5** And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

**6** Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. **7** And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

**8** And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

Psalm 29

**1** Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

**2** Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.

**3** The voice of the LORD is over the waters;  
the God of glory thunders,  
the LORD, over many waters.

**4** The voice of the LORD is powerful;  
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

**5** The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;  
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

**6** He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,  
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

**7** The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.

**8** The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;  
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

**9** The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth  
and strips the forests bare,  
and in his temple all cry, “Glory!”

**10** The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;  
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.

**11** May the LORD give strength to his people!  
May the LORD bless his people with peace!

Romans 11:33-36

**33** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?”

35 “Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?”

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

#### John 3:1-17

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” 3 Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” 4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

9 Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Our text for meditation this Trinity Sunday is on our Gospel reading.

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

#### **The Old Man and the New Birth**

Before we are converted, there is simply nothing good about us or in us. In God's eyes the unregenerate man – the non-Christian – is poor, blind, wretched, and evil. His thoughts are wicked from his youth,<sup>1</sup> and he is incapable of believing in the true Gospel. Such men live according to their sin nature, freely going along with the devil's plans for their lives. And I mean it when I say *freely*, for the unregenerate operate according to their nature. The same way that fish swim and birds fly and bees build hives, the nonbeliever does according to his corrupted nature – and chances are he *likes it*. But the same way that fish cannot fly, birds cannot breathe underwater and bees cannot build automobiles, the unregenerate man cannot operate *outside* his corrupted nature. He will not trust in God or believe the Gospel on his own. For this reason, Scripture attests that such men are slaves of sin, even though they have the free will to do as they please.<sup>2</sup> The only *positive* thing such a person can do is choose not to resist when the Holy Spirit calls them to faith.

This is why Jesus says one must be born again. What does it mean to be born again? It means nothing else than to be spiritually renewed by the work of our Lord in conversion – especially in Baptism. When the water and the Word are applied to the convert, his sins are washed away and he is

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1 Genesis 8:21

2 Romans 6:17

granted a newness of life which leads unto salvation. Quite suddenly, God does not see the man as a wicked wretch, but as a new and beloved member of His Kingdom. Allow me to clear something up though: our Lord does not do this *in order* to love the sinner, but *because* He loves the sinner. Salvation is offered to every man, woman and child, with the Holy Spirit continually working to exhort and convince the unregenerate to receive what He offers.<sup>3</sup> Even for those places where people are entirely ignorant of the Gospel, He is trying to do this by the Law that is written on their hearts and by the witness of creation itself;<sup>4</sup> He sends missionaries to those who do not refuse Him. God *wants* to renew everyone my friends. Jesus did not stutter when He said to Nicodemus, “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” That means the *whole* world.

### **The New Birth and Understanding**

Even so, not everyone will be saved. One must be born again if he wishes to be a member of God's Kingdom, and have eternal life. This is not to be understood in such a way that you stop being who you are, or else we could not say that God loves sinners – He would be merely replacing them with new persons. For this reason, we retain our names, our bodies, our minds, our maleness or femaleness that we were born with, etc. But this spiritual renewal is *like* being born, in that we must grow into what we now are and accept that we are being raised.

Christ says elsewhere, “unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven,” and He adds that this requires humility on the part of the Christian.<sup>5</sup> Think of it this way my friends, what is required for a child to grow? Ah, they must trust and they must learn. A child is entirely dependent on his parents for all of his needs. So too does a newly converted Christian need to trust our Lord for all of his needs, and to learn what our Lord teaches him.

This is especially true regarding *doctrine*, wherein we are taught things that we simply must accept by faith. As it is Trinity Sunday, the Trinity serves as a great example of this. Someone becomes a Christian after hearing the Gospel and accepting the message of Christ being crucified for his sins. Maybe he takes some classes before being Baptized, but generally speaking he will not *understand* the doctrine of the Trinity. He must accept it as an article of faith once it is taught to him, that God is one Being who is three distinct Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Over time, with catechesis and attending Bible study he will understand where the Scriptures teach this and the finer points of the doctrine (eternal generation, eternal procession, perichoresis, etc.). Still, throughout his earthly life he will still have to trust that our Lord is who He says He is, for the answer of the Trinity is always going to be beyond human reason to a certain extent. So it is with many, many doctrines and moral commands in Scripture, as well as much of the historical narratives as well: simple, childlike *trust* is what is required here, for this man who converted may be a man to the world, but he is a child in the eyes of God, and he must be raised up into spiritual maturity.

We require this of our children all the time. A young boy might see his mother's belly grow over several months, and he will only know that he is expecting a sibling because he believes what his parents tell him. Everything about where babies come from and how his parents are his parents is a mystery to him, but he accepts the simple truths and explanations from his father and mother who love him. Our Lord tells Nicodemus, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” The people who are born of the Spirit act this way because they live in *faith* that where God leads them by His Word, there they must go. Such is the fruit of being born again. No non-believer gets that; because they do not yet belong to Jesus and have not been born again, their eyes are blind until regeneration. They *cannot* understand the things of God.

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3 Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration) XI.78

4 Romans 1:19-20, 2:14-15

5 Matthew 18:3-4

## **The New Birth and the Cross**

I preach this sermon under the assumption that everyone reading it or hearing it is a Christian, someone who believes the Gospel and has been Baptized. But for anyone who isn't (or knows someone who isn't), do not lose hope. Our Lord Jesus says to Nicodemus that He must “be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” This is to say, He went to the Cross and died there *so that* people could be saved. God made sure this happened so that none of our sins, none of our wickedness, could get in the way of Him making us new again, for as Christ says, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Because God loves us, He sent His Son to pay the penalty for all sins so that no one could be barred from the new birth, from Baptism, from the Holy Spirit dwelling with us and leading us by His Word. Now, He holds out His hands, freely offering this salvation and the eternal life that comes with it.

If you have not yet received this Gospel, take comfort in the knowledge that it is never too late for you to believe. If you do believe but you *know* someone who is not Christian, perhaps it has brought concern to your heart and you worry for their soul; take comfort my friend, for our Lord is working on that one and He hears your prayers for them. He offers them faith and forgiveness, and until they are in the grave it is never too late – keep praying and entrust their soul to our Savior! For it was saving them, just as saving you, that was the entire point of Christ's mission.

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