

A LONGER LOOK AT THE LESSONS

Study Guide and Leader Guide

for Pericopes as Listed in *Lutheran Service Book*

Series C

Propers 15–29

*Including additional lessons for Christian Education Sunday,
Reformation Day, and All Saints' Day*

By Ken Behnken



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Introduction

The Three-Year Series of Scripture readings appointed for use in public worship first appeared in 1969 in the *Ordo lectionum Missae*, developed by the Roman Catholic Church. Shortly thereafter, the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW) prepared a Lutheran version of this series, which was eventually included in *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978) and, with some slight modifications, in *Lutheran Worship* (1982). *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (1993), the hymnal of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, also included a version of the ILCW lectionary.

In 1983, the Consultation on Common Texts (CCT), an ecumenical study group, published the *Common Lectionary* based on the *Ordo lectionum Missae* as well as the Lutheran and various Protestant three-year cycles in use at the time. After significant field-testing, the CCT then published the *Revised Common Lectionary* in 1992, which was adopted for use in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1998 and adapted for use in *Lutheran Service Book*, the new hymnal of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

This revised edition of *A Longer Look at the Lessons* takes into account the differences between various versions of the Three-Year Series in use among Lutherans today and provides studies for the system you have designated. The studies offer guidance for personal study and prompt discussion and application of the pericopes by adult Bible study groups.

Two basic principles were followed in structuring the various versions of Three-Year Lectionary: a *thematic principle* and a *principle of semicontinuous reading*. The *thematic principle* is generally employed during the festival half-year. Readings are selected to emphasize the themes of the festivals and the seasons that surround them. The primary reading is always the Holy Gospel, and that is why it is studied first in these materials. The Old Testament Reading (or First Reading) and the Epistle are then selected to support and enhance the theme set forth by the Holy Gospel.

The *principle of semicontinuous reading* is applied especially during the nonfestival half of the Church Year (the Sundays after Pentecost). The Holy Gospels of Series A are largely from Matthew, Series B from Mark, and Series C from Luke. Readings from John are inserted in all the series, especially during the festival half-year. The Epistles also represent semi-continuous readings through particular letters. The Old Testament Readings, however, are selected thematically in relation to the Holy Gospel throughout both halves of the Church Year.

The overall purpose of assigning Scripture readings in this way is to provide an annual review of salvation history and of major Christian doctrines, as well as to read significant sections of Holy Scripture during certain times of the Church Year. Pastors have found these pericopal studies helpful as they prepare their sermons and services from week to week.

Study Guide

How to Use the Study Guide

The Study Guide has been prepared with three goals in mind. First, it provides information about the lessons and their contexts. A look at the Greek or Hebrew is sometimes included. Doctrinal emphases are pointed out, and the text is often related to other statements of Scripture. Second, it asks questions that help the group explore the texts and provoke analytical thought. Answers are to be sought first in the pericopes themselves, with other references cited for backup or expansion of the thought. Questions that explore the text are just asking “What does it say?” to focus attention. They are easy to answer—so easy that people sometimes feel uneasy about stating the obvious. Help your group understand this. Don’t spend time on these; just get a focus on what the text says and how it says it, and move on to questions that ask “What does it mean?” These require more time and thought. Let your group struggle a little if necessary; don’t be in a hurry to provide answers yourself. Sometimes, restating the question will help them move to the point. Third, the Study Guide encourages discussion and application to Christian life today by asking “What does it mean for us?” This is the essential goal of every Bible study. Give your group members time to express themselves. Encourage and accept their applications and testimonies. Don’t hesitate to share your own views and experiences, but *don’t take over*, or group members will back off and wait for you to do this every time. Fill-in-the-blank exercises focus the attention of the group on key words of the text; and these are intended to provide emphasis of their significance in a simple way.

Make use of added Scripture references—but save time by using slips of paper to assign them ahead of time to individuals who don’t mind reading aloud in your group.

Lesson 1

Proper 15

The Holy Gospel: Luke 12:49–56

Jesus taught the crowd about the importance of trusting the heavenly Father and investing themselves in conscientious service in the kingdom of God. Now He focused on His own ministry in this kingdom. In two exclamatory statements, using pictures of fire and water, He stated His eagerness to have His saving work accomplished.

1. What was ahead of Jesus that would kindle the “fire” that He came to bring on the earth? What is the “baptism” that Jesus would undergo?

Jesus said, “How great is My distress until it is accomplished!” The Greek for “distress” implies a weight that presses down and pressures. The word *telesthe*, “accomplished,” points to the fulfillment of a purpose, not just the ending of something. It’s the same word used in the Greek text for Jesus’ statement from the cross: *Tetelestai*—“It is finished!” or “It is accomplished!”

2. Why did Jesus feel such great distress that He was eager to see His ministry come to completion and fulfill its purpose?

Jesus then spoke to the crowd about the decisive and divisive effect the fire He came to kindle would have on people. We are accustomed to thinking of Jesus as the Prince of Peace. We rejoice to remember His promise: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you” (John 14:27). But here He had surprising words for His disciples and the crowd: “Do you think that I have come to give ____ on earth? No, I tell you, but rather ____.”

3. What will be the primary decisive and divisive effect of the fire of Jesus’ saving work as it confronts people? (See John 3:16–18 and Matthew 12:30.)

4. What prompts those who reject Jesus to sometimes take it out on His followers in active persecution? How has this kind of hatred of Jesus and His Church been expressed in our country’s society?

5. Where, according to Jesus' words, is the division caused by the "fire" He brings most keenly felt?

6. When situations of tension and conflict caused by the "fire" Jesus brings come into our experience, what is to be our response? (See Matthew 10:32–33; 5:38–48; Romans 12:17–21; and 1 Peter 3:1–4.)

Jesus used the little illustration of the court system to emphasize the urgency of the either/or decision that His saving work and His call to discipleship demand. He is the one who becomes the adversary of those who reject Him. He will take them to stand before God's court of justice for judgment. Jesus was telling them, "Now is the time to respond positively to Me and the 'fire' of My Gospel before it is too late for you."

The Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 23:16–29

Jeremiah was God's prophet to the leaders and people of the Kingdom of Judah during its last years. The political leaders were looking to alliances with other countries for national security, and the religious leaders were bringing false assurance that, because of His temple, Yahweh would never let Jerusalem be conquered and destroyed. But Jeremiah persistently prophesied the fall of Judah and Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Jeremiah assailed the perfunctory performance of religion that characterized the worship in the temple. He warned that the political and religious leaders were deluding themselves and deceiving the people with their false assurances of security.

Chapter 23 is one of the great chapters of Jeremiah and of all the Old Testament. In *The Word Becoming Flesh*, Hummel calls it "a false versus true shepherd pericope" (p. 248). It includes the Lord's promise that He Himself will "gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and . . . set shepherds over them who will care for them" (vv. 3–4). It reaches its high point in the beautiful messianic prophecy of the Righteous Branch of David, who "shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land" (v. 5)—the One who will be called "The LORD is our righteousness" (v. 6). This lesson is part of Jeremiah's contrasting of lying prophets and true representatives of the Word of the Lord.

7. The professional prophets were saying to those who despised the Word of the Lord, "It shall be well with you," and to everyone who stubbornly followed his own heart, "No disaster shall come upon you." What was their basic problem? Is this a problem in today's Church? (See 2 Timothy 4:1–5.)

Jeremiah describes the judgment the false prophets were bringing on themselves: "Who among them has stood in ____ to see and to hear ____, or who has ____ to His word and _____. Behold, the ____ of the LORD! ____ has gone forth, a ____; it will burst upon the _____. The ____ will not turn back until He has _____."

The Lord of hosts says about false prophets: “I did not ____ the prophets, yet they _____. I did not ____ to them, yet they _____. But if they had _____, then they would have _____ to My people, and they would have _____, and from the _____.

8. What was the point of the Lord saying, “Am I a God at hand . . . and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? . . . Do I not fill heaven and earth?”

9. What was the charge the Lord brought against the lying prophets? How did telling their own “dreams” to one another make them guilty of trying to make people forget the Lord’s name?

The Lord’s message through Jeremiah called the deceitful dreams of the lying prophets ____ as compared with the ____ that is the Word of the Lord spoken faithfully.

10. What does it say about the true Word that it is “like fire” and “like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces”?

11. What does this lesson say to us as Jesus’ representatives for our day?

12. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Hebrews 11:17–12:3

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were being tempted to revert to Judaism because of the growing threat of official persecution of Christians. Judaism had been granted certification as a legal religion by Rome. Christianity was at the point of being declared an illegal religion because followers of Jesus were accepting persecution and even death rather than burn incense to the emperor in one of the temples dedicated to him. Feeling that pinch, some Jewish Christians were leaving the Church and going back to the safety of Judaism.

Chapter 11 is the great “Hall of Faith” chapter in the Letter to the Hebrews. The faith of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is signalized. The faith of Moses is championed.

This lesson holds before us Abraham, ready to offer up Isaac, his promised son, trusting that God was able even to raise him from the dead to fulfill His covenant promise; Isaac, invoking differing blessings on his sons, Jacob and Esau; Jacob, blessing Joseph’s two sons; Joseph, prophesying the exodus centuries later; and Moses, identifying with his people, Israel, hearing God’s call, and instituting the Passover—all acting by faith.

By faith, the nation of Israel saw its beginnings in the exodus from Egypt. Their passing through the waters of the Red Sea was a point of reference many times in Old Testament Scripture. By faith in the Lord's power, the walls of Jericho fell before them. By faith, Rahab of Jericho became part of Israel.

13. What is especially significant about Rahab being in the Hall of Faith?

14. What did Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, and David have in common in their display of faith that qualified them for mention by name in the Hall of Faith?

15. Why was Samuel singled out for naming while the prophets who followed him are referred to only by "and the prophets"?

The trials and sufferings of the heroes of faith were described in great detail by the writer of Hebrews to help the Jewish Christians face their own possible sufferings, if that was the Lord's will for them. The suggestion is something like this: "Are you ready to be in God's Hall of Faith?"

16. What is the significance of "All these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised"?

17. What was the "something better" that "God had provided" for the Jewish Christians to whom this was written? How would that also make the heroes of faith in Old Testament times "perfect" or complete?

Chapter 12 is built on chapter 11, just as a Christian life of discipleship is built on the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ. The surrounding "cloud of witnesses," those mentioned in the Hall of Faith chapter, made faith in God's covenant promise the overriding value in life and would not settle for less. Pointing to them, the writer of Hebrews said to Jewish Christians who knew the fulfillment of the covenant in Jesus Christ: "Let us ____, and let us ____."

18. Whose example does Hebrews hold out as motivation for our running the race? What was the "joy that was set before Him" that motivated Jesus to endure the cross and win the victory God sent Him to win?

Lesson 2

Christian Education Sunday

The Holy Gospel: Luke 18:15–17

It was customary among the Jews that when an important rabbi was in their town, the mothers brought their children to Him for a blessing. Luke recorded one such occasion. The disciples rebuked the mothers, no doubt, because they thought Jesus was too busy to be bothered with such trivialities—for Jewish men did not have much to do with children in public. Jesus told them, and He tells us, “Let the children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.”

19. How may we bring our children and grandchildren to Jesus?

20. How might we hinder our children’s and grandchildren’s coming to Jesus?

21. Why did Luke record this incident right after Jesus’ telling and applying His parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in the temple? What does it mean to receive the kingdom of God like a child?

The Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 6:4–15

Deuteronomy means “second law.” It records Moses’ farewell encouragement to that generation and to succeeding generations to revere and serve and obey Yahweh. It repeats the Law that he had received and handed down and applies it theologically to the relationship the Israelites were to enjoy with Yahweh as their covenant God. This pericope includes the *Shema*, the creed of the Old Testament faithful that Jesus quoted in today’s Holy Gospel. It stresses, in contrast with the prevailing polytheism of other nations, that Yahweh is the one and only God. He is not one among many, but the one and only. The word *Shema* means “hear”—it’s the first Hebrew word of this creed.

22. Why is “Hear!” a good way to begin such a statement of the faith?

These words follow Moses' repetition of the Ten Commandments. His concern for the continued faithfulness of his people is evident. He had seen the faithlessness of those who had left Egypt, and he had led them in the desert wanderings imposed by Yahweh, until a new generation arose to enter the Promised Land. His encouragement to fear the Lord may best be understood as "hold the Lord in awe and reverence."

23. What did Moses assure them would be the result of their revering and obeying the Lord?

24. What summary commandment did Moses state here as the basis for all the others? What would enable the Israelites to love the Lord and thus want to obey Him?

25. What did Moses stress with "on your heart," "teach them diligently," "talk of them," "bind them," and "write them"?

The use of phylacteries and mezuzahs grew out of a literal application of these words. Phylacteries were leather prayer bands that held small boxes in place on the forehead and the arm during morning prayer. The box for the forehead had four compartments for parchments on which Exodus 13:1–10; 13:11–16; Deuteronomy 6:5–9; and 11:13–21 were written. The box for the arm had one compartment for a single parchment on which all of these were written. These were aids for Jewish men in their prayers. Their use meant daily recommitment to love Yahweh with all their mind and all their strength. Mezuzahs were small wooden boxes containing a parchment on which Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and 11:13–21 were formally written in twenty-two lines. Mezuzahs were attached to door frames of the main entrances to houses and were touched by family members as they left the house and as they returned as a reminder of the covenant.

26. What religious artifacts serve a similar purpose in our homes and in our devotions?

27. What were the great spiritual dangers that Moses was concerned about enough to warn the people of Israel? How do we face the same kinds of dangers in our lives as modern Christians?

28. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Acts 2:37–41

29. Peter ended his Pentecost sermon with “God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” What did Peter tell the people when they then asked, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter’s answer exemplifies Spirit-powered preaching that calls on people to do what they, of themselves, are unable to do (see 1 Corinthians 2:14; 12:3). But when the Good News of Jesus is proclaimed as Peter did, the call to repent and be baptized becomes part of the dynamic by which the Spirit works His miracle of faith and regeneration.

30. God’s Word is *power to make things happen*. What is our responsibility in this process?

31. What would those who accepted Peter’s call to repentance and faith be acknowledging about Jesus by being baptized in His name? Here the Greek word for sin is *hamartia*, means “missing the mark.” What basic sin, what “missing the mark,” would these Jews be confessing about Jesus in repenting and being baptized? (See John 3:16–18; 8:24.)

32. Three thousand believed and were immediately baptized. Why were they not given more instruction in the Gospel before being baptized?

33. For what did Peter’s inspired words “the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself” prepare the way? What assurance comes to us today through these words of Peter? What guidance?

34. That Day of Pentecost was the birthday of the Christian Church. What was immediately at the center of the life of this congregation (see v. 42)? What does that say to us on Christian Education Sunday?

Lesson 3

Proper 16

The Holy Gospel: Luke 13:22–30

Jesus, traveling toward Jerusalem, teaching in towns and villages, was asked, “Will those who are saved be few?” The questioner is not identified, nor is what led to his question explained. Jesus, however, did not deal with it as an abstraction, the answer to which would make little difference to the crowd. His answer was personal and direct. The significant question for each of them and for each of us is this: if only a few are saved, will I be among them?

The Greek *agonizesthe* is a strong word. It comes from athletic games and describes the extreme effort of a runner who “hits the wall” and, through sheer determination, runs through the pain to complete the race. So Jesus’ words might be stated, “Put *everything you have* into the effort.” There is no substitute for entering the narrow door to life in the Kingdom.

35. What does it say about the “Kingdom house” that there is only one door and it is narrow? What is suggested by Jesus’ “many . . . will seek to enter and will not be able”?

Jesus’ words focus on the timeliness of the effort as well as on the narrow door. His parable makes it clear that there will be a time when the narrow door will be closed and it will be too late to enter. His “I do not know where you come from” and “Depart from Me all you workers of evil!” say that at that point the door will stay shut no matter how hard some might knock or how earnestly they might plead. There is an opportune moment in which to *hear* His urging and to *act* decisively before the door is closed. This does not apply just to Judgment Day. Opportune moments come to an end, and the door closes, also in the course of a person’s lifetime. The Scripture urges us to respond to the Gospel now, while we hear His call.

36. Why is it dangerous to put off Jesus’ urging to act decisively about the Kingdom until “tomorrow”?

37. What does “We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets” say about increased responsibility? (See Luke 12:47–48.)

38. Poet John Greenleaf Whittier wrote, “For of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these: It might have been!” How does this apply to those on the outside looking in to see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God?

39. Who are those from the east and west and north and south?

40. Keeping in mind that Jesus was making a point about opportune Gospel moments, interpret Jesus’ “some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 66:18–23

This pericope ends Isaiah III, the last part of the prophecy of Isaiah, a section that points ahead to the messianic kingdom and its glory. “I know their works and their thoughts” attaches to the previous verse, which describes the abominable actions of apostate Jews who had adopted pagan religious practices. It was to such defectors among His own people that the Lord said, “The time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see My glory.” Much later, the apostle Paul said something similar to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch when they rejected the Gospel and opposed his work (see Acts 13:42–46). It is striking that Isaiah said “all nations” will be allowed to *see the Lord’s glory*, a privilege that had not been granted even to Moses (see Exodus 33:12–23).

41. What is it about the glory of the Lord that ultimately allowed the nations to see it and not die but find life in it? (See 2 Corinthians 4:4–6.)

“I will set a sign among them” may refer back to Isaiah 11:10–12, which promises that the Root of Jesse, the promised Christ, “will raise a signal for the nations.” The ultimate “sign” of this Root of Jesse is, of course, His cross and the empty tomb, which invite all to believe in Him and be saved. In this lesson, those who respond to God’s either/or Gospel sign are called “survivors.”

42. What is the assignment that will be given to these survivors?

The glory of the Lord will be displayed as “all your brothers” are an offering to the Lord. This promised the rescue of the chosen of Israel, but it was ultimately fulfilled as the chosen ones of “the nations” became brothers and sisters in God’s covenant family, the Body of Christ. The glory of the Lord will be fulfilled as the nations become a willing “offering to the LORD.”

43. What will some of these “foreigners” in God’s family even be selected to be? (See 1 Peter 2:5–10.)

44. How enduring will this messianic kingdom be? What will be the hallmark of life in the messianic kingdom?

45. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Hebrews 12:4–29

To Jewish Christians who were thinking of reverting to Judaism to avoid the official persecution the Christians were beginning to feel, the writer of Hebrews had held out Jesus’ “enduring from sinners such hostility against Himself.” It was to encourage them to “not grow weary or fainthearted.” He said that, unlike Jesus, “You have not yet resisted to the point of ____.”

He then called what Christians were experiencing “the discipline of the Lord” and quoted Scripture to remind them that “the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.” Using the analogy of earthly fathers, he told them that when God disciplined them it was for their ____, and that His discipline proved that they were His true _____. Though it is painful at the time, he said, “Discipline . . . yields ____ to those who ____.”

46. “Therefore . . .” How would they be able to pass safely through their time of testing?

Again and again the writer has been pointing to the surpassing excellence of Christ and the fulfilled covenant as compared with all aspects of the covenant of promise. He now returns to that with a contrast that plays on the two locations involved in the two covenants: Mount Sinai, where the Law covenant was given, and Mount Zion in heaven, where the full benefits of the fulfilled grace covenant will be realized.

The old covenant was introduced with the giving of the Ten Commandments, thundered from atop Mount Sinai by the Lord Himself. Sinai was a mountain that “may be touched”—a geophysical location used by God as the site of His dramatic revelation. “You have not come” is a perfect tense in Greek and says, in effect, “You did not arrive at the mountain at which you were to remain.” Sinai, with its Law covenant, was really a way station for God’s people, intended to lead them finally to the fulfilled covenant in Christ. At Sinai, the people were so uncomfortable in the presence of God that they begged “that no further messages be spoken to them.” Their fearful reaction was not just a result of the awesome circumstances. They had witnessed God’s power before. But as God thundered the Law to them, they were fully aware of their failure to live up to its demands. Moses himself said, “I tremble with fear.” When it is taken seriously, that is always the first effect of the Law. Clearly, this was not the place at which they were to stay.

“But you have come”—the same Greek word as before but without the “not.” Its perfect tense indicates that “You have arrived! This is your final destination!” What the writer now pictures is so sure and certain for those under God’s grace in Christ that it is stated as if it had already happened. You *have come*

- to Mount Zion. Not a geophysical location, but the “city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (see Revelation 21:1–3).
- to “innumerable angels in festal gathering” (see Revelation 5:11–12).
- to “the assembly of the firstborn”—our full inheritance is guaranteed as if each of us were the firstborn in this family of God (see Romans 8:14–17).
- to those “who are enrolled in heaven” (see Luke 10:17–20).
- to “God, the judge of all” (see Romans 14:9–12).
- to “spirits of the righteous made perfect”—*teteleiōmenōn*, their purpose ultimately fulfilled in God’s will for them (see Romans 4:25).
- to “Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant” (see 1 John 2:1–2).
- to “the sprinkled blood” (see Hebrews 9:11–14).

47. What is the “better word” that the blood of Jesus speaks as compared with the “word” spoken by the blood of Abel? (See Genesis 4:9–12.)

48. When things get shaky and uncertain in life and difficult testings come, in what may we find our stability?

Lesson 4

Proper 17

The Holy Gospel: Luke 14:1–14

“They were watching Him carefully” to catch Jesus breaking the Sabbath rules, as He was known to do. Jesus accommodated them. He healed a man who had dropsy, who had come to stand before Him, but not before He forestalled their criticism by asking them, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” After healing the man, Jesus reminded the Pharisees that even their rules allowed them to do helpful things for people or animals in distress.

For formal dinners, the Jews had adopted the Roman practice of reclining at table, lying on couches, propped up on their left elbows, with their legs extended from the table. The places on the left sides of the large couches offered the best view of the table and facilitated conversation. Jesus had noticed the scramble for the places of honor, those nearest the host, and for the more convenient places on the reclining couches. Jesus warned that such pushy social behavior causes resentment, and should their host ask them to move to make room for someone he wants to honor more, it would prompt scorn from all present. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18) can be true socially as well as spiritually.

In private settings, the rudeness of those who are pushy in their social ambition usually does turn others off. It’s interesting to note, however, that sometimes those who push themselves forward most blatantly—politicians, athletes, rock musicians, entertainers, and such—are not resented by their fans. Instead, their followers lionize them and even join them in their “we’re number one” posturing.

49. What is behind this kind of resentment of the pushiness of others in one instance but adopting the same stance in another?

Jesus told the pushy people that if they really wanted to be honored by others, they were going about it the wrong way. They should seat themselves at less prominent and less convenient places. Then, should the host invite them to move up to better places, those around them would honor them for their “humility.” Jesus was needling them with His irony. He surely knew that such an approach could be just a ploy, a display of false humility to further social ambitions. It might fool the people around them, who couldn’t see how self-centered their “humility” is. But those involved in such a contrived scenario are really just full of themselves. Real humility is not a pose.

Jesus ended His instruction to guests with a principle that Scripture repeats in a number of ways and in many places: “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

50. What is it about pride that makes it top the list of things that God can’t stand? (See Proverbs 6:16–19.)

51. Why is true humility essential to receiving the blessings of God's kingdom? How is true humility produced in us? (See Romans 3:19–24; Ephesians 2:8–9.)

Modern psychology teaches us that people need to feel good about themselves to be able to live healthy lives and to utilize their talents fully. Today some even take assertiveness training to help them overcome bad feelings about themselves that have resulted from their being continually put down by people important to them.

52. What gives us as Christians the best reasons for having a good self-image?

53. How does knowing who we are help us to serve others in true humility? (See John 13:3–5.)

Jesus then addressed Himself to hosts, about the people they entertain. He said, "Do not invite your ____ or your ____ or your ____ or ____." Instead, "invite ____, ____, ____, ____." It helps to know that *phōnei*, "invite," is a present tense and implies continuing action.

54. Why did Jesus warn against continually inviting those on the first list? With what was He encouraging to keep on inviting those on His second list?

55. What categories of people in our society would Jesus include on His list of those we are to invite "when you give a dinner"? Why should we be concerned about such people, and how can we take practical steps to implement Jesus' encouragement to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind"?

The Old Testament Lesson: Proverbs 25:2–10

This pericope is from a section called "The Second Anthology of Solomon's Proverbs." Preceding 25:1 is a title: "These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied." These proverbs begin with wise sayings about kings and their courts.

56. In what sense is it "the glory of God to conceal things" and "the glory of kings . . . to search things out"?

57. What principle is established by “take away the wicked from the presence of the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness”?

The thought moves to a royal feast, where the guests are seated according to rank or royal favor. Proverbs offers wise guidance about not letting your pride and social ambition make you pushy in that setting.

58. Did Jesus have these proverbs in mind when He gave His advice to the Pharisees in the Holy Gospel? The Pharisees knew them too—why didn’t they put them into practice?

These proverbs have a place in the Bible, not as a guide to behavior in the presence of high-ranking people, but as a reminder that proud self-assertion is not only out of place socially but is also unacceptable in relation to God.

59. How would taking your neighbor to court and revealing his secrets, instead of dealing privately with him, bring shame and ill repute on you?

The tie to today’s Holy Gospel is obvious.

The Epistle for the Day: Hebrews 13:1–17

The Greek text says, “*Philadelphia*, let it continue.” The present imperative acknowledges that this “brotherly love” was already operative among them and urges that it continue. These were pointed words for Jewish Christians who had lived in brotherly Christian love but were now thinking of leaving the Christian brotherhood and returning to Judaism.

60. What produces brotherly and sisterly affection among Christians? How have you experienced this brotherly or sisterly affection on the part of fellow members in your life in the Church?

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers” is also a present tense, calling for continuing action. *Philozenia*, “hospitality to strangers,” is an extended form of *philadelphia*, “brotherly love.” The writer was encouraging hospitality especially toward traveling Christians, showing them affection as brothers and sisters even though they were not known personally. Reliable public accommodations for travelers were not available. Christians who lost house and home and were fleeing persecution were dependent on the love of other Christians. The writer’s comment about entertaining angels by being hospitable to strangers surely made these Jewish Christians remember father Abraham’s experience with the “three men” who unexpectedly appeared at his tent—and it offers its own encouragement to us.

61. How did Jesus offer even stronger motivation than Abraham for this kind of love? (See Matthew 25:34–40.)

“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.” Fellow Christians were feeling the weight of persecution, and Jewish Christians could remember their own experiences at the hand of other Jews when they had been called to follow Christ (see Hebrews 10:32–34).

62. Does this encouragement apply also to criminals who are being punished for crimes they have committed?

Both the Jewish society and the larger pagan society of that day had lax attitudes toward the marriage bond—just as our own does. The writer encouraged Christian values in this regard: “Let marriage be held in honor among all.” He became very specific by saying that the *koite*, the marriage bed, is to be kept pure. He stated categorically that adulterers, married people who are sexually unfaithful and the sexually immoral singles who practice *porneia* will be judged by God, who instituted the marriage relationship for those He had created in His image. This is no mean threat, considering that God is a consuming fire as well as a loving Father. The writer here is not pointing just to God’s judgment at the Last Day but also to the Law’s built-in, self-executive judgment that degrades immoral individuals and societies, as God lets them just go deeper into their willful sin (see Romans 1:18–32).

63. How can the Church help couples build strong Christian marriages? How can we help Christian youth resist the pressures of a sexually permissive and promiscuous society?

64. How do love of money and discontentment with what we have violate our relationship with God? What encourages us to practice Christian contentment with what we have?

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.” He had named the great champions in the “Hall of Faith.” Now he pointed to leaders they knew, who had influenced them. Paul had been able to interact with the Christian Jews in Rome while under house arrest. Tradition says also that Peter ended his ministry in Rome.

65. What had been the outcome of the way of life of these two apostles, as it was built on their faith in Jesus? What did their example say to the Jewish Christians who were thinking of reverting to Judaism?

66. How does “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” bring assurance and stability to us as we trust Him and follow Him?

Again, a contrast and an exhortation. The contrast compares Jesus’ atoning death and the Jews’ annual Day of Atonement, with its sprinkling of the blood of a sacrificial animal on the ark of the covenant for the sins of the people—and the animal’s body being burned outside the camp. The writer said, “So Jesus also suffered outside the gate” once for all “to sanctify the people through His own blood” and rose from the dead. The words of exhortation are “Let us go to Him outside the camp.”

67. What are the appropriate sacrifices we Christians are to bring to God?

Lesson 5

Proper 18

The Holy Gospel: Luke 14:25–35

“Great crowds accompanied Him.” These were probably pilgrims heading for Jerusalem, attracted to this popular rabbi. Jesus used the occasion to teach about the either/or nature of discipleship.

You want to be a disciple of Jesus? Then you must “hate” father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even your own life! There is an obvious paradox here, for in other places the Bible makes it clear that love for Jesus is to be expressed in love for family and friends and people in need.

68. What was Jesus saying with His “If you don’t ‘hate’ even those closest to you, you cannot be My disciple”? (See Matthew 12:46–50.) In what sense must we “hate” our own lives? (See Luke 9:23–25.)

The “cross” a disciple is to carry is not just life’s difficulties—illness, accidents, turmoil, frustration, and so on. These may simply result from living in a sin-corrupted world. Crosses are difficulties or suffering that result from a faithful attachment to Jesus and from faithfully representing Him in proclaiming His Gospel (see Luke 6:22–23). Jesus’ requirements—giving Him top priority in life and carrying the cross He assigns—are not optional for His disciples. A *mathetes*, a disciple, was not just a curious onlooker but was one who was fully committed to learning from his master and to catching his master’s spirit, becoming like his teacher as much as possible.

Jesus urged those who would follow Him to count the cost of discipleship—not just so they will avoid a hasty decision but also so they will make a decision in full awareness of all that discipleship will require of them. It is a decision that can be made only in the power of the Holy Spirit.

69. What was Jesus suggesting about our learning to build Christlike lives by illustrating it with a man building a tower and a king going into battle? How does God equip us to “build a tower” with our Christian lives? (See Philippians 2:12–13.)

“Renounce all that he has”—really? This is not a call to some kind of vow of poverty. It is an invitation to surrender title to ourselves, all we are and all we have, to the One who paid the price so we “may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness” (Small Catechism, Second Article). One man has called this kind of attitude toward life “Jubilee stewardship”—based on the Old Testament’s Year of Jubilee principle. Every fiftieth year was to be a Year of Jubilee. Family property that had been sold was to revert to the family as its inheritance; fellow Hebrews who had been reduced to servitude were to be

set free. Behind it all was the principle that, in the final analysis, both the land and the people belonged to the Lord (see Leviticus 25:23–24, 54–55). Historians tell us that this was never really practiced by Israel, but Jesus, with His “all that he has,” teaches us that the principle does apply to His disciples. Under the principle of Jubilee stewardship, Christians are willingly to surrender themselves to the Lord. They acknowledge that their time, their talents, and their possessions *all* belong not to them but to the Lord. Instead of asking, “What part of *my* time, abilities, and money shall I give to the Lord?” a Jubilee steward asks, “What portion of *the Lord’s* time, talents, and treasure that He entrusts to me may I appropriately use for my own and my family’s needs?”

70. How did Jesus show that Jubilee stewardship, or whatever you choose to call this personal surrender of rights to Him, is not optional?

When Jesus talked about salt, He was talking about its preservative quality—hence, the preservative quality of His disciples. The Gospel of Jesus that we proclaim and that we model with our love for Him and for others is the one hope for sinful man. If disciples lose their saltiness, either by not faithfully proclaiming the Gospel or by not modeling Jesus’ love with theirs, they are of no use to Jesus and His kingdom and are thrown away. The fault is not His, for He supplies the Means of Grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to make them salty. The fault lies with the faithless disciple who returns to his old loves, refuses to bear the cross, and again puts his trust in his possessions.

The Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 30:15–20

God’s either/or sounds out loud and clear also in this Old Testament Lesson. It is part of Moses’ urgent appeal to Israel as the end of his time of leadership approached, and he was recounting the giving of the Law of the Lord for them. *Deuteronomy* means “second law,” but it is more than just a repetition of laws. It is Moses’ preaching to the people as he expanded on and applied the theology of the covenant and the Law.

Note the extreme contrasts he holds before them: ____ and ____ or ____ and ____.

71. How could Moses *command* the people to love the Lord?

72. How were the Israelites to show their love for the Lord?

73. What blessing would be the result of their obedience to the Lord’s commands? What would be experienced if they disobeyed and turned to worship pagan gods?

74. How does Moses' urging the people to "choose life" relate to his telling them "[The LORD] is your life and length of days"?

75. What would choosing life empower the people to do?

The New Testament did not back away from this necessity to make an either/or decision and commitment, but it put Jesus, the fulfiller of the covenant, at the center of it and offered eternal life only through Him (John 3:16–18, 36).

76. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Philemon 1–21

Philemon was a wealthy and influential member of the Church in Colossae, a man who had household slaves to see to his affairs. One of these slaves was Onesimus, whose name means "Useful." Onesimus ran away, carrying with him some of his master's valuables. He found his way to Rome, where he somehow came into contact with Paul, who was under house arrest while awaiting trial in the imperial court. Paul led the runaway slave to Christ, and Onesimus gave useful service to Paul. But Paul saw that Onesimus was honor-bound to return to Philemon. Paul sent him back in the company of Tychicus, who carried Paul's personal letter to Philemon and probably also Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and his Letter to the Colossians.

Paul began his letter with the usual greetings and compliments and assurances. He prayed that Philemon's sharing of his faith might become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. He praised Philemon for an act of love that refreshed the hearts of the saints—probably a reference to his opening of his house to the Church as its meeting place.

77. How do each of these—sharing his faith, understanding the good we have in Christ, and providing his house as the Church's meeting place—apply to what Philemon had to address with the return of Onesimus?

78. Runaway slaves were dealt with harshly—the system of slavery demanded it. How did Paul suggest this might be overcome by Philemon in receiving Onesimus?

79. What friendly pressures did Paul apply to Philemon in all of this?

There is a strong parallel between what Paul did for Onesimus with Philemon and how Jesus intervenes for us with His Father. So, what became of Onesimus? Did he continue to be a slave, or is it possible that he was freed and, in time, even became a leader in the Church? One tradition says that the Onesimus who later served as bishop of Ephesus was this very same converted slave.

Much thought and comment and criticism has been prompted by the fact that Paul did not insist that Onesimus be made a free man now that he was a Christian—and did not comment on the immorality of slavery as an institution. The apostles did not devote their energies to this because they had little hope of changing this system on which the Roman world was built. They did not work to change society but to change individuals within society. Slaves who became Christians were encouraged to serve the Lord in serving their masters. Christian slave owners were told to be fair and right, remembering that they, too, have a Master in heaven (see Colossians 3:22–4:1). Martin Franzmann comments in *The Word of the Lord Grows*, “A Gospel which can say to the master of a runaway slave that he is to receive him back . . . ‘as a beloved brother’ has overcome slavery from within and has therefore already rung the knell of slavery” (p. 129). Later, that proved to be true in Western civilization, though only after a long struggle between conscience and economic profit.

80. How has this whole situation changed for us as Christians in our society?

Lesson 6

Proper 19

The Holy Gospel: Luke 15:1–10

Luke 15 is the Bible’s “lost and found” chapter. With stories about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son, Jesus taught about God’s great yearning for the lost, who are separated from Him by sin, and about God’s rejoicing when they are found and are again with Him. Luke says the stories were occasioned by the grumbling of Pharisees and scribes over the fact that Jesus “receives sinners and eats with them.” Tax collectors were Jews who worked for the hated Romans in collecting their taxes—and, as a result, were social and religious outcasts. “Sinners” were people who openly disregarded the religious laws or were living obviously sinful lifestyles—and they, too, were not given a place in the faith community. When Jesus interacted with them, listened to them, taught them, even fellowshiped at meals with them, they eagerly gathered around Him. The Pharisees and scribes, who avoided all contact with such unworthy people, judged Jesus—“this man”—guilty of conduct that proved He was not the great prophet some people thought He was.

Jesus responded with His “lost and found” parables. The stories are so simple and so natural that the listener has to agree: Yes, you would go to find the lost sheep. Yes, you would search for the lost coin. Yes, you would watch constantly for the return of the lost son.

81. What did Jesus’ beginning with “What man of you” force on those to whom He was speaking?

82. How did the impact of what Jesus was teaching grow from story to story?

83. Why is there more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance?

The contrast between the smiling, rejoicing angels in heaven and their own sour, disapproving looks surely was not lost on the Pharisees. Some interpreters see other sidelights in the first two parables. The story of the man looking for the lost sheep in the open country is seen as representing Jesus, who came to seek and find the lost of the world. The woman looking for the lost coin in her house is seen as representing the Church in its seeking concern, as it looks for those who by neglect have hidden themselves away from the fellowship of the faithful.

84. What do these sidelights say to us as the Church?

Similarly, some see the parable of the lost sheep as a warning against careless worldliness and materialism, for the lost sheep, as it focused only on nibbling one tuft of grass after another, eventually had nibbled itself away from the flock and the shepherd. They see the story about the lost coin as a warning against indifference and negligence, for the coin evidently was lost as a result of carelessness.

85. What do these sidelights say to us for our own Christian lives?

86. What assurance is there for each of us in Jesus' stories? What spirit is encouraged in us as we hear about the rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents?

The Old Testament Lesson: Ezekiel 34:11–24

Ezekiel, whose name means “God strengthens,” was God’s prophet during the dark days of Judah’s exile in Babylon. Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed. Ezekiel warned of prolonged judgment. The Jews were not to expect early release from exile but were to work at being at peace within themselves and with the Lord in their circumstances in exile. However, always before them in this hardship was Ezekiel’s consoling message of the future restoration God would effect for His people.

In the preceding part of chapter 34, the Lord took the shepherds, the religious leaders, to task for being derelict and self-serving in the performance of their duties—to the detriment of the flock. They were told that they would be removed from their privileged positions. Then, in this lesson, the Lord promised that He Himself would enter the situation and would Himself become the faithful, caring Shepherd His people needed.

87. What are the two thrusts in the concern the Sovereign Lord would display when He Himself would become the Shepherd of the sheep? (See Psalm 23.)

88. What does this say to us about the responsibilities of all who want to serve faithfully as this Shepherd’s under-shepherds?

89. When would the promised restoration of the Shepherd’s flock take place?

We fully appreciate a loving Shepherd who searches for the lost and brings back the strays, who builds up the injured and strengthens the weak, but it surely is strange to hear the Shepherd say, “The fat and the strong I will destroy.” It is not just shepherds who come under the judging scrutiny of the sovereign Lord as the Shepherd. Abuse, exploitation, and violence against some sheep by other sheep will not escape the Lord’s notice and just judgment.

90. What was the Lord saying about social and political injustices among His people? How do His words of warning apply to life in the Church today?

91. Since David had been dead for more than three hundred years when Ezekiel prophesied, who is “My servant David” who would be “shepherd” of God’s flock and “prince” among God’s people?

92. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Timothy 1:5–17

Along with the Letter to Titus, the Letters to Timothy are known as Paul’s “Pastoral Letters.” They gave instruction to his assistants regarding pastoral care of churches. Released from custody after his trial in Rome, Paul evidently carried out a fourth mission journey, visiting Spain and Crete. He then commissioned Titus to stay and represent him in Crete and left Timothy in charge at Ephesus. Paul went on to Philippi, and from there he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Later, imprisoned again in Rome, he wrote 2 Timothy.

Timothy was led to Christ by Paul as a young man in Lystra. He traveled with Paul as his assistant and co-worker in the Gospel mission. Paul called him “my true child in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:1) and spoke highly of his work (see Philippians 2:19–22). As his martyrdom approached, Paul urged Timothy to come to him at Rome (see 2 Timothy 4:9, 21).

For Paul, the Gospel of Jesus is never just theoretical; it is always personal, and is to be expressed in life as well as in words. The charge Timothy was to convey was to “certain persons not to . . . devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith” (1 Timothy 1:3–4). The aim of the charge was “___ that issues from ___ and a ___ and a ___.”

93. How do we gain these qualities that motivate and issue love?

The false teachers evidently were using the Law to try to produce love—but no matter how many times you say, “Love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself,” it won’t motivate anyone to do it. That’s why Paul wrote, “The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane”—and proceeded

to list all kinds of them. That God's Law says "Love God" and "Love your neighbor" won't motivate people to do so, but it may indeed make them aware that they don't do so and that God judges them for it.

94. In what sense is the Law not laid down for the just?

Paul ended his list of the lawless and disobedient, the ungodly and sinners, the unholy and profane with "and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted." This triggered his remembering his own call to faith and apostleship.

95. How did Paul point to himself as a living demonstration of the meaning of "the grace of our Lord"? What had prompted and enabled the dramatic turnaround in Paul?

96. What, according to Paul, was Jesus' purpose in calling one who had been a "blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent" to be His apostle?

97. In what sense must each of us say "I am the foremost of sinners"?

"The saying is trustworthy" is a phrase that appears five times in Paul's Pastoral Letters. The "saying" he was pointing to in this instance probably had already become a well-loved cliché in the life of the Church.

98. Which words of Jesus' were echoed in this trustworthy saying?

99. Why do words of assurance such as those Paul offered here fittingly end in a doxology?

Lesson 7

Proper 20

The Holy Gospel: Luke 16:1–15

This is a story about a manager who, accused of wasting his master's possessions and at the point of losing his job, used his position to assure his own future. Questions of shrewdness, dishonesty, debt, wise disposition of resources (both material and otherwise), and true accountability mingle here, providing a rich, yet somewhat confusing backdrop for Jesus' parable.

Jesus' parable teaches us that just as the shrewd manager knew how to use ___ things with his own ___ future in mind, so as His disciples, we should learn to use ___ things with our ___ future in mind (see Matthew 6:19–21).

100. Jesus said, "Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." Do these words encourage a manipulative, works-righteous approach to Christian discipleship? (See 1 John 4:19; Galatians 5:5–6.)

101. Is it generally true that "one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much"? Point to some situations that would be exceptions to this rule.

102. Why is how we handle our "unrighteous wealth" vital to our spiritual health?

103. What are some practical ways in which we disciples of Jesus can use our worldly wealth to make an investment in eternity? (See Matthew 25:34–40.)

104. Why is it that the people of this world are often more shrewd in using things for their earthly benefit than the children of light are in using things for an eternal benefit?

105. The Pharisees who heard Jesus are called “lovers of money.” Do you think they gave a full tithe as offerings to the Lord, as the Law commanded? What does this say about these who would “justify yourselves before men”?

106. “God knows your hearts”—we know it’s true, but for us to hear Jesus say it hits home. Why does “what is exalted among men” always present a test to our hearts? What can we do when we see that we have mixed motives in our management of “unrighteous wealth” as disciples of Jesus? (See 1 John 1:9 and Matthew 6:1–4.)

The Old Testament Lesson: Amos 8:4–7

Amos, whose name means “burden” or “burden-bearer,” was God’s prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, 760–750 BC—some thirty years before its fall to Assyria. Amos explained that he was not a professional prophet but had been a farmworker in the wilderness of Judah when the word of the Lord came to him and he was ordered to go and preach to Israel. Israel was enjoying a time of prosperity, but the prosperity only tended to encourage her religious and moral corruption. Idolatry was practiced alongside the worship of Yahweh at Bethel; there was extravagant indulgence in luxurious living; immorality was rampant; there was frequent corruption of judicial procedures; and oppression of the poor was the order of the day. All the while, the people of Israel and their leaders clung to a false sense of security because of their empty religious ritual. They saw their prosperity as evidence of the Lord’s approval and blessing. Amos called them to repentance and warned that God’s patience with them was at an end.

The prophetic message of Amos is strikingly contemporary both as regards the circumstances he was sent to address and in its call for social justice as the indispensable expression of true piety.

“You who trample on the needy” stands out in contrast with the ideal of generosity and helpfulness toward the poor set forth in the Mosaic code (see Deuteronomy 15:7–11). The closing down of work and business for new moon and Sabbath observances was a bother to those whose preoccupation in life was their businesses.

107. Why is it not surprising that those whose whole life was aimed at buying and selling would “deal deceitfully with false balances”? How does the Lord feel about this? (See Deuteronomy 25:13–16.)

108. What is meant by the Lord’s swearing by “the pride of Jacob”? How is the Lord’s oath that He will “never forget any of their deeds” all the more ominous when contrasted with His assurance in Isaiah 43:25?

109. What can we as individuals do about the plight of the needy and homeless in our area? What can we as Christian citizens do to promote social justice and to overcome oppressive inequities in our society?

110. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Timothy 2:1–15

Paul's Pastoral Epistles provide his guidance regarding pastoral care of the Church. After warning about false "teachers of the law" (1:7) and giving his own personal testimony in the first part of this letter, he moves to giving instructions regarding the Christian community at worship.

111. Why would this be a primary concern then and now? What is the thrust of each of the kinds of prayer he encouraged: supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings?

112. Paul specifically mentioned "kings and all who are in high positions." What does it say to us that Nero was emperor at the time? (See Jeremiah 29:1, 4–7.)

113. What is the advantage for society when life is peaceful and quiet? What is the advantage for the Church as it carries out its mission when the society in which it is working is peaceful and quiet?

The word "godly" is a key word in the Pastoral Letters, occurring ten times in the three letters.

114. What does it do for an individual to be godly? What does it do for the society in which he or she lives?

115. What does the fact that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" say about those who are lost?

Paul's "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men" combined the thrust of the Jews' *Shema*, the creed they confessed daily, with Jesus' claim about Himself (see Deuteronomy 6:4; John 14:6).

116. What is the basis of Christ Jesus' being the one mediator between God and man?

117. What would anger and quarreling do to the congregation at prayer?

118. Why is it important in the worship service that women show modesty and self-control and wear respectable clothing and accessories? How should women adorn themselves?

It is apparent immediately that Paul is asserting the principle of male headship responsibility in matters of worship and of teaching the Word—as he did also in regard to marriage and family. The Greek is very specific that it is *tous andras*, "the men," who are to pray. A more general *gunaikas*, "women," tells them to conduct themselves with humility and self-control, to be submissive and quiet—and not to teach or exercise authority over men. Many churches follow Paul's guidance in this, and reserve functions that relate directly to the public use of Word and Sacraments to the men.

In today's world, with the social and political liberation and equalization of women, more functions and responsibilities have been given to women also within churches and their organizational structures. Some churches have removed all restrictions. The argument for this is that Paul's words were appropriate to their time and place, but it is pointed out that among the first Christians there were some women who were recognized as prophetesses and that Paul referred to some women as "my fellow workers." It is also emphasized that Paul made it clear that "there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In our society, they say, for a woman to have a public leadership role in the church is not seen as insulting to her husband, nor as usurping the authority of men.

This question is not easily settled, however, for here Paul supports his "I desire" and his "I do not permit" with a theological argument—the order of creation and the order of the fall into sin—not a sociological argument. Sociological attitudes and customs may change, but the accounts of creation and of the fall into sin in Scripture are history, and are not subject to change. That God created the man first and then from the man created the woman to be "a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18) gives strong scriptural support to the principle of male headship and responsibility.

119. The official position of the LCMS is that offices and functions that relate directly to the public use of Word and Sacraments are to be limited to male members. Does the practice of our congregation in regard to these matters agree with the Synod's position?

Lesson 8

Proper 21

The Holy Gospel: Luke 16:19–31

Last Sunday, the parable of the shrewd manager taught us to be wise in using our worldly wealth by using it with an eye to heaven. It led to Jesus' "You cannot serve God and money." This parable of the rich man and Lazarus continues that emphasis. We are reminded that we are to share God's blessings with the needy—and that at times the needy are right at the door.

120. Why is it easier to love and help needy humanity in general than it is to love and help needy individuals or families with whom we have personal contact?

This parable is another that may be used to illustrate the importance of looking just for *the* point of the parable. If you press its details, you may draw some false conclusions, which are obviously not the point of the parable:

- All who are rich and enjoy luxuries here will end up in torment in hell.
- All who are poor and suffer here will be taken to enjoy heaven's comfort.
- Those in heaven and those in hell can see one another and communicate with one another.
- Hell is a place of physical fire.
- Heaven and hell are separated physically by a great chasm.
- Those in heaven and those in hell are aware of and concerned about those still living on earth.

121. What *is* Jesus teaching us about the Christian life through His story?

122. Why will those who refuse to follow the direction of the Word of God not be impressed even if "someone should rise from the dead"?

123. Why do so many of Jesus' parables deal with the way we use our money?

124. What are some practical ways in which we can be of personal help to the needy “at our door”?

The Old Testament Lesson: Amos 6:1–7

Amos was called from the wilderness of Judah to be God’s spokesman to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He brought a call to repentance and a message of impending judgment at a time when both Israel and Judah were enjoying prominence and prosperity. Here he warned against being ___ in Zion and feeling ___ on the mountain of Samaria. Zion was a reference to the capital of the Kingdom of Judah, Jerusalem; Samaria was the capital of the Kingdom of Israel.

125. What was the basis of complacency and false security in both Israel and Judah?

The Lord was using the words of verse 2 to confront the leaders: “Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory?” The leaders of the two nations were putting “far away the day of disaster” by thoughtlessly dismissing any thought of a day of reckoning. They not only ignored the moral and social problems that were bringing the Lord’s judgment but they also contributed to them through their own lifestyles. Though they denied its threat, the reign of terror would come.

126. How did Amos describe the careless enjoyment of affluence by the wealthy?

127. What is the significance of the phrase “the ruin of Joseph”?

128. What fate was awaiting those whom Amos called the “notable men of the first of the nations”?

129. What does this pericope say to us as affluent American Christians?

130. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Timothy 3:1–13

“If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” That evidently was the view of the members of the Early Church, for it had become a “saying” among them—and Paul said, “The saying is trustworthy.” We today would readily agree that anyone who has a sense of calling from the Lord and aspires to be a pastor or teacher in the Church is desiring a noble task and deserves our encouragement and support in his pursuit of it.

The Greek word for “overseer” is *episkopos*. Later in the Church’s history, the need for organization and administration led to the establishment of a professional office of oversight over a larger number of churches in a given area. The Church called them “bishops,” which probably came into English and other languages as a derivation of *piskop*. Today, in the Roman Catholic Church, there are archbishops and cardinals and a pope over them in ecclesiastical rank.

In the Early Church, *episkopos*, “overseer,” and *presbyteros*, “elder,” appear to have been used interchangeably. In Acts 20, Paul called the elders (*presbyterous*) of the Church in Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. There he charged them, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [*episkopous*], to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood” (v. 29). Whether *episkopoi* or *presbyteroi*, these men were what we call ministers or pastors. They served the local churches and cared for the Church and Christ’s gifts to the Church (see Ephesians 4:11–13).

Our word *deacon* comes from the Greek *diakonos*, which means “server.” This became an office in the Early Church and continues today—with duties involving administration as well as responsibilities to be of help to individuals in the Church as needed. In the listing of qualities needed, “able to teach” is not in the deacons’ list—so they were not expected to preach or teach as part of their duties in the congregation. But Paul honored the office of deacon by saying, “Those who serve well as deacons gain ___ for themselves and also ___ that is in Christ Jesus.”

131. Acts 1:15–26 tells of the assembly of Christians, at Peter’s suggestion, selecting a replacement for Judas Iscariot to fill the ranks of the Twelve. What qualification had to be met for a man to be nominated for this office?

132. Acts 6:1–6 tells of the selection of seven men to serve as deacons. What qualification was required for this?

133. Neither of these appear in Paul’s listing of qualifications needed to be an overseer or a deacon. Why not?

134. Today Paul’s list would be called “leadership” or “administrative” or “personal integrity” qualities. How does a person gain such qualities?

135. Why were “not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money” and “not addicted to wine, not greedy for dishonest gain, . . . not slanderers” prominent parts of both lists?

136. What do “not a recent convert” and “let them also be tested first” suggest about these offices?

137. Why is it that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has presidents of its districts and of the Synod instead of bishops?

Lesson 9

Proper 22

The Holy Gospel: Luke 17:1–10

Sin is deadly—and here Jesus told His disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come.” In the Greek, “temptations to sin” is *skandala*. It originally referred to the trigger sticks of traps used to catch animals. In the New Testament, it refers to anything that trips up or traps in sin. In society, we are surrounded by *skandala* and are even encouraged to sin by those who benefit financially from such sinning. On the religious level, *skandala* are teachings that mislead either into works-righteousness or into a permissiveness inconsistent with discipleship. On a personal level, *skandala* are the negative influences of a person’s example. In either case, Jesus’ judgment is strong: “Woe to the one through whom [*skandala*] come.” His “little ones” may refer to children. Sinful words or actions of parents or grandparents or other adults may indeed mislead children or grandchildren into similar sinful attitudes and actions. Woe to them! Or the “little ones” may refer to new Christians. Older, more experienced Christians may become *skandala* to them when they don’t model the Christian life and church membership in positive ways. Woe to them!

Jesus had told the disciples that, in love, we are to watch also our Christian brothers and sisters and not let them be *skandala* to us or to others. When their sins are evident, we are to rebuke them, but always with a desire to restore them and not just to embarrass or punish them. In any effort to encourage repentance, it is essential that forgiveness, God’s and our own, be held out to them. Assurance that the arms of Jesus are always open to receive sinners encourages and enables repentance.

138. What has to precede our rebuking a fellow Christian for sin? How did Jesus emphasize that our forgiving those who say, “I repent,” must not be limited? How can we possibly bring ourselves to forgive someone seven times in one day?

Impressed by the deadly danger of sin and *skandala*, the apostles saw their need for greater faith. Jesus reassured and encouraged them. A mulberry tree’s root system is so intricate that, according to the rabbis, it would take six hundred years to untangle it. Yet Jesus talked about faith having power to uproot it and replant it in the sea. Some interpreters see a reference here to the future, when the apostles, in faith, would be instrumental in planting the tree of the Kingdom in the unlikely soil of Gentile nations.

139. Why can even a small faith accomplish great, even “impossible,” things?

As they learned to rebuke and rescue and forgive—and “relocate trees” through the Gospel—the apostles (and the Church) would need a humble, serving spirit. Jesus described our duty as

Christians in terms of a slave serving his master. His analogy encourages us to maintain a humble attitude in our service—not expecting to be served, thanked, or praised but expecting only to be a servant and being rewarded by the fact that in all of our Christian service we are privileged to serve such a Lord in such a Kingdom.

140. Why are we still “unworthy servants” even when we are doing our duty? How does the Lord of the Kingdom surprise us when we unworthy servants have simply done our duty? (See Luke 12:37; Matthew 25:19–23.)

The Old Testament Lesson: Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4

Little is known about Habakkuk except that he was a contemporary of Jeremiah. Like Jeremiah, he announced the impending conquest of Judah by Babylon and the subsequent overthrow of the Babylonians. His writing is dated near the time of the Battle of Carchemish, 605 BC, in which the Egyptians, who were allied to the Assyrians, were crushed by the Babylonians. With Assyria and Egypt out of the picture, Babylon dominated the Middle East. It was only a matter of time until Judah fell.

Habakkuk’s first complaint is that the Lord seemingly was doing nothing to correct and punish the injustice and violence that were rampant in Judah. The law and the pursuit of justice seemed to be paralyzed. The Lord’s answer in the rest of chapter 1 is that He would use the ruthless Babylonians to punish Judah. In 597 BC, Jerusalem fell, the prominent people were carried off into exile, and Judah was made a vassal state. The conditions that would follow produced the second complaint, also a part of chapter 1: the Lord was using a wicked and heartless people to execute judgment on “the man more righteous than” they were.

The first verse of chapter 2 ends the complaint. The prophet, like a watchman on the ramparts, awaited the Lord’s answer. In answer, the Lord spoke of the end of Judah’s time of suffering that would come at its appointed time. In 539 BC, Babylon fell to the Persians, and the prospects of a return of a remnant of Judah brightened.

141. Why was the revelation to be written on tablets?

142. What would be needed as the revelation awaited “its appointed time”?

Waiting for the Lord to act to help His people is a familiar theme of Scripture and a frequent challenge to God’s people (see Psalm 27:14; 130; Romans 8:22–25).

“His soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him” begins the Lord’s promise of His judgment of Babylon. By contrast, the faithful of Judah are promised, “The righteous shall live by His faith.” This verse is quoted by New Testament writers to support the doctrine of justification by faith (see Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:37–39).

143. What does it mean to us to live by our faith?

144. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Timothy 1:1–14

The Second Letter to Timothy is Paul's "last will and testament," written to his "true child in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2) while in chains in Rome, awaiting execution for promulgating an illegal religion. Paul felt isolated; only Luke was with him. He wrote because he wanted Timothy to come to him. His letter was to be shared with the churches, offering them his apostolic encouragement to remain faithful in their times of testing.

The close relationship between the "father" and the "child" in the Lord comes across immediately. Paul said that remembering Timothy in his prayers caused him to thank God. He recalled Timothy's tears when he left Timothy in Ephesus and went on to Macedonia. He remembered Timothy's sincere ____ that dwelt first in his ____ and _____. He encouraged Timothy to ____ the gift of God that was in him through _____.

145. What gift of God was Timothy given when he was commissioned to accompany Paul? (Compare 1 Timothy 4:11–16 and Acts 13:1–3.)

146. How does one go about knocking off the ash and fanning into flame a gift from the Holy Spirit?

Paul told Timothy that this would result, not in a spirit of ____, but in a spirit of ____, of ____, and of ____.

147. Why would Timothy need this spirit in the years ahead? Why does the Church of our day need the same spirit?

Paul's injunction to Timothy was to testify about Jesus and, if it came to that, to suffer for the Gospel. The Greek word for "testimony" or "witness" is *marturios*. It has come across into English as "martyr." Being a steadfast witness to Jesus as Lord meant martyrdom for Paul and for many other early Christians. As he wrote about the Gospel for which he was about to die, Paul emphasized again that our salvation is "not because of our works but because of [God's] own purpose and grace."

148. When, according to Paul's words, was God's grace given to us in Christ Jesus? (See Ephesians 1:3–7.) How was God's grace fully revealed to us?

“Christ Jesus . . . abolished and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” The Greek says “life and incorruption.” The Christian hope is not a nebulous immortality of the soul but the resurrection of the body. Paul was expressing this solid conviction. He entrusted his whole person, body, and soul, to Christ his Lord with firm confidence.

Paul was turning over responsibility for leadership to Timothy. His major concern was that Timothy “follow the pattern of the sound words” that he had heard from Paul and “guard the good deposit [the apostolic doctrine] entrusted” to him. Later, when the Church was defining the boundaries of its New Testament Scriptures, its major concern was this: “Is the writing apostolic?” The Church wanted the sound teaching, the good deposit, of those who were eyewitnesses of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to be its New Testament authority.

Lesson 10

Proper 23

The Holy Gospel: Luke 17:11–19

Luke records a number of incidents that took place as Jesus and His disciples traveled toward Jerusalem for the last time. He says that this incident took place while Jesus “traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.” Mentioning this set the stage for the surprising turn of events that followed. Jews traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem to worship at the temple often were not well received if they passed through Samaria as obvious religious pilgrims, so many Galileans took “the long way around.” They crossed the Jordan above Samaria, traveled south along its east bank, and crossed again near Jericho to begin the ascent to Jerusalem. Jesus was leading His disciples along the border toward the Jordan River, intending to follow that route with the crowds.

The ten men were *leproi andres*. The Greek word *leproi* came across into English in our *leper* and *leprosy*, but in the usage of that time, it was a more general term that covered various diseases affecting the skin. These men did, however, live under the stigma of being “unclean” and were required to avoid all direct contact with other people (see Leviticus 13:45–46). They stood at a distance to plead for Jesus’ help.

149. What does their approach to Jesus indicate about them?

Jesus’ reply sounds abrupt to us, almost as if He was disinterested and didn’t want personal contact, but for the ten lepers, it was pregnant with encouragement for faith and hope.

150. Why were they to show themselves to the priests? What is the significance of the fact that it was “as they went” that they were healed?

151. Nine of the men kept going. Why did the Samaritan return to give thanks? Surely the others were thankful, but why did they not return to thank Jesus?

152. Does Jesus’ saying to the Samaritan, “Your faith has made you well,” suggest that the nine who did not return did not remain cleansed of their leprosy? What blessing did the Samaritan enjoy that the others did not?

153. Why is it that we at times do not give praise to God and thank Jesus when we have received blessings in our lives?

The Samaritan and the other lepers surely came from difficult circumstances, not all of which were instantly resolved through their healing. The Bible encourages us to trust God and to express our trust in conscious thanksgiving and praise in the midst of difficulties (see Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18; Acts 16:22–25; Romans 8:28).

154. What does consciously praising and thanking God in all circumstances of life, including the difficult ones, do for us?

The Old Testament Lesson: Ruth 1:1–19a

The Book of Ruth, a Hebrew short story, tells how Ruth, a young Moabite woman, became the great-grandmother of David and an ancestor of Jesus. The events occurred when Israel was a loose confederation of tribes, united occasionally under charismatic heroes (judges) when they were threatened or oppressed. The author of Ruth is unknown. Its literary style—which is often praised for its exquisite simplicity and symmetry—places it during the period of the monarchy—written to show God’s hand at work in the ancestry of King David.

The book reveals much about self-sacrificial love, which is surely a metaphor for God’s loving care. At the time, it also bolstered the position of the house of David as the Lord’s gift to Israel to provide peace and security for the kingdom and set up an implicit expectation that God’s people would strive to show the same type of selfless love for one another.

155. What were the circumstances that brought Naomi, “Pleasant,” to want to be called Mara, “Bitter” (v. 20)?

156. When Naomi was ready to return to Judah, why did she suggest to her daughters-in-law that they return to their former homes and lives? What shows the affection between these young women and their mother-in-law? In what way was Ruth’s pledge more than just a pledge to be faithful to Naomi?

157. What does it say to us that this Moabite woman became an ancestor of the Savior?

158. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Timothy 2:1–13

Paul encouraged Timothy to be strong in grace and to entrust what he had heard from Paul to “faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” He was to “share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

159. What was Timothy to learn from Paul's references to “a soldier,” “an athlete,” and “a hard-working farmer”?

This led to the imperative to “Remember Jesus Christ.” The Greek present tense implies continuing action, so Paul was saying, “Keep on remembering Jesus Christ.”

160. Why is it so essential that we keep on remembering Jesus Christ “risen from the dead”? What does “the offspring of David” emphasize about Jesus?

161. What sustained Paul while he was “suffering, bound with chains as a criminal”? What did Paul see as God's purpose and goal in letting Paul endure everything he was experiencing?

162. What does Paul's example say to today's Church and its leaders?

Paul then provided for Timothy and for the Church another of the five “trustworthy sayings” in his Pastoral Letters. Some think he was quoting a hymn that would be familiar to them from the worship life of the Church. The parallelism in its four statements is typical of Hebrew poetry. The past, the present, and the future provide the structure of the first three statements.

The past: “If we have died with Him.” This is a reference to the “great exchange” that takes place at the time we are buried with Christ in Christian Baptism to rise with Him to newness of life (see Romans 6:1–14).

The present: “If we [continue to] endure.” This was a word of encouragement to a Church under persecution—made most striking by the circumstances of the writer himself. It echoed Jesus' own assurance (see Matthew 10:22; Revelation 2:10).

The future: The Greek is future tense as it says “If we [will] deny Him.” This, of course, was the way out of persecution. How simple—just burn incense to the emperor as divine with your fingers crossed. But the consequences! God does not ask for our faithfulness only when easy or

convenient. Denying the Christian faith in any way, even if just externally, impairs our Christian witness to others and puts at risk our faith internally.

The parallel in the fourth statement of this hymn surprises us, but it also emphasizes the point. We expect it to say, “If we are faithless, He will be faithless (change His mind about us),” but it says, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful.” “Faithless” means acting in a way that is inconsistent with what we say—saying “Jesus is Lord” but denying that by our actions. God simply cannot do that; He cannot disown His nature or contradict Himself. His actions will be fully consistent with what He says—in judgment or in blessing—regardless of what we do or don’t do in relation to Him (see Deuteronomy 7:9–10; Revelation 19:11–16). The encouragement in this statement is to take God seriously and to remain faithful, as He is faithful.

163. Besides encouraging us to be faithful, how does the fact that God is faithful comfort us when we fail or fall? (See 1 Corinthians 3:10–15.)

Paul’s instruction was not just for Timothy’s personal encouragement in the faith but for his pastoral work. He is to keep reminding the people he was serving of these things.

164. Sometimes the specific meaning of biblical words is very important. Why was Timothy told to warn his people against quarreling about words? How was Timothy to equip himself to resolve disputes about wording?

165. What advantage do we have in such matters over Timothy and other Church leaders of his day?

Lesson 11

Proper 24

The Holy Gospel: Luke 18:1–8

This Holy Gospel follows words of Jesus about the coming of the kingdom of God—words with end-times urgency about saving one’s life by losing it. Jesus implied that there would be a time of waiting for and longing for His return: “The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it” (17:22). Luke followed Jesus’ talking about the coming of the Kingdom with this parable of the persistent widow, which Jesus told His disciples “to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” It is unusual that the point is stated before the parable is told, but here it connected the parable to what Jesus had been teaching them.

The key figure in the parable is the persistent widow, but the point of the parable revolves around the contrast between the unrighteous judge in his dealings with the widow and God in His dealings with His chosen ones. The judge didn’t care about God’s opinion of judges, nor about the needs of people or their opinion of him as their judge. He did his own thing in his own way. He ignored the petition of the widow for some time. But finally he acted, not to see justice done and to vindicate her against her adversary, but just to get her off his back. Her continual coming before him was wearing him out—literally, in Greek, “beating him black and blue” or “giving him a black eye.”

166. In contrast to the judge, how will God react to the cries for help of His chosen ones? What is implied by His chosen ones crying out to Him “day and night”?

Jesus’ application of His parable promises speedy relief to those who cry out to Him for help, yet He told His story to encourage them “to pray and not lose heart.”

167. How do you reconcile this promise of speedy justice with the fact that there often appears to be considerable delay in God’s response to His people’s cries for help? (See Psalm 13:1–2; 90:13–15; Genesis 50:18–20; Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10; 4:16–18; 2 Peter 3:8–9.)

The second part of verse 8 is a question by Jesus: “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?” This may best be understood by adding the word *such*: “will He find [such] faith on earth?” Jesus knew that the future would bring a time of persecution and spiritual decline—a time that would require perseverance such as the widow demonstrated. It is at such a time that we need to remember that our God is at work for our good in every circumstance.

168. How have you experienced times when your faith was tested and you had to dig deep and persevere? What did God do for you through this testing of your faith?

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 32:22–30

Jacob, the younger of the twins, arranged to receive the blessing of the firstborn, which his brother, Esau, had despised. Jacob and his mother deceived weak-sighted Father Isaac by disguising Jacob as Esau. When Esau learned he had been robbed of his birthright, he planned to kill Jacob, and Jacob fled to Haran. Jacob then worked for twenty years for Uncle Laban, married his two daughters, fathered sons and daughters by them and their maids, and, as God continually blessed him in every circumstance, grew wealthy.

Now he was returning home to Canaan and his father's house. Servants he sent ahead to contact Esau reported that Esau was coming out to meet him with four hundred armed men. Jacob had been given angelic assurance of the Lord's protection. In that assurance, he devised his plan for meeting Esau. He divided his household and his flocks into two groups so that one might escape if Esau attacked; he prayed earnestly for the Lord's help, reminding Him of His covenant promise; and he sent rich gifts of cattle and sheep ahead to Esau to pacify him. Genesis 32:21 says, "So [Jacob's] present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp."

This pericope tells of the most momentous event in Jacob's faith life—the occasion that led to his name being changed from Jacob ("He Takes Another's Place") to Israel ("He Struggles with God"). As Jacob prayed, the Lord met him in the form of "a man," who wrestled with Jacob all night. There is a striking wordplay in the account: God wrestled, *ye'beq*, with Jacob, *Ya'aqob*, by the Jabbok, *Yabboq*. Jacob's struggle here was not to achieve prominence over another, like he had in his previous efforts with Esau and Laban, but to put himself under the control and guidance of God.

169. What does it say about Jacob that he would not let the Lord go without receiving a blessing from Him—even when added pressure was placed on him by the injury to his hip?

170. What blessing was inherent in the Lord's changing Jacob's name to Israel? Why did the Lord not comply with Jacob's request to tell him His name?

171. How did Jacob show that he was fully aware of what he had experienced and agreed with it in faith?

The next day, limping physically but spiritually regenerated and standing strong in faith, Jacob changed his approach to Esau. Instead of thinking "escape" or "bribe," he approached Esau humbly and, trusting the Lord's assurance, placed himself and his family at the mercy of his brother. And Esau welcomed him instead of fighting him.

172. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5

“Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed.” “Learned” implies accepting as true, and “firmly believed” points to personal experience of the trustworthiness of what has been learned and believed. Paul’s “knowing from whom you learned it” adds its own validity to what Timothy had been taught by his grandmother Lois and his mother, Eunice, who were his first teachers. From childhood he was taught the Holy Scriptures, emphasizing God’s covenant of grace with Abraham and his descendants in the Old Testament.

173. What does this say about the role of parents and grandparents in the process that leads children to personal Christian faith and life? What does “from childhood” suggest?

174. What results from parents’ instruction of their children in the Holy Scriptures?

Paul wrote, “All Scripture is breathed out by God.” The ancient formula says, “God is the effective source of Scripture; men were the instrumental source.” The process obviously was not mindless dictation by the Holy Spirit. God used the whole man as His instrument. Personalities, backgrounds, experiences, and skills of the individual writers are evident. Their writings vary in vocabulary, style, form, and emphasis. The clear claim of Scripture, however, as Paul asserted here, is that the product is God’s own inspired Word of truth, which accomplishes His saving purposes through the Law and the Gospel (see 2 Peter 1:16–21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Isaiah 55:10–11; Romans 3:19–20; 10:14–17).

175. How may we verify for ourselves that the Holy Scriptures are God’s inspired Word? (See John 7:16–18.)

Paul said the inspired Scripture is “profitable for ____, for ____, for ____, and for ____, that the man of God may be ____, ____, for ____.”

176. How do the Scriptures relate to the Church’s teaching?

Holy Scripture reproves and corrects us as it searches, exposes, and judges the thoughts and intents of our hearts, as well as our actions. As we grow through this experience, we may learn to use the Word in love to teach and admonish others in Jesus’ name. “Training” refers to the guidance and discipline given a child to teach him or her what is right and good. “Righteousness” is more than being good; it is living in a right relationship with God through Christ, displaying conduct helpful to all and pleasing to God. Paul sums up the point of such training in righteousness when he says that thus the man of God is “equipped for every good work.”

177. Timothy was to “preach the word”—to reprove, rebuke, and exhort. Why do some not want to hear sound doctrine? What kinds of myths do they want to have scratch their itching ears? Why did Timothy need to “be sober-minded” in such situations?

178. What is meant by “the work of an evangelist”? Who can do this work?

179. What guidance does Paul’s charge to Timothy give to today’s Church and its leaders?

Lesson 12

Proper 25

The Holy Gospel: Luke 18:9–17

Jesus' interaction with "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt" occasioned the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. This parable makes us also search our hearts for "holier than thou" attitudes.

Pharisees, "separated ones," were defenders of the faith and the traditions. During years of Hellenizing pressures and spiritual laxity, it was the Pharisees who saved and vitalized Judaism. In their zeal to obey the Law, they surrounded it with a "hedge" of 613 lesser, more specific, more doable rules. By scrupulously obeying their rules, they felt they would be safeguarded from transgressing God's laws. The covenant faith thus was reduced to a legalistic system. Legalism produces either despair of ever living up to its standards or pride in doing so. The Pharisees generally saw themselves as paragons of religious virtue—and paraded themselves as such (see Matthew 23:1–7).

Rome's system of taxing conquered nations involved auctioning the rights of tax collecting in specified areas to Roman nobles for sums paid to the public treasury—in *publicum*, from which "publican" is derived. This arrangement assured the imperial court of a set income. The *publicani* made their profit by exacting taxes in excess of what they had paid the emperor. For the actual collection of the taxes, they employed citizens of the conquered nations. They, in turn, were authorized to make their living by adding to the amount they were to gather. It was ready-made for greed, graft, and extortion. Jews who worked for the Romans as tax collectors were considered traitors. They were socially ostracized and were excluded from the synagogues. "Tax collectors and sinners" became a proverbial phrase for those outside the family of faith. Jesus was criticized for accepting and eating with tax collectors and sinners.

Jesus' parable tells of a Pharisee and a tax collector in the temple court at one of the hours of prayer. This was standard behavior for the Pharisee, but the tax collector's presence in the temple is surprising.

180. How would you describe the prayer of the Pharisee? Did he mean all those things about which he was congratulating himself?

181. How would you describe the prayer of the tax collector?

The Greek is more pointed than our English "be merciful to me." It carries the idea of "let Yourself be propitiated in regard to me."

182. On the basis of what propitiation was the tax collector asking God for mercy?

183. Jesus' judgment about which of the men was justified before God says a lot about the biblical meaning of this key word. How do you define *justified* in its biblical sense? (See Romans 3:19–28.)

184. Why is it that God cannot help someone who exalts himself?

It was customary among the Jews that when an important rabbi was in their town, the mothers brought their children to Him for a blessing. Luke recorded one such occasion. The disciples rebuked the mothers, no doubt, because they thought Jesus was too busy to be bothered with such trivialities—for Jewish men did not have much to do with children in public. Jesus told them—and He tells us—“Let the children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.”

185. How may we bring our children and grandchildren to Jesus? How might we hinder their coming to Him?

186. Why did Luke record this incident right after Jesus' parable and its application?

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 4:1–15

The consequences of the fall into sin were seen immediately in the human family: a man murdered his own brother. In the Garden, the Lord God had foretold that two seeds would strive with each other until the seed of the serpent would finally be overcome by the seed of the woman. The two seeds were immediately evident in the family of Adam and Eve. The New Testament says of Abel that his sacrifice and works were righteous (Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12) and that Cain was “of the evil one” (1 John 3:12).

The text says, “Adam knew Eve his wife.” This is the Hebrew way of expressing the depth of the relationship between a man and his wife also in sexual intercourse. The word is used even in regard to our knowledge of God and His knowledge of us, expressing intimate relationship instead of mere acquaintance with certain facts—as in “You *know* the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.” When her son was born, she called him Cain, a play on the Hebrew *qanah*, which means “get.”

187. What does Eve's "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord" suggest about how she was thinking about the birth of her firstborn son?

The birth of Abel followed. His name means "frail" and is another biblical reminder that God does not look at outward appearance but at the heart. It was not always the firstborn who was chosen by God. As the two boys grew up, they displayed different inclinations, interests, and abilities. This difference became significant when they brought their offerings to the Lord.

188. What does it say about their family life that they saw it to be appropriate to bring offerings to the Lord? What difference between them is suggested by the way their selection of what they would bring as an offering is described in the text?

How God showed His regard for Abel's offering and His disregard for Cain's is not explained in the Bible. Some think that God may have provided "fire from heaven" because of other instances in the Bible of fire consuming offerings (see Leviticus 9:23–24; 1 Kings 18:36–38). Cain carried a bitterness in his heart. Perhaps his parents' description of the garden that had been their original home contrasted with his own hard work in getting things to grow and made Cain resentful and angry toward his situation and toward God.

189. What was probably Cain's inner attitude as he brought his offering? How does that same attitude affect the church life of some today? How can we avoid the attitude of Cain as we bring our offerings to the Lord?

190. What do verses 5, 8, 9, 13, and 16 indicate about Cain's personality? What was God's intention in confronting Cain about his anger after his offering was not accepted? Though Cain was not responsive to God's outreach to him and acted in willful sin, how did the Lord show continued concern for Cain?

Cain's continued rebellion and self-will were shown ultimately when he "went away from the presence of the LORD" to live in Nod, which means "flight" or "banishment." The phrase "the presence of the LORD" probably referred to his and Abel's having grown up in the area near the site of the Garden of Eden, which was a continual reminder to them of the Lord's presence. Cain's leaving to go out on his own indicates that he did not value that awareness nor desire to live in the presence of the Lord.

The Bible warns about the defiling effect of a "root of bitterness" (see Hebrews 12:14–15). It tells us that not interacting properly with those around us will hinder our prayers (see 1 Peter 3:7). It says a refusal to forgive others blocks God's forgiving love from us (see Matthew 6:14–15). It insists that a right relationship with others is an essential part of a right relationship with God (see Matthew 5:23–24).

191. How can we deal with disappointment and conflict so that bitterness will not take over in our hearts? (See Colossians 3:12–17.)

192. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18

Paul had charged Timothy: “Be sober-minded, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (v. 5). Now Paul shifted the focus to himself. The Greek starts with *egō*, providing emphasis. It says, “As for me . . .” In fifty-two Greek words, Paul wrote a dramatic valedictory, displaying his attitude toward his imminent death and toward his life of service as an apostle.

Drink offerings were poured out around the temple's altar of sacrifice, the last act of the sacrificial ceremony. Paul saw his whole life of apostolic ministry as a willing sacrifice, ending with the drink offering of his death. The Greek word for “departure” pictures loosening tent ropes or a ship's mooring lines. Paul was moving on to another destination. He described his life and ministry in the analogy of the athletic games. *Agōna*, “fight,” referred to the full exertion that an event required over its entire performance. Paul was saying that he had not only begun but had also persisted and had finished the race. He had “kept the faith”—a Greek phrase used when an athlete performed completely within the rules of the contest. Paul was telling Timothy that as a disciple and apostle of Jesus he had run the whole way to the finish line! Now he was looking ahead to the victory wreath of righteousness, graciously awarded by the righteous Judge to those who successfully complete the contest, finish the race, and keep the faith.

193. What does Paul's “also to all who have loved His appearing” say to us?

The second section of this pericope is part of the personal instructions with which Paul closed his letter. He urged Timothy to get Mark and to come to him to comfort and support him in his last days—only Luke was with him. He warned against Alexander, who had done him great harm, opposed his message, and, perhaps, accused him in court.

194. Why had no one stood by Paul as he made his defense at his first hearing? Of whom does this remind you?

The Lord had been true to His promise to stand beside those who proclaimed His Word. Because of Jesus' presence with him, Paul was able to proclaim the Good News clearly, for all present to hear (see Luke 12:11–12).

195. How did Paul deal differently with his disappointment over his friends leaving him to stand alone than with his anger toward Alexander (v. 14)?

Do you want a good word or motto by which to live? Adopt Paul's confident approach to life. Let's do that as we say it together: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Lesson 13

Reformation Day

The Holy Gospel: John 8:31–36

This familiar pericope is part of a section in which Jesus was interacting with Pharisees, who were questioning the validity of His teaching. Many, however, believed Jesus as He said, “I do nothing on My own authority, but speak just as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me. He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him” (v. 28).

It was for these neophyte believers that Jesus had instruction and encouragement. To truly be His disciples, they were to _____. Then they would know the _____, and it would set them _____. First steps need to be followed by additional steps. Hearing the Word of Jesus must be followed by abiding in His Word.

196. What does abiding in the Word of Jesus involve us in as His disciples?

197. What will a growing realization of the truth bring about in us? What kind of freedom was Jesus promising here? How is that freedom to be expressed in the lives of Jesus’ disciples? (See Galatians 5:13; Romans 6:15–18.)

Jesus’ antagonists interrupted with “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone.” They were not talking about political freedom; the Jews had long suffered subjugation under powerful conquerors. They were instead talking about their religious freedom as servants of the one true God rather than of many idols. Jesus responded with one of His “Truly, truly [or *amen, amen*], I say to you” statements. His is the voice of truth and power.

198. How did Jesus’ “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” expose the falseness of their taking security in “We are offspring of Abraham”?

199. What is the point of Jesus’ comparison of “the slave” and “the son”?

It is the Son, whose Word is the embodiment of truth, who is able to set us free indeed. And Jesus’ words make it clear that He is that Son and that in Him we are truly free! The Greek is

eleutheroi, “free men”—far more than liberated slaves who have become “freedmen.” By grace, through faith, we become sons and daughters in the family of God, brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, and will belong to the family of God forever.

The First Lesson: Revelation 14:6–7

200. What is the significance of the messenger’s flying “in mid-heaven,” as the Greek puts it? Why is his message called “an eternal gospel”? To whom does the messenger proclaim this eternal Gospel?

This lesson is appropriate for Reformation Day. Since the time of the Reformation, Luther and other reformers have been seen in these angel messengers in Revelation. They returned the Church to a focus on the Gospel truth—its Good News that assures God’s children of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus’ completed work of redemption, and not by religiosity and its works (see Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:15–16, 21).

201. Are the pastors and teachers of the Church of today represented by this angel messenger in Revelation?

202. How may we all see ourselves as this angel with the Gospel to be Good-Newsed to all?

203. How does the angel messenger’s announcing that “the hour of His [God’s] judgment has come” relate to the eternal Gospel he proclaims?

204. How does this First Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 3:19–28

Paul had quoted from Old Testament Scriptures at some length. With phrases like “None is righteous, no, not one” (v. 10), “all have turned aside” (v. 12), “the way of peace they have not known” (v. 17), and “there is no fear of God before their eyes” (v. 18), he pointed to the universality of human sinfulness and its depravity. Now he turned to God’s solution.

It begins with seeing that the human predicament is beyond our ability to rectify. Paul asserted that the demands of the Law are placed on all, Jew and Gentile alike. No one is exempt; arguing is futile; all are accountable to God. Instead of the Law being a way to life for those who try hard to be

obedient, it only makes them conscious of their sin. And that is especially true for those who take the Law very seriously. As a result, Paul said clearly that by ____ no human being will be ____ in God's sight.

"But now . . .," said Paul. God has another answer to this dreadful human condition: "the righteousness of God has been manifested *apart from the law*" (emphasis added). This too, Paul said, was attested to by the Old Testament Scriptures, "the Law and the Prophets," in their emphasis on faith. It is a righteousness of God that is "through ____ for all who ____."

205. How did Paul point out that this new answer from God is universally needed and applicable? What motivated God to provide this righteousness apart from the Law? How was this righteousness of God apart from the Law brought into effect?

"Justified by His grace as a gift" is a key phrase. The *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (p. 1721) says, "Paul uses [justify] 22 times. . . . The term describes what happens when someone believes in Christ as his Savior: From the negative viewpoint, God declares the person to be not guilty; from the positive viewpoint, He declares him to be righteous. He cancels the guilt of the person's sin and credits righteousness to him. . . . This legal declaration is valid because Christ died to pay the penalty for our sin and lived a life of perfect righteousness that can in turn be imputed to us" (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

"Redemption" is a related key word, a word taken from the slave market. It was the ransom paid to free a slave. Paul referred to our release from guilt and the sentence of death because Christ, in His death, became the ransom for us.

"A propitiation by His blood" referred to the Old Testament's Day of Atonement. Having offered sacrifice for his own sins, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with blood of the animal sacrificed for the sins of the people and sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat, the cover of the ark of the covenant. The Septuagint called the Mercy Seat the *hilasterion*. In this text, "propitiation by His blood" is *hilasterion*. In effect, Paul was saying that Jesus is our Mercy Seat, the "place" where we receive atonement.

206. The result of redemption through Christ's blood is that all human ____ is excluded. How would the law (principle) of works itself exclude boasting? How is boasting excluded even more by the law (principle) of faith?

Paul's Letter to the Romans formulates the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ more fully than any other New Testament book. Luther said, "This Epistle is truly the chief part of the New Testament and is the purest Gospel." Paul proclaimed justification by faith against all legalistic works-righteousness. Luther interpreted the sense of Paul's words and added *alone* in his translation—and *sola fide*, "by faith alone," became a cardinal principle of the Reformation. In closing this study on Reformation Day, let's speak together a paraphrase of Paul's great assurance:

"God's Word has convinced us that we are justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone—and our obedience to the Law, or our disobedience, does not even enter into the consideration of our being right with God."

Lesson 14

All Saints' Day

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 5:1–12

Matthew organized his Gospel in ways that would help him teach the Christian faith and life. At the outset, as he got into Jesus' ministry, he provided the Sermon on the Mount, a summary of Jesus' teaching about the proper righteousness of a disciple. Jesus insisted that faith is more than sentimental "believing" or merely intellectual agreement with theological propositions. It involves a relationship with Him that is expressed in a godly lifestyle that honors Him. The classic analysis of faith listed three ingredients: knowledge, assent, and trust. One Christian teacher has quite properly added action. In Christian discipleship, faith always *acts* on the basis of its trust in God's good will.

Scholars identify five "books" in Matthew, delineated by the phrase "when Jesus finished these sayings." In this first book, the Sermon on the Mount, the ending emphasizes Jesus' unique qualities as the Teacher sent from God: "When Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (7:28–29).

The Greek says, "He sat down and He opened His mouth and taught them, saying . . ." This was the classic way of introducing a teacher's setting forth of something of vital importance. It says, "Sit up and take notice! This is Jesus' official teaching!" The nature of Jesus' kingdom is immediately evident. Things are turned around, the opposite of what we expect, but consistent with the surprising Good News that God loves sinners and wants us to find new life in Him. The eight statements are collectively called the Beatitudes because each begins with "Blessed."

Both John the Baptist and Jesus called out, "Repent!" The first "Blessed" echoes that call and pertains to those whose poverty of spirit has produced true repentance. *Prochos*, "poor," is from a verb that describes cringing or crouching like a beggar. Pride is the antithesis of this poverty of spirit and prevents the proud from being blessed.

207. What blessing do the poor in spirit receive?

"Those who mourn" care deeply about the seriousness of their own sins; about sin, injustice, and perversion in the world; and about the suffering they and others experience because the world is out of sync with its Creator.

208. Just how are such mourners comforted? (See John 14:18–19.)

The "meek" are the gentle, the patient, and the humble, those who are strong enough *not* to assert themselves selfishly at the expense of others. They are the opposite of the "go-getters," who move up even if they have to step on a few others. Note that the promised blessing the meek are to

receive is “the earth”—a blessing for this life, not just for eternal life. But it is generally our human experience that it is the aggressive who grab the earth for themselves.

209. In what sense do God’s meek ones “inherit the earth”? (See Matthew 6:25–34.)

God’s basic, most valuable gift is “righteousness”—being right with Him through Christ and right with others in Christ. “Hunger” and “thirst” are present tense in the Greek, suggesting “keep on hungering and thirsting.”

210. Why must this hungering and thirsting for righteousness be continual?

The Greek word for “satisfied” is very emphatic. It was used for feeding and fattening cattle by giving them all they will eat and more!

211. Where is the Lord’s “filling station” for this blessing?

The first four beatitudes look toward God. The next three look toward other people, citing virtues that disciples of Jesus display in their interactions with others.

212. Of what does “blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” remind you? Consider the opposite. What does one who is unmerciful and unforgiving reveal about how he feels about himself?

213. What is the source and basis of a Christian’s purity of heart? Paul said we will see God “face to face” in heaven (1 Corinthians 13:12). How do the pure in heart see God now as part of their daily life experience?

214. Why is it the peacemakers who are called “sons [and daughters] of God”? What limits are there in this matter of peacemaking? (See Romans 12:18; Luke 12:51–53.)

The final blessing involves being persecuted because of righteousness, suffering because of Jesus. Suffering for Christ leads Christians to ____ because it is evidence of our identification with Christ (see John 15:18–21).

God’s ways and the world’s ways are usually antithetical. State this by working through the Beatitudes in this way: Jesus said, “Blessed are ____,” but our world says, “Blessed are ____.”

The First Lesson: Revelation 7:2–17

The four angels stand as potential destroyers of the whole earth and as protectors of those God will seal as His own. Then appears the angel with the seal of the living God to be placed on the foreheads of the slaves of our God—in contrast with the mark of the beast on the worldly. The *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (p. 1955) explains the total of 144,000: “[This is] not a reference to members of actual Jewish tribes, but symbolic of all the faithful believers on earth. . . . Everywhere in Revelation, 12 is the number associated with the church. Twelve squared is 144. One thousand is 10 cubed, a number for completeness” (see Galatians 3:26–29).

This is followed by John’s vision of the great multitude in white robes standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb, holding palm branches and expressing their praise.

215. Who are the ones in this multitude? How is it that they wear white robes and carry palm branches and are privileged to stand before the throne and in front of the Lamb? Why are they called “a great multitude that no one could number”?

216. To whom do they offer their praise? on what do they focus their praise? Who then affirms their praise and joins them in praising God?

Those who interpret symbolic visions of this kind literally see “the great tribulation” as a specific time of distress preceding a millennial rule of Jesus on earth. Narrative sections of Scripture, however, never speak of a preliminary, earthly rule but warn that the end will “come like a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2 and others). They do, however, predict a time of great stress for followers of Jesus as the end approaches. The “multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” includes *all* who have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”—Christians of every era who have through much tribulation entered the kingdom of God (see Acts 14:22).

217. What is it that occupies this multitude from every part of human society?

The words “He who sits on the throne will shelter [literally, ‘spread his tent over’] them with His presence” is a reference to the tabernacle with its *Shekinah*, its cloud of glory that assured the Old Testament people of God’s presence among them. The vision of John makes it clear that full awareness of God’s presence with us will be a hallmark of life in the eternal kingdom (see Revelation 21:1–3).

218. How are the blessings of heaven described here in negative terms, things withheld or removed?

219. What will be the great positive of the heavenly experience?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 John 3:1–3

The opening words of this pericope are an exclamation about the kind of love the Father has given us in Christ, which may be seen in the fact that we are called children of God. John was writing to Christians, most of whom had no status in the eyes of the world. The majority of those who became Christians in the first-century Greek world were slaves. They could be treated badly or disposed of at the will or whim of their masters. The Gospel of God's love in Christ had brought them a wonderful sense of personal worth. God's Son had been made sin for them so they could be made the righteousness of God in Him! But they were feeling pressure. Even in the Church, they were being put down by the "super-spiritual." In the world, they were beginning to feel official persecution for confessing "Jesus is Lord!" and, as a result, rejecting the requirement to worship the emperor as a personification of the divine spirit of Rome.

220. In what ways is it still true today that the world that does not know God does not know the disciples of Jesus as children of God?

221. In what ways may the feeling of being put down or one-upped even by other Christians still be a problem in the life of the Church?

The Bible doesn't give us a lot of details about the eternal life that God promises. Here John wrote, "What we will be ____." His words encourage us to recognize that for now it is sufficient to know that "we are ____."

222. What assurance is added by John's "when He appears we shall be like Him"?

John then returned to an emphasis of the importance of living out who we are in Christ. We are to purify ourselves just as He is pure.

223. What does John point to as motivating factors in purifying ourselves to become more like Jesus in our daily living?

Lesson 15

Proper 26

The Holy Gospel: Luke 19:1–10

The Roman system of taxing conquered nations utilized citizens of those nations as the actual tax collectors. Jews who worked for the Romans in this way usually got to be wealthy, but at the cost of rejection by their people. The Jewish people resented Jews who became tax collectors not only because they chafed under foreign domination and the resultant taxation but also because they saw such Jews as traitors to the nation and faithless to the covenant. They did not socialize with tax collectors, whom they regarded as open sinners, and they did not allow them to participate in the synagogues. Such was Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector of Jericho. He was a man of small stature but he had amassed a large fortune for himself, which had caused large resentment on the part of the people of Jericho. On this occasion, having heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho, Zacchaeus wanted to see the famous rabbi, the prophet about whom everyone was talking. Setting aside concern about his dignity, Zacchaeus climbed a tree alongside the road where he knew Jesus would pass.

224. What surprise did Jesus have for Zacchaeus—and for the crowd?

225. In what sense did Jesus' surprise of Zacchaeus prompt and enable the surprising response Zacchaeus had for Jesus?

226. Why was Zacchaeus's response to Jesus expressed in his intention to share his wealth with the poor and to pay back four times the amount to anybody he had cheated out of anything?

227. *Sōteria*, “salvation,” comes from the root word *sōzō*, which carries the idea of “to heal” or “to restore to health.” How did Zacchaeus become “healthy” through this experience with Jesus?

228. What was Jesus saying about Zacchaeus with His “he also is a son of Abraham”? (See Romans 4:9–12.)

In one of the most striking statements of Luke's Gospel, Jesus again called Himself "the Son of Man." This title from Daniel 7:13 clearly had messianic overtones, but it was not loaded with political expectations as was the title "Messiah." With words that wonderfully express the Gospel, Jesus, the Son of Man, made it clear that His mission is "to ___ and to ___ the ___." What He came to accomplish for sinful mankind through His suffering for human sin, He still comes to bring to effect in sinners when He seeks us, heals us through His forgiving love, and gives us new life with God.

229. What were the circumstances God used to bring together the Seeker and the lost one at the opportune moment in Jericho? How has God arranged circumstances to touch your life in similar ways?

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 1:10–18

Isaiah was God's prophet during the reign of Hezekiah in Judah. It was a time of great peril for the nation. Assyrian armies had conquered the nations to the north, including the Kingdom of Israel. They swept southward toward Jerusalem, overwhelming villages along the way. But Isaiah continually assured Hezekiah that God would prevent them from conquering Jerusalem. A siege was begun—and ended suddenly when, in response to Assyrian arrogance and blasphemy, "the angel of the Lord went and struck down 185,000 men in the camp of the Assyrians."

Chapters 1–39 of Isaiah deal with that history and Isaiah's related prophecies. With chapter 40, the thrust changes to a future conquest of Judah by Babylon and the eventual return from exile of a remnant to rebuild. Because those events took place more than a hundred years after Isaiah, many scholars conclude that it was written later, and thus call it Isaiah II. Traditionally, however, Isaiah is seen as a unit, in which the Lord prophesies through Isaiah about the future, including the ultimate, eschatological future of the messianic kingdom. Linguistic studies support the unity of Isaiah. For example, calling the Lord "The Holy One of Israel" occurs twelve times in chapters 1–39 and fourteen times in chapters 40–66. In the Gospels, we hear Jesus quoting from both parts as from "Isaiah the prophet."

230. Who were "the rulers of Sodom" and the "people of Gomorrah" to whom Isaiah was bringing the Word of the Lord?

The burnt offerings on the great altar of the temple, the coming into its courts, the burning of incense, the observance of the Sabbath and the festivals, the morning and evening prayers by the priests and the prayers of the people—all were commanded by the Lord in the ceremonial Law. They were intended to be means of mediating His grace to His covenant people.

231. Why had the Lord "had enough" of their burnt offerings; why did He say "who has required of you this trampling of My courts?" to the worshipers at the temple; why had the smell of incense become "an abomination" to Him; why could He no longer endure "solemn assemblies"; why did His soul hate their festivals; why would He "hide [His] eyes" from them and "not listen" to their "many prayers"?

232. In what sense were the hands of the people of Jerusalem and their leaders full of blood? What would be the remedy that would again open up their relationship with the Lord?

233. In inviting His people to “reason together” with Him, how was the Lord offering them what is unreasonable?

234. What do Isaiah’s words call for on our part when we gather for worship and celebrate our Lord Jesus’ having made our scarlet sins “as white as snow”?

235. How does this lesson tie in with the emphasis of today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Thessalonians 1:1–12

Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians from Corinth, probably not more than half a year after he had sent the Thessalonians his first letter. He had learned from Silas and Timothy that the Thessalonian Christians had reacted with fear to his writing that the Lord will come suddenly and unexpected, like a thief in the night. They were troubled with doubts because his final blessing was “May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:23). They saw that in themselves they did not qualify as blameless. Paul wrote to allay these fears and renew their confidence. His greeting, wishing his readers “grace to you and peace,” was typical of that day even among pagans, but Paul’s wish was not general and vague. It was for grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul addressed his letter to “the church.” In the Greek, it is *ekklesia*, which means “the called-out ones.” Originally it referred to the citizens of the Greek city-states when they were called out by heralds to meetings of the community. By the time of the New Testament, it simply referred to an assembly or gathering and was chosen by the apostles to refer to the Church, those “called out” of the world to unite in the community of faith.

As he did in his first letter, Paul began with complimentary remarks about the good report he had received: “Your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.” In this he boasted about them in the churches of God, so he said, “We ought always to give thanks to God for you.” Paul told them that their perseverance in faith was evidence that God’s judgment in allowing them to be tested by persecution was right. It had served God’s good purpose for them and for the other churches.

236. In what sense was the experience of the Thessalonian Christians leading to their being “considered worthy of the kingdom of God”?

The suffering of the Thessalonians and other Christians—as well as his own—at the hand of enemies of the Gospel led Paul to point them to God’s justice in the matter. As one of his final instructions in his first letter, he had written, “See that no one repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one other and to everyone” (5:15). Christians are not to think of revenge and to seek retribution when they are persecuted. We are to be kind to, forgive, and pray for our enemies—turning the situation over to God to deal with in His ultimate justice (see Matthew 5:43–48; Romans 12:9–21).

God does allow His people to be tested by suffering injustices and persecution in this life, but in His justice, there will be a time of retribution. Paul says God will pay back affliction to the afflictors and will grant relief to those who are afflicted. He says this will happen fully and finally “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven.” He will inflict vengeance on those “who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” “Not know God” means more than just “not know about the true God”; it involves their refusal to know and acknowledge Him as God personally. “Not obey the gospel” goes beyond just “not believing in Jesus” to their refusal to put their lives under the rule of the Lord in His kingdom.

237. How does Paul describe the fate of those who “do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus”? What does Paul say will occupy the believers on the day of the Lord’s coming?

238. What was uppermost in Paul’s mind as he prayed for the Thessalonian Christians?

All of this was cited by Paul to substantiate God’s righteousness in rescuing His people and condemning those who persist in rejecting Him. It emphasizes that our present response to the Gospel, or our lack of response, has eternal effect.

Lesson 16

Proper 27

The Holy Gospel: Luke 20:27–40

Luke had told of representatives of the Pharisees posing their “stumper” about paying taxes to Caesar. Jesus avoided their trap by answering, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Luke 20:25).

Here Luke tells of Sadducees taking up the effort to discredit Jesus. Sadducees were the modernists of the Jewish religious establishment. They had adapted to the Hellenistic culture of the time and had maneuvered politically to arrange for the appointment of Sadducees to the positions of chief priests. Many were members of the Council, also called the Sanhedrin. As their religious authority, the Sadducees accepted only the Torah, the Law of Moses. As a result, they clashed with the Pharisees, the defenders of all the Old Testament Scriptures and the rabbinical traditions. The clash often centered in the Sadducees’ Greek-influenced disbelief about the resurrection of the dead. They, no doubt, had used their story about the seven brothers who had the same wife to confound the Pharisees. Approaching Jesus, they called Him “Teacher” but really wanted to discredit Him and His teaching. Because of their vested interests, they supported the status quo under the Romans, and they saw Jesus as a threat to it. So they joined with the Pharisees in their determination to get rid of Him.

The story about the seven brothers having the same wife was based on the law of levirate marriage, one of the civil laws of the Mosaic code (see Deuteronomy 25:5–10). The purpose of the law was to ensure the continuance of the family line of a man who died without a son. In levirate marriage, the first son born to a dead man’s widow and his brother legally became the dead man’s son and heir. There is some evidence that levirate marriage was practiced at times—Ruth’s claim on Boaz, for example, was based on this law, and it brought Ruth into the line of ancestry of the Savior (see Ruth 3:7–9). But the law was no longer applied in Jewish society of Jesus’ day. The Sadducees were not concerned about the law. They told their story based on it to try to reduce the whole idea of resurrection of the dead to the point of the absurd.

239. How did Jesus turn things around and reveal that the Sadducees were absurd with their story and their argument?

240. Jesus pointed out that marriage is God’s gift to us for our earthly lives. Identify the three purposes in God’s plan for us in blessing us with the gift of marriage: Genesis 2:18; 1:27–28; and 1 Corinthians 7:2–5. How are these purposes obviously temporal in nature and not applicable to life in the eternal kingdom?

241. In what sense will we be “equal to angels” in the resurrection? How will we be different from the angels? (See Philippians 3:20–21; 1 Corinthians 15:42–57.)

Basing His argument on the Book of Exodus, which the Sadducees accepted as authoritative, Jesus pointed to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had died centuries before God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, yet the Lord had identified Himself to Moses as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Jesus then ended the argument by saying, “He is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him.”

242. What do Jesus’ majestic words say to us about loved ones who have died? What encouragement do they give us regarding the direction of our own lives?

The Old Testament Lesson: Exodus 3:1–15

Moses was raised as a prince, the adopted son of the daughter of the pharaoh of Egypt. But as an adult, he identified with his own people, the Israelites, whom the Egyptians held as slaves. When he saw an Egyptian slave driver beating an Israelite slave, Moses killed the Egyptian. He fled to Midian, rough desert country on the eastern part of the Sinai Peninsula. There he married Zipporah, a daughter of Jethro, a priest of Midian. Moses’ preparation for the leadership role God had in mind for him then included years of solitude in the wilderness as he cared for the flocks of his father-in-law.

“Horeb” and “Sinai” are used interchangeably for the mountain called “the mountain of God,” because God used it as the site at which He revealed Himself to Moses—and later to Israel as a nation. The “angel of the LORD” was used in the Old Testament when God was expressing Himself in interaction with people. This divine messenger was God Himself, as His later conversation with Moses indicated. He is Yahweh, the eternal Word of God, who later expressed Himself and revealed Himself fully as Jesus Christ. Here on Mount Horeb, He revealed Himself in fire in a bush on the mountainside.

243. What was it about the burning bush that caught Moses’ attention? Why was Moses told to remove his sandals?

244. What is the significance of God’s revealing Himself as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? Why did Moses immediately hide his face when God called to him from the burning bush and identified Himself as the God of his ancestors?

245. What was Moses' reaction when God outlined His intentions for him? What was to be the sign that God would be with Moses as he carried out this challenging service?

In response to Moses' request for "credentials," God gave Moses His name, Yahweh. This is a form of the Hebrew word for "to be." God Himself interpreted it for Moses to mean "I AM WHO I AM." This name identifies God as the Living God, a personal being, as contrasted with the idols of the nations. It says that God has His existence fully in Himself and is dependent on no one else for His existence.

The Bible's text immediately begins to refer to God as "The LORD" instead of as "I AM." This developed as a result of the Jews' thinking that if they would not say the holy name, they would not be guilty of taking it in vain. So when *YHWH* was in the Hebrew text, they would say *Adonai*, a more general term for God as Lord of all. This carried over into English texts, not only in using *the LORD* instead of *Yahweh*, but also in causing *Yahweh* to be misspelled and mispronounced when it was used. The Hebrew language had no written vowels. Vowel sounds were just provided by those familiar with the language as they read. In the tenth century, to facilitate the study of Hebrew by non-Jews, scholars added vowel "points" in the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Old Testament. When it was *Yahweh*, however, they used vowel pointing for *Adonai*—and this led to the mispronunciation of the name in English as *Yehowah* or *Jehovah*. The conclusion drawn from all of this has to be that if God's name emphasizes His being, who He ____, then our worship as we stand before Him must be not just a matter of what we say (or what we avoid saying) but of who and what we ____.

246. Is Yahweh still *the* significant name by which we know God? (See Philippians 2:9–11.)

247. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Thessalonians 2:1–8, 13–17

The Thessalonian Christians were obsessing about the second coming of the Lord Jesus. Paul had tried to deal with this in his first letter, but his words about its coming "like a thief in the night" (5:2) had led to a frenzied concern. Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to settle them down and allay their fears. They were becoming like a ship adrift from its moorings, which is what the Greek word translated "shaken" suggests. Some were quoting some "spirit or a spoken word, or a letter," ostensibly from Paul, saying the Day of the Lord had already come. Paul said the Day of the Lord would not come until a falling away, or apostasy within the Church, would occur and the man of lawlessness would be revealed. Paul's words here are particularly difficult for us to understand fully since we do not have the benefit of Paul's previous instruction.

The Lutheran Confessions point to this section of Scripture as the major basis of their speaking of the papacy in Rome as the man of lawlessness (not individual popes but the papal office and its assumption of authority). They see the development and promotion of Roman Catholic "Jesus-plus" doctrines to their logical conclusions as the great apostasy or falling away from the truth of the Gospel. The view of the Lutheran Confessions obviously is not a popular one in liberal, ecumenical

Christianity today. The *Concordia Self-Study Bible* urges us to keep in mind that “this tradition must remain a historical judgment, not a scriptural truth” (p. 1843).

248. What is the distinction between a historical judgment and a scriptural truth? Does the fact that the Lutheran Confessions point to the papacy as the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist, make it an article of faith that Lutherans must believe?

Identifying *the* apostasy and *the* man of lawlessness is a judgment call, but these will be a particular apostasy and man of lawlessness that stand out from all others. Small, isolated fallings away and promotions of strange doctrines do not fit. The prophecy points to a condition infecting the whole Church. The man (*anthrōpos*) of lawlessness cannot be Satan; he must be a human. His lawlessness makes him “the son of perdition” (several translations) and not the softer “the son of destruction” (as in ESV). “Son” implies adult standing and adult responsibility for actions. Jesus used these same words in reference to Judas, His betrayer. (See John 17:12—also softened in the ESV’s translation.)

Pagan emperors claimed to be divine and worthy of worship—but not as replacements for the gods. They just were added gods in the pagan pantheon. But Paul says the man of lawlessness “opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship.” Pagan gods (and “divine” emperors) were said to *sit* in their temples; statues placed there represented them. In contrast, the Lord God, who forbade representation by graven images, was said to *dwell* in His temple. Paul said the man of lawlessness would take “his seat in the temple of God.”

249. What constitutes the temple of God in the New Testament? (See 1 Corinthians 3:17; Ephesians 2:21–22.)

The lawlessness of the man of lawlessness lies in his “proclaiming himself to be God.” He assumed divine authority to promulgate nonbiblical teachings in the Church. These grew out of human theological thought and made human effort and accomplishment by Christians essential to their being fully right with God. “Jesus-plus”! These teachings effectively brought people under the Church’s control by requiring obedience to new rules and specifying what good works were to be done, but by adding a works-righteousness element, Jesus-plus teachings diminish the Bible’s assurance of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus and His once-for-all atonement for the sins of the world.

250. What are some of these misdirecting Jesus-plus teachings of the Roman Catholic Church?

Paul said “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work” but the appearance of “the man of lawlessness” was being restrained and will be restrained until “he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.” The full meaning of this and the identity of the restrainer is unclear, but a study of Church history cannot fail to offer insights.

251. What would be the two reactions of the Lord Jesus to the appearance of the man of lawlessness?

252. What three steps does Paul describe in verses 13–15 in regard to God’s bringing the Thessalonians—and us—to salvation? What does each step say to us Christians in our relationship with the Lord?

253. What instrumentalities are used by God to achieve His salvation goals in us? When we understand this, what must be given a place of primary importance in our lives?

Lesson 17

Proper 28

The Holy Gospel: Luke 21:5–36

The temple was built on an epic scale as a symbol of regal power and protection for the Jewish people. Some of the gigantic stones that formed the bases of its walls weighed more than 200 tons.

When the conversation in this Holy Gospel took place, the renovation of the second temple had already been going on for forty-six years, and it continued until AD 63. No matter how many times Jewish people like the disciples of Jesus had seen it, it still drew their expressions of awe and admiration. In response to their comments, Jesus told His disciples, “The days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” In AD 70, just seven years after its completion, Jesus’ prophecy was fulfilled. In response to an ill-conceived Jewish rebellion, the Romans besieged Jerusalem, sacked it, and destroyed the temple. Josephus, a first-century historian, wrote that 1,100,000 Jews were put to the sword and another 97,000 were led into slavery. The temple was never rebuilt, and a Jewish state did not exist as such until recent times. Today a Muslim mosque, the Dome of the Rock, occupies the site.

When the disciples reacted to Jesus’ prophecy and wanted to know the signs that would precede the temple’s destruction, Jesus did not directly answer their questions but talked to them about another “temple”—Himself—and warned about false “christs” who would arise and mislead many. Later, He spoke more specifically about what He predicted and about the cosmic happenings that would precede His coming at the end of the age.

254. How are wars and revolutions and fighting between nations signs of the end? How are earthquakes, famines, and pestilence signs of the end?

255. Why would the disciples of Jesus be subjected to persecution and punishment for the sake of Jesus’ name? (See John 15:18–25.) What was Jesus’ purpose in allowing situations that would threaten His followers?

256. Does Jesus’ promise to supply “a mouth and wisdom” mean that we should always approach such opportunities spontaneously, or can we prepare ourselves to witness about Jesus? (See 1 Peter 3:15–16.) What did Jesus promise to those who would stand firm as His witnesses?

Jesus spoke very specifically about the destruction of Jerusalem and the suffering that would attend it. When the rebellion came and the Roman legion appeared, many of the Christians in Jerusalem remembered Jesus' words and fled to the area east of the Jordan River. Jerusalem will then be "trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" by the return of Christ and the establishment of the New Jerusalem.

257. How are the signs that will immediately precede the coming of the Son of Man different from the natural calamities predicted earlier by Jesus?

258. What should be our reaction as Jesus' followers when we see the signs of Christ's return in our own day?

259. What is the lesson of the fig tree or of any tree in our yards?

"This generation will not pass away until all has taken place" has to be understood in terms of the meaning of the word *generation*, which in the untranslated language here has connotations of a self-replicating evil. Like the Pharisees and Sadducees of His day, their "offspring," unbelieving Jews, will continue to reject Jesus to the very time of Jesus' return.

260. Since "that day" will spring suddenly and decisively "like a trap," what are we Christians to avoid, and what are we to involve ourselves with as we wait for our Lord?

The Old Testament Lesson: Malachi 4:1–6

Malachi means "My Messenger." He was the last prophet of the coming grace of God before John the Baptist, who came some four hundred years later. Malachi's prophecy focused on the one who would be God's messenger to prepare the way for the promised Messiah.

Malachi warned, however, that at His coming the Lord would be "like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap" (3:3) It would be a time of purification for God's people, starting with the temple workers and priests, the sons of Levi—and then "the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years" (3:4).

This lesson ends the prophecy of Malachi and our Old Testament. "The day is coming" points to the climactic Day of the Lord: "The day is coming, ____, when all the ____ and all ____ will be ____." The day that is coming shall ____."

261. How complete will the destruction imposed by this judgment be? Who alone will escape the Lord's devastating judgment?

262. What is the picture that is portrayed by “the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings”?

With “Remember the law of My servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb,” the prophet was calling for the people to do more than keep God’s Word in mind. Implicit in the call to remember the Law is urging the people to a willing obedience to what the Lord set before Israel at Horeb, the mountain of God. The moral law set forth a God-pleasing way of life but always exposed the people’s sins and shortcomings. Through the ceremonial law, the Lord mediated His grace to His repentant people as they came before Him in faith in His covenant promises.

Through Malachi, the Lord promised, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” This herald, or messenger, is identified in the New Testament as John the Baptist, who appeared on the scene as the Messiah’s Way-Preparer six months before Jesus began His years of ministry. An angel who was sent to announce this to aged Zechariah said his son would be “great before the Lord,” would be “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb,” and would “turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God” (Luke 1:15–16). Then, using Malachi’s words, he said, “He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared” (v. 17). Later, Jesus Himself identified John the Baptist as the Elijah who had been prophesied (see Matthew 11:11–15).

263. What is meant by “he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers”?

In a very real sense, this “great and awesome day of the LORD” encompasses much more than the saving ministry of the Lord Jesus—His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. It includes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon His apostles on the Day of Pentecost and upon the Church that was born through their testimony. It includes the faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus by the Church, the Body of Christ, down through the ages. Its “sun of righteousness” will not set until He comes in glory as judge of all and graciously invites His own into the eternal kingdom. In that sense, this day, as we take A Longer Look at the Lessons, is itself “the great and awesome day of the LORD.” Each of us is being called to repent and believe the Good News—and to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus.

264. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Thessalonians 3:1–13

As he did in most of his letters, Paul asked the Thessalonian Christians to pray for him and his work, and he assured them that the Lord, who is faithful, would “establish you and guard you against the evil one” and prayed that God would “direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.”

265. What do his words encourage in us as a congregation?

Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to correct continuing misconceptions regarding Christ's return in glory. Some, thinking the Lord's coming was imminent, had given up their work and were simply waiting for Jesus to come. With their mistaken views and idleness, they had become a nuisance and a burden to others, even depending on the charity of other members of the Church for their food. Paul clarified that there is a "not yet" as well as a "soon" in regard to Jesus' return and addressed the problems caused by the idleness of some.

266. How did Paul give his words full weight and authority?

Paul referred to the "tradition," or teaching, the Thessalonians had received from him. Paul had already approached the problem of idleness in his first letter (see 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12; 5:14).

267. What was Paul now commanding with his "keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness"? (See 3:14–15.) Though Paul had the right to expect the Thessalonian Christians to supply his needs as he worked among them, why did he work "night and day" to support himself?

Paul used strong language. His command, "Let him not eat," is an imperative that forbids idlers to eat food for which others have worked and forbids others to support them in their idleness.

268. What compounded the problem caused by those idly awaiting the Lord's return?

269. We might think such a situation was just a practical problem without much effect on their faith, but how did Paul connect their doing "their work quietly and to earn their own living" with their Christian discipleship?

270. In the context of what Paul was dealing with in this section, what are the "good" actions Christians are to not grow weary in doing? (See Ephesians 4:28.)

271. How can we make a difference in a world in which there are so many millions of homeless, hungry, and needy?

Lesson 18

Proper 29

The Holy Gospel: Luke 23:27–43

Luke's account of the crucifixion of Jesus speaks clearly, out of surprising circumstances, of Jesus, the Christ, the Chosen One, the King. It points to the wondrous purpose of God and of His Christ in His suffering and death as it records Jesus' first word from the cross, His prayer for those who rejected Him and were seeing to His execution—a prayer that has meaning also for us when we “know not what we do.” It records the fulfillment of prophecy in the mundane situation of the soldiers' gambling for Jesus' clothing. It recounts the reaction of the people, of the Jewish rulers, of the soldiers, of the judge who sentenced Him, and of the criminals executed with Him as Jesus suffered on the cross and His death approached. And it includes His word to the repentant criminal, which only the King of love, the King of kings, could say and mean.

Such spectacles always draw a crowd. That the women of Jerusalem mourned and lamented for Him does point to them as His disciples. They were beating their breasts and bewailing Him with the Jewish death wail—and may have been part of the crowd on every occasion when a Jew faced this form of execution. Jesus' words to them, understandably, were words of warning and judgment. They did not understand what was happening. They should have been wailing for themselves and their faithless leaders, who had rejected their Messiah and were sending Him to His death.

“The people stood by, watching.” The place of execution was not far from the city wall. People from Jerusalem and passersby could conveniently pause to satisfy their curiosity. Also some of Jesus' followers were there, quietly watching and waiting. “The rulers scoffed at Him.” They testified truly: “He saved others.” They had received first- and secondhand reports about the miracles Jesus had done in His compassion for those in need. During recent months, His healing in Jerusalem of a man born blind and His raising of Lazarus from death in nearby Bethany had claimed their attention—and they had investigated these incidents thoroughly. But now they scoffed, and again demanded that He prove Himself to them.

272. Why would these religious leaders not believe in Jesus in spite of all the evidence implicit in His miraculous signs? (See John 9:35–41.) Why were they so insistent that Jesus be executed? (See John 11:45–53.)

“The soldiers also mocked Him.” It's not surprising. These hardened men had seen it all, and the prisoner had been scourged and sentenced to crucifixion as an enemy of Rome. By calling Jesus the “King of the Jews,” they were mocking not only Jesus but also the Jewish nation.

The written notice proclaimed, “This is the King of the Jews.” The Jewish leaders asked Pilate that a disclaimer be added so it would read, “This man said, I am King of the Jews,” but Pilate refused to do so.

273. Why did Pilate, who had bent to their will regarding the execution of a man he knew to be innocent, suddenly stand firm and refuse their request?

One criminal hurled insults at Jesus and a challenge: “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” The other, however, was touched by the kingly demeanor of Jesus. He had heard the surprising prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” He reprimanded the other criminal and turned to Jesus with a simple but profound request: “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus responded with kingly authority: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

274. What does this assurance to a dying criminal say to us about Christ the King, about His kingdom, and about our salvation?

The Old Testament Lesson: Malachi 3:13–18

Malachi means “my messenger” and may have been the name of the writer, though some, because the superscription does not appear in the Septuagint, think that this title and superscription were taken from 3:1 and attached later. The concerns addressed in Malachi suggest that it was written about 450 BC. The remnant had returned to Judah in 516 BC with permission to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. Priestly duties had been resumed, and anticipation of the glorious messianic age was strong. But as time passed and the awaited time of blessing did not come, enthusiasm waned. Religious duties became perfunctory or were neglected entirely. Priests went through the motions and took shortcuts. Blemished animals were offered in sacrifice. The marriage covenant was not honored. The tithe was neglected. Malachi took up all these concerns in his stylized, scholastic question-and-answer style.

Malachi’s style was to have the Lord make a statement that was then followed by His saying, “But you say, ‘How . . . What . . . Why . . . ?’ ” His book begins with “‘I have loved you,’ says the LORD. But you say, ‘How have You loved us?’ ” In another section, the Lord says, “Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me.” And it continues, “But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions.” This pericope begins with these words: “ ‘Your words have been hard against Me,’ says the LORD. But you say, ‘How have we spoken against You?’ ”

275. What was the complaint of the people regarding their relationship with the Lord?

276. The kind of complaining the people of Judah were guilty of is not confined to any generation. It is also found today. What attitude does this kind of complaining reveal?

277. Malachi says, “Then those who feared [revered] the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them.” What do you think they said to one another that the Lord listened to with such approval? When are we involved in similar conversations today?

Hummel says in *The Word Becoming Flesh*, “‘Those whose names are written in God’s book of remembrance’ is a frequent Biblical figure, but here it was used eschatologically for the first time.” This is especially clear when you hear the assurance, “They shall be Mine . . . in the day when I make up My treasured possession”—an evident reference to life with Him in the eternal kingdom. “The distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him” will stand out clearly when the Son of Man comes in His glory and says to those on His right hand, “Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom,” and to those on His left, “Depart from Me, you cursed.”

278. In the meantime, how can we deal with the appearance that it is the ungodly who prosper in this world? (See Psalm 73:12–28.)

279. What is the Lord saying to us through this Old Testament Lesson?

280. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Colossians 1:13–20

This pericope wonderfully underscores the fact that Jesus is indeed Christ the King and bids us find our strength in Him and “giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:12)—the kingdom of light! Two kingdoms are cited: the domain of darkness and the kingdom of His beloved Son. The domain of darkness holds its sway over mankind by virtue of our sinful natures. We *cannot*, indeed, we *will* not free ourselves (see Ephesians 2:1; Romans 8:7). But our heavenly Father has delivered us and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, “in whom we have ____” (see 1 Peter 1:18–19). As a result, we may be assured that we enjoy ____.

The wonder of redemption is appreciated only when you realize who the Redeemer is and what He did in love to rescue us from the domain of darkness. Paul says, “He is the image of the invisible God.” He is God made visible and tangible.

281. Paul goes on: “He is . . . the firstborn of all creation. . . . All things were created through Him and for Him.” What does this say about the Son, the image of the invisible God, in relation to all creation? (See John 1:1–3.)

The Arian heresy in the Early Church suggested that the Son, or Word, was God's first creature, a demigod through whom God created all things and who later acted as the Christ to rescue sinners. All of this was to keep the Spirit-God from having any personal, direct contact with the world of matter, which Greek philosophy saw as inherently inferior, even evil. Orthodox theologians saw that Arianism made both creation and salvation depend on one not fully God, decreasing the wonder of the Good News of Jesus and its reliability.

282. In the Nicene Creed, how did the Church echo apostolic teaching such as in this pericope in speaking of the person and the work of Jesus Christ?

283. What is the relation of the Son of God to the Church and, in turn, that of the Church to the Son of God?

284. If the Son was eternally the image of the invisible God, what does Paul mean by saying, "In Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell"?

285. What assurance is there for us in the fact that through this Son of God, our brother, Jesus, God was pleased "to reconcile to Himself all things," "making peace by the blood of the cross"?

Leader Guide

How to Use the Leader Guide

Put in time and effort to make these thoughts your own. Notes on your Study Guide will help you remember them in class. If you think a point is stated particularly well in the Leader Guide, you may want to quote it, but do not use the Leader Guide continually as the last word. Your group's ideas about themes and emphases and applications may differ from those in the Leader Guide. That's okay; explore their insights. Since each study is a unit in itself, you may easily use substitute leaders. Provide them with a Study Guide and Leader Guide, along with instructions for their use, well in advance.

Each lesson in the Leader Guide begins with the collect assigned for the day. You may use this prayer or another prayer suitable for your needs to begin your study. Suggested also are the hymns and songs, listed topically in the index of *Lutheran Service Book*, appropriate for the season or day. The index begins on page 993.

Lesson 1

Proper 15

Merciful Lord, cleanse and defend Your Church by the sacrifice of Christ. United with Him in Holy Baptism, give us grace to receive with thanksgiving the fruits of His redeeming work and daily follow in His way; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 12:49–56

1. What would kindle the fire that Jesus came to bring on earth was the completion of His ministry in His suffering and death on the cross. This central event of human history would become crucial for everyone as it confronted people with the Good News of salvation to be found only in Him. It is a fire that divides humanity into believer or unbeliever. The “baptism” that Jesus would undergo also referred to His suffering and death for our sins. Jesus used “baptism” in the same way on another occasion in His interaction with James and John (see Mark 10:35–40).

2. Jesus felt pressure to bring His ministry to its completion, not just so the painful experience ahead of Him would be over, but so that its purpose, the salvation of sinners, might be once for all accomplished and the process begin through which people from every nation would be rescued for new life in Him.

Fill-in answers: Jesus said, “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.”

3. The primary effect of the fire of Jesus’ saving work is that it divides on the basis of reaction to Jesus, the either/or figure of human history. The message of Jesus Christ as mankind’s Savior and Lord confronts every individual who hears it with the need to decide about Him. Harvey Cox said with good insight, “Not to decide is to decide.” The one who believes and follows Jesus has salvation; the one who doesn’t believe brings condemnation on himself because he rejects God’s means of salvation. For many, the message of salvation through the cross of Christ is foolishness. Jews stumbled over the Messiah’s dying the shameful death of crucifixion; Greeks thought the whole idea of God having His Son suffer the consequences of our sins so we can be free of them was illogical. But for those being saved, the message of the cross is the power and wisdom of God (see 1 Corinthians 1:18–25). Only one as destiny-deciding as the Son of God could say, “Whoever is not with Me is against Me” (Luke 11:23).

4. Jesus’ claim to be the Savior is easily rejected by a proud humanity, which prefers a do-it-yourself religion, if any religion at all. This rejection of Jesus, who condemns sin and proud self-determination, is experienced also by His faithful followers when they proclaim His message of repentance and forgiveness (see John 15:18–21). This hatred of Jesus has not produced active persecution of Christians in our society because ours is a deliberately pluralistic society. The U.S. Constitution guarantees religious freedom. In our society, the hatred of Jesus is expressed in ridicule of those who give a clear testimony to Jesus as God and Savior and who take a firm stand on biblical

principles for living. In the world of politics and media, “Christian right” has become a term of derision. There is negative reaction to any suggestion of condemnation of permissive sexual immorality or abortion on demand.

5. The division caused by allegiance to Jesus is most keenly felt in a family circle, when some are Christians and others are not. Ties to loved ones may indeed produce situations that conflict with loyalty to Christ. Jews or Muslims who become Christians are frequently cut off and shunned by their families.

6. The Scripture references that describe the proper response to situations of tension and conflict because of Jesus’ fire call for continued confession of Jesus as Lord and Savior (Matthew 10:32–33); praying for, doing good to, and turning the other cheek to those who may be antagonistic to us (5:38–48); turning the matter over to God for His action in dealing with our antagonists (Romans 12:17–21); and being winsome in the way we conduct our lives in relation to them (1 Peter 3:1–4).

The Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 23:16–29

7. The basic problem of the false prophets was that they wanted to be popular with the people by bringing them a word of good news instead of the word of judgment for their sins. The temptation to scratch itchy ears is always with us. A “feel good” message may make a prophet or a preacher very popular among those who sentimentalize the Word of the Lord, and he may attract a large following, but our Lord has called His preachers to proclaim “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3) in His name. That always begins with acknowledging God’s truth about us and ends up at the cross of Jesus with the truth about God.

Fill-in answers: Jeremiah describes the judgment the false prophets were bringing on themselves: “Who among them has stood in the council of the Lord to see and to hear His word, or who has paid attention to His word and listened? Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and accomplished the intents of His heart.”

The Lord of hosts says about false prophets: “I did not send the prophets, yet they ran. I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have proclaimed My words to My people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds.”

8. The Lord’s words through Jeremiah emphasized that He is not a localized God with influence in only a limited area—a view that was common in that time of multiplicity of pagan gods. He was letting the false prophets know that they were not dealing with one whom they could deceive or from whom they could hide. He fills heaven and earth. He is all-knowing and is present everywhere.

9. The Lord charged the false prophets with prophesying lies *in His name*. It was bad enough that they were dreaming their own dreams and telling them to one another as a source of false assurance, but they were claiming that their dreams were from the Lord! In telling their dreams to one another, they were calling attention to themselves and their messages—thus misdirecting the people and their leaders. Instead of supporting Jeremiah’s warning and call to repentance, they were telling the people and the leaders what they wanted to hear—the “messages” they dreamed up. Hearing such reassurances, the people were forgetting the Lord and His Word.

Fill-in answers: The Lord’s message through Jeremiah called the deceitful dreams of the lying prophets straw as compared with the wheat that is the Word of the Lord spoken faithfully.

10. Inherent to the true Word is the Spirit-power to bring to pass what He has spoken. Like fire, it consumes or it purifies. Like a hammer, it crushes or breaks down the rock walls of hypocrisy and resistance to His will.

11. This lesson surely lays on us the responsibility to be true representatives of God by speaking His Word of truth faithfully. There is also the assurance that when we proclaim His Word of truth, it will have the power to accomplish His purposes.

12. The obvious tie with the Holy Gospel is the Lord saying through Jeremiah that His Word is like fire, just as Jesus was eager to have the fire of the message of the cross kindled on the earth.

The Epistle for the Day: Hebrews 11:17–12:3

13. Rahab was a pagan and a prostitute when she saw that Israel's Lord was going to give Jericho into Israel's hands. She assured her future by furthering that cause, befriending and saving the lives of Israel's spies, and became part of Israel. She later married Salmon and became the mother of Boaz, the grandmother of Jesse, the great-grandmother of David—an ancestor of the Messiah (see Matthew 1:5).

14. All were the Lord's instruments in defeating Israel's enemies and establishing the Lord's authority among the people of Israel (vv. 33–34). Gideon defeated the Midianites with his army of 300 men (Judges 7). At Deborah's urging, Barak fought and defeated the Canaanites, and Sisera their commander was executed by a woman, Jael (Judges 4). Samson defeated the Philistines, killing more in his death than during his life (Judges 16). Jephthah defeated the Ammonites and is remembered for the rash vow that cost him his daughter's life (Judges 11). David, Israel's great king, defeated Israel's enemies and consolidated the kingdom (2 Samuel 5).

15. There were others through whom the Lord spoke to His people who predated Samuel, but Samuel, who was one of the judges as well as a prophet, became the first prophet officially recognized (1 Samuel 3:20–21). He was the obvious choice to introduce the prophets in the Hall of Faith.

16. "What was promised" had not yet come during their time on earth. The true fulfillment of the promise for all of God's people is found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

17. The Old Testament believers were constantly looking forward in faith to the full redemption God had promised, but it was always a looking forward for them. For New Testament believers, including us, Jesus Christ has made perfect and complete the promises of God and validated the faith of all who believe in Him, including those who did not live to see the day of His coming. The gift that was promised has been received.

Fill-in answers: The writer of Hebrews said to Jewish Christians who knew the fulfillment of the covenant in Jesus Christ: "Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith."

Some "weights" and "clinging sins" in our present culture are these: the materialistic pursuit of more and better things and the recreational pursuit of more and better fun that compete with Christian management of life to provide more and better service to God and our fellow man; the permissive attitude toward sexual immorality and its pervasiveness in the entertainment media, which influences our attitudes and actions; the casual, social use of addictive drugs, alcohol, and tobacco, entangling also unwary Christians; the growing acceptance of violent behavior, possibly leading us to surprising displays of violence. You and your group may add other examples.

18. Hebrews points to the paramount example of Jesus, who "endured the cross, despising the shame" so He could win the race marked out for Him. He, of course, is more than an example. He ran as God's Savior from sin and hell—and He ran the race for us, on our behalf! The joy set before Jesus was His exaltation to God's right hand, but more than that, it was the celebration of the salvation of lost sinners, our restoration to a living relationship with God as our heavenly Father (see John 17:24–26).

Lesson 2

Christian Education Sunday

Lord Jesus Christ, You have entrusted to Your people the task of teaching all nations. Enlighten with the wisdom of Your Holy Spirit those who teach and those who learn that the joyous truth of the Gospel may be known in every generation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 18:15–17

19. We may bring our children to Jesus through Holy Baptism, in which sins are forgiven and the Holy Spirit is given to live within them. That, of course, presupposes that we will then lead our children to personal understanding in their faith by leading them into the Bible's salvation history and by teaching them to pray. Our examples as we hear the Word in our homes and in church are vital in this.

20. We might hinder our children when, in word or deed, in wrong actions or in neglect of what is right, we become stumbling blocks to them. Poor parental examples may become reasons or excuses for them to turn from Jesus in disinterest and doubt (see Luke 17:1–2).

21. The incident with the mothers and their little ones and Jesus' reaction was a case in point for Jesus' application of this parable: "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14). Receiving God's kingdom like a child means receiving it in humility, with nothing of our own to offer as payment.

The Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 6:4–15

22. Moses' use and the Jews' continued use of "Hear!" at the beginning of their creed said more than "Pay attention!" It was a continual reminder that their faith was a result of Yahweh's revelation of Himself in the covenant of grace and blessing. God's presence with His people and actions among them were at the core of this creed. We Christians do well to keep this God-to-us revelation thrust in mind as we speak the great Christian creeds together (see 1 Corinthians 12:3).

23. Moses assured them that revering and obeying the Lord would result in their "multiply[ing] greatly in a land, as the LORD . . . has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey" (v. 3). Plenty of "milk and honey" characterizes the ideal life of people who had been living as nomads. Later promises of the Lord's blessing were more fitting to a society that had become agrarian.

24. The summary commandment was "love [Yahweh] your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." Their reverent obedience to the Lord was enabled by His gracious love expressed in the covenant initiated with Abraham and expanded to Israel as a nation (see Genesis 12:1–3; Exodus 19:3–6).

25. All the phrases used in connection with God's commands emphasize their importance in terms of daily living. Think through each with your group to recognize its specific impact. They combine to say we are consciously to make God and His Word a central part of our thinking and our conversations. Statistical studies of Lutheran families indicate that in only 20 percent are family Bible reading and prayer part of the family's routine. In another 20 percent, the family occasionally talks about God or about the church. In 60 percent, talk about God and use of His Word are limited to time spent in church. Where would you and your family fit in this?

26. We use religious pictures, plaques with Scripture verses, crosses and crucifixes, ICHTHUS designs, and other artifacts at our entries to indicate our homes are Christian homes and to remind us of our relationship with God in Christ and, occasionally, as aids to focus our attention in our devotions.

27. Two dangers to the Israelites' spiritual life were emphasized. First, there was the danger of becoming so self-satisfied when things were going well that they would forget about the Lord and their continual need of His presence and power in their lives. Second, they were tempted to involve themselves in the immoral worship practices of their pagan neighbors. Living as affluent modern Christians confronts us with the temptation to focus our lives on things, pat ourselves on the back for supplying ourselves as we have, and look to the future with confidence that our prosperity will continue. Thus we may forget the Lord or reduce our relationship with Him to occasional, formal, perfunctory worship. We, too, may be caught up in the political correctness of universalism—in which we see all religious faiths as ways by which people may come to God—and even involve ourselves in syncretistic worship with non-Christians. This surrounds us in America today and is a very present danger.

28. The Holy Gospel exalts the humility and trustfulness of children as examples in matters of faith. This lesson emphasizes the need to make worship of the Lord and study of His Word a part of our daily living, whereby we may also lead our children and grandchildren to personal understanding in their faith.

The Epistle for the Day: Acts 2:37–41

29. When the people asked, "What shall we do?" Peter responded, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

30. The Holy Spirit must supply regenerating power for true repentance and faith. We remember Luther's "I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him." But Luther continued, "But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel" (Small Catechism, Third Article). Our responsibility—always in the power of the Holy Spirit—is to lend our ears and our hearts attentively to the Spirit's call to repentance and faith, to devote ourselves diligently to the Word of God, and then, in the power of the Spirit, to proclaim that Word clearly and emphatically, trusting that the Holy Spirit will call people to repentance and faith.

31. Peter's call to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ involved His hearers in acknowledging Jesus as the Promised Christ (Messiah). To be baptized in His name meant they were placing themselves under Jesus' authority as Lord. They would be confessing the basic sin of missing the mark in their rejection of Jesus as the promised Savior in favor of continuing to trust in what had become a works-oriented Judaism. Today's humanistic moralists continue to miss the mark for the same reason. Since Jesus came and accomplished salvation for all, there is one basic sin: rejecting Him who is the Savior from sin.

32. Those responding to Peter's preaching of the Good News on that day were devout Jews. They knew the promise of the Messiah and its assurances. They did not need extensive instruction; they needed only to look to Jesus in faith and acknowledge Him to be the Messiah. When the

Gospel is proclaimed in our world today, we cannot take it for granted that people understand the Word of salvation—even when they respond and say they believe in Jesus. So, generally, they are given more thorough instruction in Christian doctrine prior to their receiving Christian Baptism.

33. Peter's words about them and their children and those far off prepared the way for understanding that the Good News is for all people and that the Lord calls young and old from every nation to be His own. Peter's words assure us that we are included in God's gracious salvation in Jesus Christ and that when we were baptized in Jesus' name, we, too, received the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. His words guide us to make our own change of heart and mind, our redirection of life, a continual reality in our Christian discipleship, and they guide us to reach out actively to others, even those far off, with the Gospel of Jesus.

34. At the center of the life of the Jerusalem congregation were the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. "The apostles' teaching" was the teaching of Jesus, who had promised that the Spirit would remind them of everything He had said (see 1 Peter 2:2). "The fellowship" means their unity of faith and life in their commitment to Jesus—being His Body, attached to Him in faith as the Head and to one another in love as members of His Body. "The breaking of bread" is a reference to the Lord's Supper, celebrated in those days, before it was more formalized in the worship life of the church, after eating their meals together. "The prayers" signifies their times of worship together, which probably followed a pattern they were accustomed to from Jewish tradition and from the synagogue worship. A life built around the Word and Sacrament in a Christian fellowship is essential for our continuing in faith and discipleship. It becomes the soil in which we and our children mature and learn to bring forth the fruits of faith in our daily living. A person may say, "I can worship God and the Lord Jesus anywhere." That may be true, but he or she probably doesn't do it. The New Testament doesn't mention any private Christians who decline to be part of the Christian fellowship.

Lesson 3

Proper 16

O Lord, You have called us to enter Your kingdom through the narrow door. Guide us by Your Word and Spirit, and lead us now and always into the feast of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 13:22–30

35. The door is open and available, but the fact that there is but one door and it is narrow says that there is only one way to enter the Kingdom house: through faith in the One who is Himself the Door (see John 10:7–10; 14:4–6; Acts 4:10–12). Many try to enter the Kingdom house through their own “doors,” depending on their own moral goodness or their religious efforts. These humanistic doors are natural and logical. They make sense. But they mislead and misdirect many people and cause them to overlook the true Door (see 1 Corinthians 1:18–25).

36. Opportune moments to hear and to respond to the Gospel do not continue indefinitely. It is especially dangerous to hear and agree that you should respond and walk through the door into the Kingdom but then put it off to “someday,” to “when I have more time,” or to “when I am older and ready to settle down to the more serious things of life.” The danger is not so much that you might die before that “tomorrow”—though that might be the case—but that when you consciously delay your response, your heart will become less and less inclined to respond. You cannot premeditate or preplan a sincere repentance and faith for a later time! If it is important at all, it is important *now* (see 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2).

37. Those who enjoyed personal contact with Jesus, heard His teachings, and witnessed His miraculous signs were made more responsible before God for their reaction to Jesus (see Luke 10:13–15). It’s true also for those whose contact with Jesus is through the message of the Gospel. St. Paul said that hearing the Gospel can be “a fragrance from death to death” as well as “a fragrance from life to life” (2 Corinthians 2:14–16).

38. The Jews were proud of being “the chosen people.” For them to be on the outside looking in because they preferred their own doors instead of entering through the narrow Door would have to be the classic, sad case of “it might have been.” They had the covenant and all the prophecies and should have been able to recognize Jesus as their Messiah and turn to Him in faith (see John 1:10–11; Romans 9:1–8).

39. Those from the east and west and north and south are the nations whom the Jews despised as sinners who were outside the family of God; but many of the “Gentile dogs” would find the Gospel door of the Kingdom house open and would happily enter through faith in Jesus and enjoy their places at the feast. We, who generally are from Gentile stock, are the recipients of God’s gracious “all points” outreach through the Gospel.

40. Cryptic, pithy statements like that of Jesus were called *mashals*. They were designed to make their hearers chew on them for a while to get all the meaning out of them. Jewish teachers and their

students loved them. Here Jesus was saying that some who were last in terms of opportunity to hear the Good News (some Gentiles) will be first in terms of entry through the Kingdom door, while some who were first in terms of opportunity to hear the Good News (some Jews) will be last in terms of entry through the Kingdom door. We may be amazed at who we see in heaven, and maybe they'll feel the same way about us.

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 66:18–23

41. The glory of the Lord that Moses could not look at and live was God's awesome holiness, which was dramatically displayed at Sinai. That glory was tempered in Moses' interaction with the Lord on the basis of the covenant and the ceremonial laws—a face-to-face interaction. Now the glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus! Together with people of all nations, we rejoice to know that God's greatest glory is in His mercy and grace toward sinners through Jesus. We look at God in the face of Jesus and find life!

42. The assignment given to the survivors is to “declare My glory among the nations . . . and they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations.” What a transformation—from survivors to heralds who proclaim the Gospel and gather people to the Lord from every nation and tongue!

43. Some of these “outsiders” will even be selected “for priests and for Levites” in serving the Lord in His house. This privilege was not even open to all Jews; it was restricted to those of the tribe of Levi and the house of Aaron. Peter points out that God's love for us is so great He makes all of us His royal priests, privileged to declare the praise of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

44. The messianic kingdom will endure as long as the new heaven and earth endure, which the Lord says “shall remain before Me.” The hallmark of life in the messianic kingdom will be “from new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath [continually], all flesh shall come to worship before Me, declares the LORD.”

45. This Old Testament Lesson, with its stress on God's gracious outreach to the nations, corresponds to the “from east and west, and from north and south” of the Gospel.

The Epistle for the Day: Hebrews 12:4–29

Fill-in answers: He said that, unlike Jesus, “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.” Using the analogy of earthly fathers, he told them that when God disciplined them it was for their good, and that His discipline proved that they were His true sons and daughters. Though painful at the time, he said, “Discipline . . . yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

46. Therefore . . . they were to stand strong and walk straight, striving for peace with everyone, resisting every root of bitterness, and not defiling themselves with sexual immorality or unholiness. Note the dynamic involved here: you overcome fear, not just by humbly trusting the Lord to keep you safe and to see you through it, but by taking the firm, positive stance of Christian discipleship in life that you have been called to take and meeting the challenge.

In Greek, the perfect tense implies a completed, once-for-all action. Help your group see how this was used to heighten the contrast between the two covenants.

“You *have come*” (emphasis added). The Bible often couches future hopes and promises in words that make it sound as if what is being promised has already happened. Isaiah 53, the description of the Suffering Servant, is a classic example. The hope of heaven's glories—for the Jewish Christians who would remain faithful and for us—is presented as something already experienced. It is that sure for those in Christ!

Explore all the Scripture references cited to expand on the writer's description of the glories that are ours now and that await us in heaven through Jesus. Most are easily understood. "Firstborn," in the phrase "assembly of the firstborn," cannot refer to Christ Himself, for it is a plural form in the Greek, meaning "the firstborn ones." The phrase "spirits of the righteous made perfect" speaks of the blessed departed who are with Christ. *Teteleiōmenōn*, from *telos*, has to do with something that is made complete or perfect in terms of its purpose having been fulfilled. The Hebrews 9 reference to the Day of Atonement, when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place and sprinkled blood on the Mercy Seat cover of the ark of the covenant, helps to explain the why the writer calls Jesus' blood "the sprinkled blood."

47. The "better word" that the blood of Jesus speaks is "forgiveness." The blood of Abel cried out from the ground for "vengeance."

48. We have come to all the glories named and described in this section of Hebrews *by faith in Jesus Christ*, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. The abundant blessings that God has given to His Church so far are evidence of the reliability of His providence in the future.

NOTE: The Study Guide includes many pertinent Bible references, especially for the Epistle and the Old Testament Lesson. In the class setting, as suggested in the Leader Guide introduction, it is helpful to have them written on slips of paper that can be passed out to your group, assigning their reading by individuals, so you don't have to wait in class for everyone to find them in their Bibles. Some are longer; give them to the better readers. Encourage all to read "loud and clear."

Lesson 4

Proper 17

O Lord of grace and mercy, teach us by Your Holy Spirit to follow the example of Your Son in true humility, that we may withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds avoid ungodly pride; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 14:1–14

49. In private or ordinary settings, pushy people turn other people off because the others see them as thoughtless about their feelings and about how they might be inconveniencing them. Behind this turnoff, there is probably some self-concern—they don't like being put down or made to feel unimportant. On the other hand, fans of pushy, prominent people often seem to get some vicarious feelings of importance by attaching themselves to them and their successes—as if they had a hand in them. “*We won the championship!*”

Jesus' words about taking the lowest place in anticipation that the host will make you look good by calling you to sit in a more honored place have to be irony or sarcasm. They take the matter to the other extreme. There is no real humility in that kind of “humbling yourself.” We even joke about this kind of situation at times—when we make a show about being “humble” enough to sit in the poorest seats or to accept the meanest assignments. Real humility is a matter of getting beyond both the pushy and the “self-effacing” kinds of self-consciousness to a kind of self-forgetfulness in which you can be who you are and do what you should do without worrying so much about what others think.

50. Pride (“haughty eyes” [Proverbs 6:17]) tops the list of things the Lord hates because a person who is full of himself will have no room for God or for others—except as an extension of himself, for those who will benefit him.

51. The only way we can receive the blessing of God's forgiving love is to humbly acknowledge our full need of His grace—being poor in spirit and approaching Him with a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart (see Matthew 5:3; Psalm 51:17). True humility is produced in us both by the Law's making us aware of our sin and need and by our full appreciation of the fact that we enjoy salvation purely as a gift of God's grace, His undeserved love. We have no reason for any boastful pride in this. In humility, we can only praise our Lord for His glorious grace.

52. There is a difference between true, healthy humility and being beaten down or beating ourselves down psychologically to the point where we feel worthless. God does make us recognize our sin and guilt, but He also assures us that we are worth so much to Him that His Son gave Himself into suffering and death for us. We may enjoy a good self-image when we see that we are loved by our Lord Jesus and that His Spirit renews us and equips us to offer valued service to Him and to others in His name.

53. Jesus, in full awareness of who He was and why He came, was able to accept the role of the servant, something all of His disciples had been too self-conscious, too self-concerned, to do. As children of God, we don't have to be concerned about what others will think of us. We can carry out the service He calls us to do—for Him!

Fill-in answers: Jesus said, "Do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind."

54. Entertaining those on the first list is generally done because it is enjoyable and socially rewarding. Jesus accepted that kind of entertaining from His friends, such as Martha and Mary and Lazarus in Bethany. He surely is not forbidding it here. But His words suggest that it is not to be our only social concern. His directive to invite those on His second list encourages us to have an ongoing concern for society's unfortunate and to take definite, decisive steps to be of help to them in Jesus' name.

55. In our society, Jesus might have mentioned the homeless, the refugees, the aliens, the prisoners, the addicts, the AIDS patients, the lonely, the aged, and so on. The Christian motivation for compassion for those in need is Jesus' own compassion for them, as well as the love and compassion He continually has for us. Our practical steps should include personal interaction and assistance in the case of those we know and reaching out to those we don't know through our generous support of dependable Christian agencies such as Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Social Services. Our Lord's command to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" encourages us to be personally involved and not be content just to write checks. Look around and you will find individuals who need your friendship and care and agencies that need your help.

The Old Testament Lesson: Proverbs 25:2–10

56. God Himself is unsearchable and His ways past finding out. His hand is behind all things, but His actions are often hidden. Kings like to know what is going on and who is doing what in their kingdoms, so they search things out.

57. The proverb establishes the principle that when a king surrounds himself with righteous people and the wicked are weeded out of his government, he himself is more likely to rule in righteousness.

58. Yes, Jesus may well have had these proverbs in mind at the dinner at the house of the ruler of the Pharisees. Knowing what is proper behavior and putting it into practice are two different matters. How easily we set aside what we know is right when we want to use a situation to advance ourselves or our own particular cause.

59. Suing in court or revealing secrets would indeed let other people know something about your neighbor that they did not know before or diminish their opinion of him, but in the process you would also have gained a reputation as one who seeks your own advantage instead of being considerate of your neighbor.

The Epistle for the Day: Hebrews 13:1–17

60. Brotherly and sisterly affection grows as we stand together under God's grace and share Christian values. Interaction within the Christian fellowship, enjoying good times together, and being there for one another in difficult times all produce Christian friendships. Christians usually find that their most valued friends are fellow church members. In fact, we often have to work at developing friendships with others who are not Christians to provide us with opportunities to witness to Jesus to them. Be ready to give an example from your own experience to encourage sharing.

61. Jesus offered the strongest of motivations by saying, “As you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40). End this consideration by asking, “Does this encourage an indiscriminate hospitality toward strangers?” We are to be congenial and helpful to all, but it may not be advisable to take any and all into our homes.

62. Those being punished for crimes must be in prison. That is quite different from the early Christians being imprisoned just because they were Christians. We surely should have a Christian concern also for criminals and their possible rehabilitation to life in society. We should especially do what we can to lead them to repentance and new life in Christ through personal contact with those we know and by supporting prison ministries.

63. We can strengthen Christian marriages by improving Christian instruction of the Church’s youth in the values of chastity before marriage and faithfulness in marriage by improving pre-engagement and premarriage counseling, by providing formal instruction and counsel during the first year of marriage, by providing marriage enrichment studies, and by sound preaching of God’s Word regarding Christian marriage. We can help youth resist the immoral attitudes of our society, first of all, by giving them good examples as parents. We can also instruct them in God’s intentions for them as sexual persons—so they understand the possibility of, and the positive value in, reserving sexual intercourse for the marriage relationship and so they see the many negative consequences that accompany *porneia*.

64. Love of money easily becomes idolatry because it lets things take the place in life that God deserves and demands. For a Christian to have a continual attitude of discontent insults God, our loving Father, who is the Giver of all good gifts. When we have a loving Father in heaven asserting His loving will in our lives through the circumstances He allows, we have every reason to trust Him and be content with His decisions. Father knows best (see Romans 8:28–30).

65. Paul and Peter both suffered martyrdom in Rome, confident that they shared in the victory over death and hell won by the Lord Jesus Christ. Their example encouraged Jewish Christians to rethink their concern about their safety in just this life, allowing them to be ready to commit themselves to being faithful to Jesus even to the point of death.

66. A changeless Christ does not play fast and loose with us. We can count on His love, help, and guidance today and tomorrow, just as we did yesterday.

67. The appropriate sacrifices for us to bring are to “continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name;” “to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God;” and to “obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.” We are “to do this with joy and not with groaning.”

Lesson 5

Proper 18

O merciful Lord, You did not spare Your only Son but delivered Him up for us all. Grant us courage and strength to take up the cross and follow Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 14:25–35

68. Jesus' "hate your family" comment was an extreme way of showing where loyalty to Him might take His disciples when it conflicts with loyalty to families. Jesus insists on having top priority. There are those who have been disowned by their families because they became Christians, but that is unusual. Usually tension in a family setting that results from one being a disciple of Jesus may be resolved by patient love and willing service on the part of the disciple (see 1 Peter 3:1–4). However, when family relationships bring situations that threaten a disciple's relationship to the Lord, a decision must be made between the two. The Scriptures cited show how Jesus at times distanced Himself from His parents and His siblings because of awareness of who He was and what He had come to do. We must "hate" our own lives by denying ourselves. This means that in our life with God we do not proudly rely on our own goodness but humbly depend on the grace of Christ and surrender our will to His will as our Lord.

69. The man building a tower and the king going into battle with thousands of soldiers both suggest that we are dealing with major factors of life as we count the cost and decide about Christian discipleship. It is not an easy thing, a simple matter, but is one that involves all of life. One man has said that these illustrations suggest that as disciples we are to "attempt great things for God and expect great things of God." We are equipped to "build a tower" with our lives, attempting even great things for God, as God's grace works in us to will and to act according to His good pleasure, working out our salvation with fear and trembling. Remember, in our salvation, He has in mind not just taking us to heaven someday but also equipping us to imitate Him in Christian service here and now.

To understand the Year of Jubilee concept fully, read all of Leviticus 25. We all generally agree, at least in principle, about the Lord's ownership of all of our time, talent, and treasure. But it is the Jubilee steward's question that points up practical ramifications of this radical way of approaching Christian stewardship of life.

70. Jesus showed that personal surrender of ourselves to Him, all we are and all we have, is not optional when He said, "Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple." When we invite Jesus to live with us, and He takes charge of our lives, we cannot keep "a little closet" of our "house" just for ourselves. Discipleship costs us, but deciding not to follow Jesus costs far more. It's not surprising that Jesus said, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14).

The Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 30:15–20

Fill-in answers: The contrast held before the people by Moses was life and good or death and evil.

71. Love for the Lord could be commanded only as a willing response to the love Yahweh had shown the people in initiating the covenant of grace with them. The love required is not sentimental or emotional but a willed determination to have the Lord be God in their lives. In the New Testament, it is called *agape* love—a response to Jesus’ love.

72. Love for the Lord was to be shown by walking in His ways and by keeping His Commandments, His statutes, and His rules. The ceremonial law set forth a system of rites and ordinances that were doable. The Sabbath law and others, for example, made them different from the nations around them. In carrying them out *faithfully*, the Israelites were renewed in their awareness of the Lord’s covenant with them and in their response to Him.

73. The blessings: they would live and multiply, the “LORD your God” would bless them in the land they were entering to take possession of it. Disobedience would mean that they would surely perish and not live long in the land they were entering to possess. Relationship with the Lord always has ramifications for practical, daily life.

74. “He is your life and length of days” is pure Gospel. It was a simple statement of the covenant of grace and blessing and provided motivation and power for them to “choose life” with Him.

75. Choosing life would empower the Israelites and their children to live in relation to their covenant Lord—loving the Lord, obeying His voice, and holding fast to Him. The Hebrew word for “hold fast” is the same word that was used in Genesis 2:24 to describe the marriage union of a man and a woman.

76. The Holy Gospel talks about the righteousness that is displayed in daily life through a new obedience to the spirit of the Law; this lesson invites us to choose life in the Lord, hold fast to Him, walk in His ways, and keep His Commandments.

The Epistle for the Day: Philemon 1–21

77. Throughout his letter, Paul encouraged Philemon to see Onesimus in a new way. Sharing his faith in Jesus meant sharing it also with Onesimus, his slave. That would lead to full understanding of every good thing in Christ, especially the forgiving love that is the heart of our relationship with Him and with each other. Opening his house to the worshiping community, which included many slaves, showed that Philemon saw that he and Onesimus stood on the same level in the fellowship in which there is neither slave nor free, in which all are saved by grace (see Galatians 3:28).

78. Any thought of severely punishing Onesimus would be overcome by receiving him as a Christian brother in the grace of forgiveness.

79. Paul’s pressuring of Philemon included calling attention to how valuable Onesimus had been to Paul in Rome, reminding Philemon that Onesimus was now his Christian brother, asking his “partner” to receive Onesimus as he would welcome Paul himself, offering to repay any debt Onesimus owed due to stealing things when he left, and reminding Philemon that because Paul had led him to Christ, he owed Paul his very self.

We don’t know whether Bishop Onesimus of Ephesus was the same man who is the subject of this letter, but as we observe the grace of God at work in us and in others in the Church today, we know it is not impossible.

80. Our society is different from that in which the early Christians lived in a number of ways: (1) Our economy is not based on slavery (though some might argue this in terms of degree). (2) Our world generally rejects slavery as immoral, and it has been formally declared to be illegal in most countries. (3) Through the right of voting, we are participants in our government and its laws. We can change things. The early Christians had no such possibility of changing the political or social scene in which they lived.

Lesson 6

Proper 19

*Lord Jesus, You are the Good Shepherd, without whom nothing is secure.
Rescue and preserve us that we may not be lost forever but follow
You, rejoicing in the way that leads to eternal life; for You live and reign
with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

The Holy Gospel: Luke 15:1–10

Understand the Pharisees' concern about Jesus' eating with tax collectors and sinners. In that day, eating together established an unspoken bond between participants (see Revelation 3:20). This is still true in our society to some extent. Our English word *companion* comes from the Latin *cum panis*, "with bread." Note also that the text says they referred to Jesus just as "this man." The Greek simply has *houtos*, "this . . ." "This fellow" might better convey their attitude. They avoided saying His name even among themselves as a way of devaluing Him and, perhaps—because His name *Yeshua* means "Yahweh saves"—to avoid being understood as pointing to Him as the promised Savior.

81. Beginning with "What man of you" forced the Pharisees to personalize Jesus' stories, to listen, and to give their answer to His questions—which had to be yes. Using stories about a sheep and a coin and a son, instead of just arguing the concept of the needs and worth of tax collectors and sinners, defused their complaining and let Jesus make His point in a more general way, so they could do nothing but agree.

82. There is progressive impact in Jesus' stories as they move from one of a hundred sheep to one of ten coins to one of two sons. One sheep out of a hundred may not be missed so badly; one coin out of ten would be missed more by a woman of limited means; one son out of two must be missed and cannot be forgotten.

83. To say there is "more rejoicing" does not deny God's joy over those who are already found. But God's great glory is in His reaching out through the Gospel of Jesus to seek and to save the lost. Each response to His seeking, each finding, occasions great joy because it validates God's saving will and plan in Christ. By pointing to the greater joy in heaven over repentant sinners, Jesus was not only defending His interaction with those whom the Pharisees rejected, but He was also encouraging the Pharisees to change the way they looked at themselves and at others.

84. These sidelights say that as His Church we must share Jesus' concern and be actively involved in reaching out to the lost "out there" in the world. We must also be conscientious about "closing the back door" by bringing Christian encouragement and love to those who may be drifting away from involvement in the Church's fellowship around the Word and the Sacraments.

85. These sidelights warn us: Don't let preoccupation with things in your life out in the world distract you from the things of God. Be careful lest your indifference to the Lord's Day sharing of Word and Sacrament in the fellowship of the faithful leads to your being lost, separated from the others, no longer part of the fellowship.

86. The wonderful assurance in these stories is that each one of us is valued, worth God's time and effort in seeking and finding us. If there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents, we surely should develop the spirit of the shepherd and the woman and the angels, both in helping with the search and in rejoicing whenever another lost sinner has been found.

The Old Testament Lesson: Ezekiel 34:11–24

87. The two thrusts are the Lord as Shepherd will search for sheep that are lost, and when they are restored to His flock, He will faithfully care for them.

88. The Church and its leaders always have to keep both of these thrusts in mind. It is intrinsic to the Great Commission that we disciple the nations by reaching out with the Good News and by nourishing them as we teach all that the Lord has commanded. This is a both/and responsibility: evangelism and pastoral care are both necessary if the flock is to grow and prosper.

89. The restoration promised through Ezekiel was to come to pass in the history of Judah when Persia would conquer Babylon, and Cyrus the Great would allow a remnant of the Jews to return to Judea under Zerubbabel, a Davidic prince, to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. But the description of the Shepherd's care and the blessings that would result surely point us to the eternal messianic kingdom for its ultimate fulfillment.

90. Shepherds value the sleek and the strong in their flocks; in fact, it is their aim that all of their sheep fit that description. In this instance, however, these terms referred to those who had been guilty of social and political injustices during the time before the fall of Jerusalem and also to those in exile who had so adapted to their situations that they had become prosperous, even at the expense of fellow Jews. An implication of spiritual pride may also be seen in these words. In terms of the Church today, discrimination and favoritism within a congregation may focus all attention on an in-group and develop participation and draw leadership from within that in-group, while others in the congregation can only look on from outside the in-group. The discrimination may be on many bases—rich and poor, old-timers and newcomers, young and old, male and female, and so on. Pastors especially have to be careful to provide pastoral care faithfully to all members and not predominantly to those who have become their friends.

91. Ezekiel's reference to "David" as shepherd and prince is obviously messianic in its thrust. It really was pointing to the promised Son of David who was to fulfill the covenant of grace and blessing, our Lord Jesus Christ.

92. This lesson's ties to the Holy Gospel may be seen in the picture of shepherd and sheep in both.

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Timothy 1:5–17

Fill-in answers: The aim of the charge to be given to "certain persons" was "love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

93. All of these qualities are gracious gifts from God through the Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit gives a pure heart that desires nothing more than a living relationship with a forgiving heavenly Father, accompanied by a good conscience because we know we are forgiven and redeemed by His Son, which together stimulate a sincerity of faith that issues love.

94. The Law is not laid down for those who are just, made righteous through faith in Jesus, because its curse has been removed and its purpose has been fulfilled by God's grace in Christ. It may indeed teach us how to please our Lord, but it does not energize us to do so. That has been and continues to be accomplished by the Gospel.

95. Paul never got over his amazement at the grace of God that had reached out to him, a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent, to turn him around and equip him to become a champion of the Gospel. He must have given this testimony many, many times. It was a direct, personal appearance of the risen Jesus that turned Paul's around. Paul said he had acted in ignorance and unbelief—and when confronted with the living truth of Jesus the Christ, his turn-around was immediate and complete.

96. Paul said that Jesus had reached out to “the foremost” of sinners so that He might be a *hupotypōsis*, a prototype example of what the grace of the Lord can do. Paul was saying, “If God could reach out and love me, He can reach out and love anyone.”

97. Each of us can say “I am the foremost of sinners” in the sense that we know our own sinful nature and our own deep inner need of salvation more than we know this about any other person.

98. Paul's trustworthy saying was “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” It echoed Jesus' “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

99. Whenever we hear this trustworthy saying, in whatever form it comes to us, a word of praise to the One whose love has made it true and trustworthy is always the only appropriate response. The historic liturgy of the Church follows the confession of sins and the pronouncement of absolution with the Gloria Patri, the Kyrie, and the Gloria in Excelsis. Songs of praise to the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, are only natural for Christians—for He has shown Himself to be our Savior!

Lesson 7

Proper 20

O Lord, keep Your Church in Your perpetual mercy; and because without You we cannot but fall, preserve us from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 16:1–15

Fill-in answers: Jesus' parable teaches us that just as the shrewd manager knew how to use earthly things with His own earthly future in mind, so as His disciples, we should learn to use earthly things with our heavenly future in mind.

100. It surely seems as if Jesus was urging us to “feather our nest” eternally by doing good works. The Bible’s encouragement to sanctification is often misconstrued in that way—as if by our service we are gaining “points” with God to be rewarded in heaven. Jesus was talking to His disciples, those already committed to Him as Savior and Lord. His words have to be understood in that context. Paul’s words in Galatians help us to keep salvation *by* faith and sanctification *in* faith in their proper relationship. We offer our love to Jesus and to others in His name because He loved us first. In boundless grace, God graciously surprises us by rewarding our loving service.

101. As a general rule, an honest person will be honest in matters large or small, while a dishonest person will be untrustworthy in small and in great things. One careless about little things may become very scrupulous when entrusted with a major responsibility; on the other hand, one honest in ordinary matters may find the temptation to benefit in a major way from some dishonesty too much to resist.

102. Jesus called earthly wealth “unrighteous wealth” because wealth is simply earthly, in itself neither morally good nor morally evil, but it does have an insidious way of influencing and even taking over the attitudes and intentions of the heart, usurping the priority place that God demands. When we recognize this, we not only aim at honesty in all things but also strive, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to manage all of our lives, our worldly wealth included, to the glory of Him who is the owner of all and to the blessing of those around us, whom He loves just as He loves us. The allegiance either to God or to money concerns us in every area of our lives.

103. Practical ways to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:20) include joyful, generous Christian giving to honor God and to support the Gospel ministry (2 Corinthians 9:6–7); being serious about charitable contributions to Christian agencies that help the needy in Jesus’ name; and giving generously of our time and money in providing our personal help to needy individuals or families in our church and our community.

104. People of this world are often more shrewd at this because they use worldly wealth to say yes to themselves and their ambitions. For Christians to use worldly wealth for an eternal benefit requires that we say no to ourselves and surrender also our money to serving God’s purposes. Our

sinful natures have to be “crucified” to allow this—and that will be accomplished only by the power of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22–25).

105. Yes, they probably did give their full tithe to the Lord. Obeying the rules was not their problem (see Matthew 23:23–24). Being pharisaical is a matter of doing the right thing for the wrong reason. Jesus put His finger on their problem when He said, “They do all their deeds to be seen by others” (see Matthew 23:1–7). We can all be Pharisees.

106. We all like to make a good impression on those around us, and sometimes that encourages us to make a display of the good things we do for the Lord and for other people. Receiving certificates of recognition, being on the list of donors, having a plaque put on a wall to memorialize our gift—these don’t help us with this problem. Jesus said, “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you” (Luke 6:26) as part of His Woes that were counterparts of His Beatitudes. We can face up to the truth of our sinful nature and its mixed motives, confess them to the Lord, and seek His kingdom. We can’t control our hearts, but we can avoid making public displays of piety and good deeds and can choose not to even let our left hand know what our right hand is doing.

The Old Testament Lesson: Amos 8:4–7

107. When making a profit becomes the all-consuming concern, it is easy to rationalize dishonest business practices as necessary because “competitors are obviously involved in them” and “that’s the way things are in the real world.” How easily any one of us can be tempted to make that “good deal” that we know really is not fair to the other person. Many of the situations Amos pointed to are societal—attitudes that infect a whole society’s mores. We face this in our society’s tendency to get by with the least possible personal effort. Scripture is clear that the Lord abhors cheating because of what it does to the cheater and the cheated, as well as to the moral fiber of a society in general.

108. In the Lord’s swearing by “the pride of Jacob,” He was taking an oath on Himself. *He* was the pride of Israel (Jacob). There is no more binding oath that He could take than to swear by His own person and name (see Isaiah 45:23). The Lord’s “I will never forget” has all the more impact when you contrast it with His great desire, in His forgiving love, to “[blot] out your transgressions . . . and not remember your sins.” The one states His judgment as severely as you can; the other expresses His love and mercy in as reassuring a way as possible.

109. As individuals, we can share part of our income with the needy and homeless. If we know them, we can do this directly but anonymously through our church—which helps them and us avoid self-consciousness in future interaction at church (see Matthew 6:3–4). Those we don’t know are best served by supporting Christian social ministry agencies, like LCMS World Relief and Lutheran Social Services. Increasing your offering to the Lord by 1 percent of your income and devoting that 1 percent to social ministry provides a meaningful, substantial amount for this. There are also avenues for volunteer service in such agencies. The reward promised by the Lord is significant (see Proverbs 19:17). As Christian citizens living in a participatory democracy, we can encourage governmental programs that will provide short-term assistance to needy citizens and long-term possibilities for them to get on their feet again—and willingly pay the taxes the operation of such programs requires.

110. This Old Testament Lesson provides a negative foil against which the positive use of worldly wealth encouraged by Jesus in the Holy Gospel stands out.

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Timothy 2:1–15

111. Worship is always a primary concern, the heartbeat of the Church: the Christian community comes together in the presence of God to be strengthened in faith and life through Word

and Sacrament. What happens in our worship together and our attitude toward it has a large effect on what happens in our daily discipleship. Supplications involve asking God for what our society and our church needs. Prayers approach God with due reverence and praise. Intercessions are specific prayers for those in specific need. Thanksgiving is acknowledging God's mercies, which are new to us each day, with gratitude. All of these, as they are practiced, help us look up to see God's hand of blessing and emphasize for us our dependence on Him in all of life.

112. That Paul could urge these Christians to pray for Emperor Nero and his authorities, who were a real threat to them, indicates that we are to pray for governing authorities whether they are good or bad, respecting their offices and the purposes God has in mind for them. They are God's representatives and need our prayer support to take their responsibilities seriously (see Romans 13:1–7).

113. When society is peaceful and quiet, the energies of leaders and involved citizens can be directed to concerns that will benefit all. When turmoil arises, it distracts from helpful pursuits and wastes energies, time, and resources. The investment of so much of our government's income in arming for national defense and in fighting crime, though these may be necessary, takes money away from positive projects. Though the Gospel may reach individuals with special impact when they are in circumstances of turmoil—as was true in the Early Church—a stable society allows the Church to focus without distraction on the proclamation of the Gospel.

114. Godliness, like virtue, is its own reward. It encourages an individual in his life of close fellowship with Jesus and daily dependence on Him. Godliness encourages a person to be aware of and helpful toward his neighbor. Many godly people have championed movements in society that have brought liberation and renewal to many. Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, with his involvement in Habitat for Humanity and his dedication to negotiating peaceful agreements, is an example of a godly person who is doing something positive for society in general as a Christian witness.

115. That God wants all to be saved says emphatically that He is never the cause of people being lost. That happens because of their sin and their rejection of the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

116. Jesus is the one mediator on the basis of who He is, the Son of God, and on the basis of what He has done, giving Himself a ransom for all. The Greek's *antilutron hyper pantōn* speaks emphatically of Christ's substitutionary atonement. *Lutros* means "ransom." Its prefix *anti* adds emphasis, making it "ransom instead of." Including the preposition *hyper* emphasizes that this "ransom instead of" was "on behalf of." *Panton* means "all" and makes it most emphatic: Christ Jesus gave Himself as a *ransom for all!*

117. Anger and quarreling carried in the heart during prayer, instead of an attitude of love and forgiveness for those with whom you are praying, effectively block prayer from the heart of God (see Matthew 6:14–15).

118. The opposite of conducting yourself modestly and dressing respectably is to draw attention to yourself by how you act and dress. Women acting or dressing inappropriately in church may distract men and other women in their worship—and may be there for reasons other than worship. In the life of the Church, women are to adorn themselves with good works—calling attention to the One whom they are serving and not to themselves.

119. A time for introspection—be careful it doesn't become a time for quarreling and arguing.

Women sometimes feel they are insulted by Paul's "she will be saved through childbearing," as if Paul were saying that's all they're good for, having kids. Paul was not, of course, talking about being "saved from sin and death." That's always through faith in Jesus Christ. His words were intended to elevate women by emphasizing their womanliness. Their being the "heart" of the home with their sensitivity as they support and encourage the "head" of the home, their "faith and love

and holiness, with self-control,” and their giving birth to children and rearing them with warmth and love—these are values that they uniquely contribute to a family.

Lesson 8

Proper 21

O God, You are the strength of all who trust in You, and without Your aid we can do no good thing. Grant us the help of Your grace that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 16:19–31

120. It is easier to love humanity in general and to help the needy by voting for social assistance programs and by contributing to agencies of social ministry than it is to help individuals with whom we have personal contact because in those ways we exercise a general concern in impersonal, “antiseptic” ways. We don’t become personally involved with the people we are helping or have to carry a continuing personal concern for their welfare. Usually more than our money is involved when we offer loving assistance to help people who are “at our door.” They place demands also on our time and on our physical and emotional energy.

121. General assistance to help solve major social problems may indeed be more effectively handled through agencies, but we are not to avoid personal involvement. Jesus’ parable teaches us that we can’t love Him and at the same time persistently pass by our neighbors in their needs (see 1 John 3:16–18).

Many people in our world take the connection between faith and love very seriously. Ask your group to mention examples, possibly including some from their own experience with such individuals.

122. It is God’s Word that gives us His warning, instruction, and encouragement regarding the direction of our lives. Jesus called it “Moses and the Prophets,” a reference to all the Old Testament Scriptures—Moses, the source of the Torah, the Pentateuch, and “the Prophets,” the source of the rest. Today we refer to the Bible, which includes both Old and New Testaments, as God’s Word to us—also His instruction to practice active love and helpfulness toward the needy (see Micah 6:6–8 and James 2:14–17). One who is hardened to the instruction of the Word and set in his own ways will not be impressed by miracles either. Then it’s a matter of “Don’t confuse me with facts; my mind’s made up!” The Jewish leaders were a case in point. They pressed Jesus for “a miraculous sign” to prove He was the Messiah, but all the while they willfully ignored all the miracles He was doing—and continued to ignore the evidence He had given them through the apostles that He had risen from the dead.

123. So many of Jesus’ parables deal with our use of our money because it is vitally true that “you cannot serve God and money” (Luke 16:13). We easily want to stretch the needle’s eye to let us pass through comfortably, but Jesus wants us to know that unless we are ready to practice a detachment to things, our attachment to Him is weakened.

124. We can give help to the needy “at our door” by being sensitive to and providing help anonymously to friends in financial stress because of emergencies; by arranging for and contributing to an assistance fund at our church to be dispensed by the pastor and the board of elders, so members in need or needy transients can be given temporary assistance; and by becoming volunteer workers for an agency of social ministry. Your group may suggest other ways.

The Old Testament Lesson: Amos 6:1–7

Fill-in answers: Amos warned against being at ease in Zion and feeling secure on the mountain of Samaria.

125. The religious and political leaders in both countries were complacent and felt secure because things were going so well. Weren’t the extension of the kingdoms and the great prosperity they were enjoying convincing evidence that God was with them and was blessing them? Surely this would continue—they were the Lord’s covenant people! They held these attitudes themselves, and they projected them to the people.

126. The careless enjoyment of affluence is depicted in the statements of verses 4–6, which imply that the wealthy saw to it that they could enjoy the best that money could buy. They saw themselves as the most deserving and the most clever in the expressions of their artistic skills.

127. “Joseph” was a poetic reference to the Kingdom of Israel. The people of Ephraim, the most prominent of the ten tribes that constituted Israel, were descendants of one of Joseph’s two sons. Especially the religious leaders should have been concerned about “the ruin of Joseph,” the moral and spiritual rot that was evident in Israel’s society. Israel’s ruin would be at the hand of the Assyrians, but the nation was ruined already by the greed, self-indulgence, oppression of the poor, sexual immorality, and shallow religiosity that often accompany prosperity and affluence. Their ruin was already evident in their inner decay and their lack of concern. They were not interested in correcting the moral and social problems that were sure to bring the Lord’s judgment on them for their faithlessness.

128. The Assyrian policy of resettling their conquered peoples among other conquered peoples was intended to erase national and ethnic identity. In such a policy, the prominent people, the religious and political leaders, were always among the first to be removed and scattered among other nations. As a result of the application of this policy upon conquered Israel, the ten northern tribes disappeared without a trace as an identifiable Jewish people.

129. Read yourself into verses 4–6. There is strong warning here for us that we not allow a desire for things and pleasures to rule us in our affluence and produce an attendant disregard for the poor and needy. We need to bring everything, including our use of money, into submission under the rule of Christ and imitate Him in active compassion for those in need.

130. The rich man in Jesus’ story ignored poor Lazarus in his need. The rich people of Israel and Judah were oppressing the poor so they could become more and more affluent and enjoy their life of ease and pleasure all the more.

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Timothy 3:1–13

Fill-in answers: Paul honored the office of deacon by saying, “Those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

131. Peter suggested that they choose “one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when He was taken up from us” (Acts 1:21).

132. In the selection of men to “serve tables” (Acts 6:2) in overseeing the distribution of food to the needy in the congregation, Peter suggested that they be “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (v. 3).

133. In the case of those under the supervision of Timothy, it is impossible that the qualification of having been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry to His ascension could be met by one desiring to be an overseer. It was a different time and place in which Timothy was ministering as Paul’s representative. That those desiring to be an overseer or a deacon had received the gift of the Holy Spirit was taken for granted. That was part of becoming a Christian through Holy Baptism and professing faith in Jesus.

134. The qualities in Paul’s list are human qualities, which can be gained and strengthened through a personal dedication to the disciplines of faith and discipleship. Non-Christians can pursue them too—and do as part of their life in the world of business. But in the life of the Church, such qualities are of great importance, for they do not impact only on the success of a business but also on the lives of members of the Church, citizens in the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit’s presence in the lives of the Church’s leaders is vital to their personal lives and to the work they are committed to do for Christ and His Church. Pastors, for example, need to seek the Spirit’s help and guidance as they work to develop the effectiveness of their communication as preachers and teachers—but it requires a good deal of effort on their part too.

135. We need to remember that the new Christians who came into the Church came out of a world that was grossly immoral, eager for wealth, and addicted to pleasures. They had a ways to go in the new life to which the Spirit called them. However, new converts today often come to the Church out of a similar environment in their society.

136. It is never a good idea hastily to elevate a newcomer to a congregation or to the Church itself to a position of leadership—for that person’s sake as well as for the Church’s sake. Newcomers need to become a part of the Church and congregation and be blessed by that association themselves, learn the local traditions, the likes and dislikes, before they have to confront them in positions of leadership responsibility.

137. The founders of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod purposely chose to have a congregational model instead of the hierarchical model that they had left in Germany. With the Scripture’s encouragement, they chose to have the final authority in the Church rest in the congregations, the people of God, as they are guided by the Word of God, and not in a hierarchical system of offices within the Church—be it pastor in a congregation or bishop in the larger church body. A pastor does not make decisions for his congregation but may influence decisions by convincing the congregation about what the Word may say on a given matter. A president presides over meetings of a congregation and is responsible to see that the decisions of the congregation are carried out. He, too, may influence decisions through his wise argument or through application of the Bible, but he does not make decisions for the church. The same holds true for the president of a district or of the Synod. Thus the congregational model keeps the Church itself as the final authority, under the ultimate authority of the Word of God, for its faith and life.

We might ask, “What’s in a name or a title?” Experience shows that the title an office is given can influence, and has influenced, the view the officeholder has of himself and of his function in the Church—and in the hierarchical model, in ecclesiastical tradition, a bishop makes decisions and determines appointments and gives orders within his realm of jurisdiction.

Lesson 9

Proper 22

O God, our refuge and strength, the author of all godliness, by Your grace hear the prayers of Your Church. Grant that those things which we ask in faith we may receive through Your bountiful mercy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 17:1–10

As you read the first paragraph of the Study Guide with its description of *skandala* on various levels, ask “For example?” about each level. Social *skandala* abound: drugs, prostitution, power brokering, gambling, promotion of alcohol and tobacco, “easy credit” commercialism, media approval of sexual immorality and violence, and so on. They also exist on a personal level: words—blasphemous use of God’s name, angry words that demean and degrade, gossip that tears down reputations, stories and jokes that devalue important relationships, and so on; actions—dishonesty and cheating, casual violation of rules and laws, spousal abuse, drug and alcohol and tobacco abuse, and so on.

138. Before we rebuke a brother or sister for an evident sin, we must “pay attention to ourselves” to see if we are involved in that same sin ourselves. Readiness to forgive in Jesus’ name must not be limited to a certain number of times. Here Jesus says, “Seven times in the day.” Remember, when Peter suggested “seven times,” Jesus came back to him with “seventy times seven.” How many times a day do we want the Lord Jesus to forgive us? His love does not have limits, and our love is to reflect His.

139. It is not the value of the container that counts but the value of what goes into the container. A small faith is still faith in a large and powerful God. Jesus was assuring the weak to trust in God’s strength; He was not encouraging us to be content with a little faith.

140. We are unworthy servants even when we are doing our duty, first, because our being His servants and being given His commands is all based on His grace, not our worthiness; and second, because none of us does the work that is assigned to us as we should, with eager hearts and with diligent minds and hands.

The Old Testament Lesson: Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4

141. Habakkuk was told to write the revelation on tablets so heralds could run and proclaim its message throughout Judah.

142. Because the revelation awaited its appointed time and would appear to linger, patience would be needed by the Lord’s people as they waited for its fulfillment. Explore the Scripture references to help your group gain a feel for the challenge of waiting for the Lord.

Devote some time also to the New Testament’s quoting of Habakkuk 2:4, for it became the bedrock of Paul’s and subsequently Luther’s theology. Hebrews 10:37–39 shows that usually the

New Testament writers quoted from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament's Hebrew. The Hebrew *'emunah* carried the meaning of "trust" or "faithfulness," which became *pistis*, "faith," in the Septuagint and in the New Testament. The two concepts are fully related.

Horace Hummel wrote in *The Word Becoming Flesh* (pp. 347–48),

God's answer [to the prophet] is primarily to trust, to believe that God has not abdicated, that "God's mills may grind slowly, but they grind very fine." . . . There finally is no other "answer" to the problem of evil, but the answer of faith. . . . Neither Paul nor Habakkuk nor anyone else in either testament before the Enlightenment understood subjective "faith" apart from . . . "revelation" . . . the revelation of the active, aggressive labor of a personal God for the restoration of the universal "justice" and "righteousness" lost in the Fall. . . . Paul's "faith" necessarily eventuates in [Habakkuk's] "trust" as inevitably as Habakkuk's "trust" presupposed Paul's "faith." . . . If "faith" is thus fully and biblically defined, there is no problem with the alternate translation sometimes suggested for the entire verse: "He who through faith is just shall live."

143. As Hummel has pointed out, faith that is effective is "faith in . . ." It is our faith in God's full revelation of His saving love in Jesus Christ, our Savior, that brings new life to us in the power of the Holy Spirit—and so we live as God's children, as we, as disciples of our Lord Jesus, carry out the commission He has given us, and with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

144. The Holy Gospel speaks of faith accomplishing great things because it is faith in a great God; this lesson says that faith, or trust, was the key for the people of Judah to understand the Lord's working things out for them in His saving will.

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Timothy 1:1–14

Fill-in answers: Paul remembered Timothy's sincere faith that dwelt first in his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice. He encouraged Timothy to fan into flame the gift of God that was in him through the laying on of hands. Paul's words highlighted the love and respect between the two of them and reminded Timothy how he and the Church's leaders had laid hands on him, and he had been blessed with a charisma from the Holy Spirit to equip him for his leadership role.

145. In 1 Corinthians 12:7, Paul wrote, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." The gift Timothy received through the formal laying on of hands by the Church's elders and the apostle Paul evidently was the ability to be a recognized leader in the Church. As Timothy worked with Paul and then was given positions of responsibility by Paul, his gift of understanding true Gospel teaching and being able to proclaim it clearly and to distinguish it from false teachings enabled him to work effectively for the common good of the Church.

146. You fan the flame of a spiritual gift by going to its source, the Holy Spirit, through prayer and through study of the Word, by which He works in you to give you new insights and to strengthen your faith. You fan the flame also by using it faithfully for the common good of all of God's people, giving and receiving encouragement in faith and love—sometimes being led into new areas or ways of service.

Fill-in answers: Paul told Timothy this would result, not in a spirit of fear, but in a spirit of power, of love, and of self-control.

147. Many interpreters feel Timothy was an introvert, shy and sensitive, who needed a spirit of power and love and self-control to wear Paul's mantle of leadership. The Church would be without its great apostolic leaders and would need men who could proclaim the Word with certainty and with power. The Gnostic heresy lay just ahead. The Church of our day must confront a sophisticated, humanistic, science-oriented society with the "foolishness" of the Gospel. We must be bold in

the Spirit to meet the intellectual with evidence that shows that man's exaltation of man has not worked to solve our basic problems of sin and selfishness. We must be able to present the "foolish Gospel" in all its Spirit-power and in complete confidence that it is the only power of God for salvation also to those who think they have outgrown it.

148. Paul said that this grace was given "us in Christ Jesus before the ages began." He touched here on the mystery of God's eternal election of His own, a teaching that must always be aimed at giving Christians added assurance of their salvation (see Romans 8:28–30). Theologians remind us that we must always consider this teaching *a posteriori*, after the fact, and not try to go back and *a priori*, before the fact, pick God's mind and impose our logic on His election. It must remain a mystery of His eternal gracious disposition toward sinners. God's grace in Christ was fully revealed in the saving ministry of Jesus—His life, death, and resurrection—in fulfillment of the eternal plan of salvation and of the covenant established with Abraham and his descendants.

Lesson 10

Proper 23

*Almighty God, You show mercy to Your people in all their troubles.
Grant us always to recognize Your goodness, give thanks for Your
compassion, and praise Your holy name; through Jesus Christ, Your
Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.*

The Holy Gospel: Luke 17:11–19

Today we call leprosy Hansen’s Disease, but in ancient times, leprosy referred to a number of communicable diseases that displayed symptoms on the skin and required the victim to be isolated from society. Leprosy itself was progressive, incurable, and ultimately fatal.

149. The lepers who approached Jesus, calling Him “Master,” evidently had heard about His powers as a healer and hoped that He would have pity on them and heal them.

150. Jesus told them to show themselves to the priests because the priests were designated in the law as the ones who would determine whether a skin disease made a person unclean. Only the priests could say the lepers were fit for life in society. Sending them to the priests would make the men key in on their hope—and requiring them to act on it would focus their faith on what was implicit in Jesus’ words. Their healing was contingent on their setting out, just as Naaman, the Syrian general, finally had to set aside his arguments and actually wash in the Jordan River to be healed of his leprosy (see 2 Kings 5:1–14). It’s hard to think the miracle would have happened if their reaction had been “What good will that do? We’ve been examined by the priests before. That’s why we’re where we are.” It is suggested at times that faith equals obedience. Believing is not just a matter of the head but also of an obedient life (see John 13:12–17).

151. The Samaritan returned to give thanks out of the joy in his heart at seeing that he was healed. He related the blessing to the One who gave the blessing. We’re not told why the nine did not return. They probably all intended to get back to Jesus and thank Him after the priests had given them official clearance but got caught up in all the new possibilities life now entailed and never got around to it. That’s the way it often is in this matter of saying “thank you.”

152. There is no suggestion that the healing of the other nine was temporary. God often blesses people and they stay blessed even when they forget to thank Him, but God’s desire is for an awareness of His hand in the blessing to be expressed in a proper response of thanksgiving. The Samaritan had been healed of leprosy, just as the other lepers had. But Jesus pronounced him *well*. There is a suggestion here of greater wholeness. Faith itself is a priceless blessing that the Samaritan received.

153. We sometimes do not return and give praise to God because we get preoccupied with the enjoyment of the blessings themselves, we take them for granted, or we don’t look beyond the “cause and effect” of our own efforts and other earthly circumstances to see God as the Giver. This is why it is helpful and healthful for us to practice giving of thanks and praise as the first part of our

praying in our daily lives and to make joining fellow Christians regularly in worship and praise a continuing discipline.

154. Encouragement to give thanks in all circumstances aims at changing our focus from the situations and circumstances themselves, good or bad, to the One who is at work in all of them for our good—the true good of our relating to Him in faith and love. Asking “What does God have in mind for me in this?” we, too, may trustingly give Him praise and thanks in advance for the good to which He is leading us through the circumstances He is allowing.

The Old Testament Lesson: Ruth 1:1–19a

155. The circumstances that led “Pleasant” to become “Bitter” are obvious: the famine that forced a move to Moab and the subsequent death of her husband and two sons, leaving her alone in a foreign land, dependent on foreign daughters-in-law.

156. Naomi released Ruth and Orpah from their ties to her because they had no children to tie them to her family line. She felt they could more readily pick up their lives among their own people than in the uncertain circumstances that she would face on returning to Judah. Twice when Naomi was talking to them about going separate ways, they wept. There was genuine love and affection among these women. Ruth’s pledge was not just to stay with Naomi to comfort and help her but also included the statement “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” She wanted to become a part of the covenant people of Israel. She showed her belief in and commitment to Yahweh with her oath in His name: “May the LORD [Yahweh in the Hebrew] do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”

157. That a Moabite woman could not only believe but also be privileged to become an ancestor of the Messiah shows that it was God’s good will for the Messiah to be the Savior of all nations.

158. In this lesson, a foreigner, Ruth, was a key figure in leading Naomi ultimately to give God thanks and praise; in the Holy Gospel, it was the foreigner, a Samaritan, who returned and gave thanks to Jesus.

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Timothy 2:1–13

159. Timothy was to learn from the soldier, who doesn’t involve himself in civilian pursuits, from the athlete, who competes according to the rules, and from the hard-working farmer that he needed to focus on what he had been called and commissioned to do as the assistant to Paul the apostle. He needed pointedly to avoid that which would distract him from that Gospel work assigned to him. Pastors today, too, must be careful not to get overly involved in business concerns, in hobbies, in sports, and so on. They are to be *pastors*.

160. That Jesus Christ is remembered as “risen from the dead” establishes the fact that He is the very Son of God, the One who is fully worthy of our faith and love. New life is to be found in Him (see Romans 1:1–4). That Jesus was “the offspring of David” establishes His true humanity as our brother in the flesh and validates His person and position as the promised Messiah (see 2 Samuel 7:16; Matthew 1:17–23; 21:9).

161. In addition to being sustained by awareness of the constant presence of Jesus with him, Paul was sustained in his suffering by awareness that the Gospel, to which he dedicated his life, was not chained. It was being proclaimed with life-saving and life-renewing power (see Philippians 1:15–18). The goal of Paul’s enduring everything he was experiencing, even imprisonment while awaiting execution, was that the elect of God might obtain salvation in Christ.

162. Paul's example surely teaches today's Church and its leaders that our number-one purpose in life is to get the Word of Christ out to our world—even if we must suffer because of our faithfulness to that goal.

Explore the Scripture references that relate to the hymn that Paul quoted to gain an appreciation of its message. In a pithy way, it provides clear teaching about faith, discipleship, and God's unfailing faithfulness.

163. We all know that we will fail and fall, even when we are determined not to. God's faithfulness to His person and His Word provides comfort to us in such circumstances. Day by day, we live under the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our partial service and our faulty works may not stand up under His scrutiny—in Paul's words, they may be “burned up” (1 Corinthians 3:10–15)—but salvation through God's grace in Christ is assured. Only rejection of Christ or willful persistence in sin can cancel that (see John 3:16–18; Hebrews 10:26–31). When we continue in faith and in our desire to be His serving disciples, our faults and failings do not separate us from His forgiving love—nor can anything else in all creation (see Romans 8:31–39).

164. This may be explained by pointing to the beginnings of the Gnostic heresy in which the Gospel of Jesus was distorted by incorporating Greek philosophy and its terminology into the Gospel. The true deity and true humanity of Jesus as the Word made flesh and the reality of His bodily resurrection from the dead were at the heart of it. Timothy was to be a workman who rightly handles the word of truth. He needed to examine and be sure of his theology and his preaching and teaching.

165. Our advantage is that we have the completed New Testament as the source and norm of Christian teaching. We also have had centuries of studies of the original languages and systematic theological analyses of the Bible's doctrine, such as our Lutheran Confessions, to serve as a basis for our own analysis and understanding of God's Word to us.

Lesson 11

Proper 24

O Lord, almighty and everlasting God, You have commanded us to pray and have promised to hear us. Mercifully grant that Your Holy Spirit may direct and govern our hearts in all things that we may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of Your name; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 18:1–8

166. In contrast to the judge, who helped the widow only to stop her bothering him and nagging him, God dearly cares for His chosen ones. He wants nothing more than to help us in the best possible ways. He will listen lovingly to our cries for help and will respond in the way He knows will be best for us. That God's chosen ones cry out to Him "day and night" not only suggests the severity of their need but also that the situation they are experiencing is dragging on and on.

167. It is an interesting exercise for your group to reconcile the Lord's promise of speedy justice with what appear to be lengthy delays, during which situations simply must be endured and His people must persevere in crying out day and night. Explore all of the Scripture references. Each offers its insights to help us see that God's ways are not our ways and His time schedule is different from ours. But the assurance is always there: He will live up to His promises to be with us, to be at work in us in all circumstances in such times of stress, to always strengthen us, and to produce the good that He has in mind for us. The process, not just the outcome, is important.

168. Some in your group may be ready to share an experience that required a persevering faith on their part. Be ready to offer an instance from your own experience as a Christian. It will encourage them to share, and this sharing of experiences will be encouraging to all.

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 32:22–30

169. The Lord intended this night of "wrestling" with Jacob to be an experience that would focus Jacob's attention on Him and on the covenant promise—and stretch Jacob's faith and commitment to Him. When the Lord showed His power over Jacob by dislocating Jacob's hip, He brought Jacob to know that he could not face life depending just on his own cleverness and manipulation. Jacob rose to the occasion and was ready to learn the lesson the Lord was teaching. He recognized the significance of what he had been experiencing and hung on, insisting that the Lord bless him.

170. The blessing came in the form of the change of Jacob's name to Israel. Giving a person a name indicated authority over and ownership of that person. For Jacob to be called "He Struggles with God" was a continuing reminder of this life-changing experience, and his walking with a limp

was a continuing encouragement to him to continue to have a faith that perseveres in its trust in God. The Lord did not comply with Jacob's request to tell him His name because He had revealed Himself to Jacob by His name, Yahweh, already at Bethel (see Genesis 28:10–17). He could be recognized by Jacob in this interaction by what He had done in dislocating Jacob's hip and in changing his name. The setting in which Jacob asked for the name of the one with whom he was struggling might have indicated that Jacob wanted more than a servant relationship with the Lord, which would have defeated God's purpose in the encounter.

171. Jacob showed his awareness of what he had experienced and his agreement with it in faith by naming the place *Peniel*, “the face of God.” That he could have that kind of personal encounter with God and live was in itself reassuring to him that his covenant Lord, Yahweh, would always be faithful to His promise.

The change in Jacob was evidenced immediately in the way he changed his approach to Esau. He was ready to humble himself, ask for Esau's forgiveness, and trust God's blessing. He had found, as we must, that life is not just a struggle with circumstances and with other people but is a matter of finding a living relationship with the Lord and then persevering in keeping it, trusting Him to provide His saving and strengthening presence in every circumstance.

172. In this Old Testament Lesson, Jacob's wrestling with the Lord is an example of the kind of persevering prayer that Jesus encouraged in the Holy Gospel.

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5

That Timothy had learned the Scriptures from childhood keys in on the influence of Lois and Eunice, but Paul surely included himself in those “from whom you learned it.” Timothy had traveled with Paul, had served as his assistant, and had grown in personal conviction in the process.

173. Paul's words surely point to parents and grandparents as having the primary role in the Christian education of their children and grandchildren. “From childhood” suggests that education in the Good News of Jesus is to begin at a most tender age, when little ones are so receptive to the Gospel and even become examples of faith to their parents (see Mark 10:13–16; Matthew 18:2–3). It is the example of parents in their use of the Word and in worship and prayer that is the major influence in the growing faith of youngsters. “The faith is caught more than taught.”

174. The result of parental instruction and example is that their children are made “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

Use the Scripture references to underscore the Bible's claim for itself and its effectiveness in accomplishing God's purpose through Law and Gospel. An aphorism that distinguishes Law and Gospel is this: “The Law is intended to afflict the comfortable; the Gospel is intended to comfort the afflicted.” In simple terms, the Law shows our sins, and the Gospel shows our Savior.

175. Verification that the Scriptures are God's inspired Word is experiential. You cannot argue anyone into it by just quoting the Scriptures' claim of inspiration, though that claim itself does have God's authority. But the Scriptures speak with impact about this only to Christians. The Spirit-powered Scriptures themselves convince us that they proclaim God's truth—as the Gospel of Jesus leads us to repentance and faith in Jesus. When that step is taken, it is a small added step for a Christian to see all the Scriptures as God's inspired Word. In the experience of the Christian life, the Scriptures attest to themselves over and over as divine truth, and in their impact on the believer, they verify themselves.

Fill-in answers: Paul said the inspired Scripture is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

176. Lutherans recognize that the Scriptures are the only source and norm of Christian doctrine. Teachings are to flow from the Scriptures to the life of the Church. Nonscriptural teachings

or interpretations are not to be imposed on the Scriptures by the Church. Similarly, all teachings or interpretations must be measured against the Scriptures, and especially the Gospel of Jesus, to ascertain their validity as Christian doctrine. The hermeneutic principle that “Scripture interprets Scripture” is vital in this. All Protestant Christians protest against any other authority or source of teaching. As a corrective to the Church of his day, which allowed the Church itself to add to the body of Christian teaching, Luther said *sola Scriptura*. This firm stand is still needed, for the Roman Catholic Church still insists that the church itself is a valid source of teachings when its head speaks *ex cathedra*. Also, some “Protestant” churches are allowing their teaching and practice to be influenced by what they call “a new understanding” of theological matters.

177. The sinful nature does not like to hear sound doctrine. It does not like the Law because the Law judges pride, self-determination, and disobedience; it does not like to hear the Gospel because it prefers to hear it can save itself by its own self-styled moral goodness instead of by the “foolishness” of God’s Son dying on a cross for our sins. Myths that scratch the itching ears of those who do not want sound doctrine are messages that “comfort the comfortable,” that justify the humanistic creed of man’s essential goodness. Some say Paul was probably referring to myths that warped Old Testament history and formed the basis for heretical beliefs. Today’s New Age philosophy and the myths of Mormonism would be modern counterparts. Timothy needed to be sober-minded so he could deal intelligently and authoritatively with aberrant teachers and their teachings in sound, decisive ways on the basis of Scripture and not be intimidated by their claims to “wisdom” directly from God.

178. Christ’s gift to the Church is that some are evangelists (see Ephesians 4:11). Those so gifted are able in the power of the Spirit to reach out effectively with the Gospel. “The *work* of an evangelist” (emphasis added) implies that those who are not specially gifted in this way may also work at learning to apply the Gospel to all of life. Thus they can learn to make use of opportunities the Holy Spirit provides to witness to the Gospel of Jesus to those in their web of relationships. This speaks to all of us.

179. The Church of every era has as its primary task the preaching and application of the Word: Law and Gospel. Settings may vary, methods may be adapted and modernized, but the message of Christ must be the same.

Lesson 12

Proper 25

Almighty and everlasting God, You are always more ready to hear than we to pray and always ready to give more than we either desire or deserve. Pour down on us the abundance of Your mercy; forgive us those things of which our conscience is afraid; and give us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask except by the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 18:9–17

180. The “prayer” of the Pharisee is a classic statement of self-righteousness. He was just telling God how lucky He was to have such a good man to serve Him. The Pharisee meant what he said in his prayer. He had carefully obeyed the requirements of laws and traditions. God’s Law prescribed one annual day of fasting, the Day of Atonement. The nation itself had added four other fast days. But Pharisees fasted on Mondays and Thursdays of each week as a special mark of their holiness. Jesus commented on their scrupulous but falsely motivated tithing in Luke 11:42.

181. The prayer of the tax collector was one of sincere, heartfelt humility. He approached God as an undeserving supplicant.

182. The Greek wording says the tax collector was acknowledging that he could hope for God’s mercy only on the basis of the sacrificial system, which God had prescribed and through which He mediated His mercy. The man was attaching himself in faith to the sacrifices that were offered daily in the temple—just as we approach God through the One who fulfilled of the sacrificial system, our Lord Jesus, God’s own atoning sacrifice.

183. A review of the suggested Scripture text that emphasizes justification by faith alone will lead your group to define *justified* as “being declared righteous by God for Jesus’ sake.” *Justified* is a forensic term; it pictures a judge declaring a guilty person to be innocent because of the action of someone else.

184. God cannot help the person who exalts himself because such a person is too full of himself. It is only when we are emptied of pride and self-will that there is room for God’s grace in Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who leads us to repentance and faith, and through faith we are graciously exalted to the privileged position of being God’s freely forgiven, righteous sons and daughters through faith in Jesus.

185. We may bring our children to Jesus through Holy Baptism, in which their sins are forgiven and the Holy Spirit is given to live within them. That, of course, presupposes that we will then lead our children to personal understanding of their faith by instructing them in salvation history in the Bible and teaching them to pray. Our examples as we hear the Word in our homes and in church are vital in this. We might hinder our children when in word or deed, in wrong actions, or in neglect of

what is right, we become stumbling blocks to them. Poor parental examples may become reasons or excuses for them to turn from Jesus in disinterest and doubt (see Luke 17:1–2).

186. The incident with the mothers and their little ones, and Jesus' reaction, was a case in point for Jesus' application of the parable "Everyone who humbles himself [e.g., receives the kingdom like a child] will be exalted."

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 4:1–15

187. For Eve to say "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD" surely indicates that she was remembering the promise of help to come through the woman's Seed. The Hebrew text does not have "with the help of." That kind of phrase has to be supplied out of the context of a statement. The text just says, "I have gotten a man the LORD." This suggests to some that Eve may have thought that already this child was the One who would crush the serpent's head.

188. The story of their bringing their offerings is told so matter-of-factly that it indicates that this was an established practice in the family. How else are people to express their worship than to return to God a portion of what He has given them? Of Cain's selecting things for his offering, the text simply says, "Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground." By contrast, it says of Abel, "Abel also brought of the *firstborn* of his flock and of their *fat* portions" (emphasis added). The difference was not in Cain's bringing things grown in the ground while Abel brought live animals. They were both bringing offerings that represented their lives and their livelihoods. The Mosaic code later included grain and cereal offerings along with the sacrifice of animals. The difference was in the way they went about it—Cain evidently grabbing some surplus produce, and Abel selecting the first and best from his flock. God, who searches the heart, is always concerned about the motive behind the gift and the appropriate quality of the gift rather than about what kind of gift is brought.

189. Cain's inner attitude as he brought his offering probably was one of obligation and resentment. He was doing something he felt he *had* to do because it was customary in the family—or possibly because he saw Abel was going to bring an offering to the Lord. A similarly deadening sense of obligation in us can change a worship service into a required chore; it can make an act of service something that is done to get God off your back; it can reduce an offering to giving the Lord only what you won't need yourself. In short, it robs the Christian life of its vitality. We can avoid the attitude of Cain by consciously worshiping and serving God and by giving a renewal of our response to the love of Christ our Lord (see Romans 12:1–2).

190. Verse 5—anger toward God when things didn't go as expected; verse 8—disregard for his brother's life; verse 9—deceitful, surly response to God; verse 13—unwillingness to acknowledge his wrong and the just judgment of God; verse 16—not interested in renewing his relationship with the Lord. God confronted Cain about his anger as a warning and as a call to repentance, just as He had confronted Adam and Eve in the Garden. God's desire is always for restoration of relationship. The Lord showed His continued concern by confronting him with his murderous action. He pronounced His judgment of Cain's sin to lead him to repentance, and He "marked" Cain to protect him from those who might want to exact retribution. Always, the Lord was desirous of Cain's repentance and restoration. We don't know what the mark of Cain was, but it evidently was obvious to all as "the Lord's mark."

Have your group explore each of the Bible references in the paragraph about the "root of bitterness." Give opportunity for discussion, but in most instances you may just let the Bible speak in support of the statements. This is a key part of the lesson to be learned from the story of Cain and Abel.

191. When we are disappointed and bitterness threatens to take root in us, we need consciously to seek the Lord's help in putting on the Christian qualities that smooth out relationships, and just

forgive those who have hurt us. The peace of Christ will rule in us when we let His Word dwell in us. Then we may give and receive admonition and encouragement in His name—consciously covering all of life with an attitude of thankfulness to Him who is our Lord and Savior.

192. The Holy Gospel emphasized the need for humility as we stand before God, trusting Him to do things His way and receive us on the basis of His surprising love for us. The Old Testament Lesson warns against a spirit of bitterness that can result when we don't get our own way and don't want God to have His way.

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18

193. “Also to all who have loved His appearing” reminds us that the victory wreath is not just for great apostles but also for all who, through the grace of Christ, fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith. We are reassured by the fact that the Judge's righteousness is shown in His making things right through His atoning work. Paul's words also encourage us to be among those who steadfastly long for and await the Lord's coming, devoting ourselves in the meanwhile to the tasks He has assigned.

194. “No one came to stand by me” indicates that when Paul gave his *apologia*, his answer to the indictment against him, no one was willing to stand beside him as his patron and friend. Only someone of wealth and importance would have the influence necessary to help. Luke was with Paul but did not qualify for this. What Paul needed was for a prominent person, whether a Christian or not, to step forward and become his patron in the court; however, doing so would have been very dangerous because Christianity was illegal. Paul's situation reminds us immediately of that of Jesus Himself. Paul had said, “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” Now also in his appearance in Caesar's court, he could identify with the experience of Jesus.

195. We don't know what Alexander's treachery was, but in his anger, Paul turned him over to God for judgment—consistent with his advice in Romans 12:19. When it came to his disappointment with his friends' failure to stand up and be counted with him, he, like Jesus, prayed that it would not be charged against them. Paul knew he was at the point of suffering a martyr's death. Every circumstance brought his mind again to that fact and strengthened his assurance in Christ. Paul left no loose ends but dealt with his anger and his disappointment by placing both matters into God's hands.

Lesson 13

Reformation Day

Almighty and gracious Lord, pour out Your Holy Spirit on Your faithful people. Keep us steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and deliver us in times of temptation, defend us against all enemies, and grant to Your Church Your saving peace; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: John 8:31–36

Fill-in answers: They were to abide in His Word. Then they would know the truth, and it would set them free.

196. Abiding in the Word of Jesus involves us in regular hearing of the Word together with fellow Christians as it is read in our worship services, reading the Word devotionally by ourselves, studying the Word together with other Christians or by ourselves, and putting what the Word leads us to—firm faith and obedient discipleship—into practice in our lives. Growth in faith and life is the goal, and that requires continual, diligent effort.

197. The growing realization of the truth will bring us to appreciate an expression of a growing freedom in Christ. In Christ, we are free from guilt and the eternal consequences of our sin; we are free from the basic sin of wanting to go our own way instead of God's way; we are free from fear of what men may do to us; we are free from fear of death itself, for we share Christ's victory; we are free from bondage under the threat of Law-based religion to enjoy all the assurances of the Gospel; and we are free from the deadening frustration of a works-righteous "Christianity" to willing service under the Gospel. It is as this *freedom to* live out God's will becomes the mind-set of disciples that *freedom from* becomes more and more apparent—but both require persistence and vigilance. The poet Robert Browning spoke about "Sin which steals back softly on the soul half saved." Christian freedom is to be expressed not in the indulgence of our own desires but in loving service to those around us in Jesus' name.

198. They could not argue against "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin"—nor can we. Its truth is self-evident. Though they were physically descended from Abraham, they knew they were not free from the kind of slavery Jesus was describing. Old Testament history is replete with instances of God's judgment of faithless, the rebellious "offspring of Abraham" when they lost Abraham's faith and trusted in their perfunctory religious practices. Jesus wanted these Jews to see that they, too, were guilty of this kind of mistrust and needed a personal spiritual freedom, the kind that only He could supply.

199. The status of a slave in a household is uncertain. He is in no sense a permanent part of a family. He may be sold or given to another owner. A son, on the other hand, by virtue of his relation to the father, his position as a son in the family, belongs permanently to the family. The point is this:

one who is a slave of sin has no lasting place in God's family, but those have been given sonship or daughterhood in the family of God through faith in His Son, Jesus, will never be disowned.

The First Lesson: Revelation 14:6–7

200. John was being given a tour of heaven in his vision. In verses 1–3, he had just seen the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and “with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father’s name written on their foreheads” (the number being symbolic of *all* who are saved, with not one missing). He had heard a voice “like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder” and “like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.” They were singing “a new song” that “no one could learn . . . except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.” Then the angel messenger flying in mid-heaven appears with the eternal Gospel. His presence, his loud voice, and his having “an eternal gospel to proclaim” underscores the basis for the whole scene: salvation by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Gospel is an eternal Gospel because it has always been in the heart and mind of God, from before the creation of the world, and because it is definitive of what is at the center of His person and His will for His creation. There is only one Gospel, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, and it is always the same, from eternity to eternity (see Ephesians 1; Galatians 1:6–9). The angel messenger proclaims the eternal Gospel “to every nation and tribe and language and people.” In this scene, all of the New Testament era is compressed into this angel with the saving Gospel that is to be Good-Newsed to all. The Lord of the Church entrusts His Church with the Gospel, not just for our own benefit, but also for the benefit of the whole world. The Gospel is for our hearing and believing but is also for our Good-Newsing of the world.

201. Pastors and teachers of the Church of today surely are represented by this angel messenger when they lead people into God’s Word—with the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ as the heart and center of their messages and their instruction.

202. We may all see ourselves in the angel messenger with the Gospel to proclaim when we take Christ’s commission seriously and diligently prepare ourselves to present the Gospel to others in a clear and winsome way. It helps to take the time to write out a Christian testimony based on Scripture and memorize it—not to always use verbatim but to have helpful phrases that can be utilized in the proper way at the proper time. This all begins, of course, with our personal study of the New Testament so we will be Spirit-equipped to be Christ’s ambassadors to those around us as He give us opportunities. We also are called on to generously support the effort of the Church and its missionaries as they act on our behalf as well as on Christ’s behalf (see 1 Peter 3:13–17; Philippians 1:3–6).

203. The angel messenger’s announcing that “the hour of His [God’s] judgment has come” relates to the eternal Gospel he proclaims in the fact that there is always an either/or element in the Gospel’s call: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved! Reject Jesus Christ, and condemn yourself to an eternity without God” (see John 3:16–18). According to St. Paul, the same Gospel message becomes the fragrance of life for those who believe but is the fragrance of death for those who will not believe (see 2 Corinthians 2:15–17). The Gospel calls people to more than believing in principle that Jesus is the Savior. It calls to a relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and we as His servants, belonging to Him, eager to do His will in all matters (see Luke 14:25–35). One Christian teacher has suggested that we state this aloud to Christ, consciously turning over all we have and are to Him as His possessions, bought and paid for, and then receiving them back from Him as His gifts to us so we can use all we have and are to His glory as His willing disciples.

204. This lesson emphasizes God’s call to faith and discipleship through the eternal Gospel of Jesus. The Good News that Jesus offers frees us to give that to God willingly and lovingly.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 3:19–28

Fill-in answers: Paul said clearly that by works of the law no human being will be justified in God's sight.

God's own answer to this human problem is a righteousness of God that is "through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." This is truly righteousness apart from Law, for when our being declared righteous by God is His gift through faith in Christ, then our observing laws or not observing laws doesn't even come into consideration.

205. Paul showed that this new answer from God is universally needed because "There is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." He stated that it is also universally applicable that they "are justified freely by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The motivation behind the righteousness of God that is given apart from the Law is God's grace, His undeserved love. It is not a quality in the recipients that prompted God's grace in Christ; it was the gracious quality of His own nature as God. The Old Testament consistently shows God to be the initiator of the covenant, a covenant of grace. The grace of God, of course, is to be responded to in obedient faith. The prophets took Israel to task for their faithless, perfunctory performance of religious ritual. The apostles, too, remind us that we should not receive the grace of God in vain either by trusting partly in our merit or by abusing our freedom through willful sin. God effectuated righteousness of God apart from the Law "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The death of Christ, who bore our sins, fulfilled the Law's demands and opened wide the way of mercy and grace between God and sinners.

206. The result of redemption through Christ's blood is that all human boasting is excluded. The law (principle) of works that excludes boasting is found in the fact that the Law calls for obedience. Its demands are not satisfied by an agreement that what the Law sets forth is basically good (see Galatians 3:12). The Moral Law is indeed God's instruction (that's what *Torah* means) for right living, but its first effect is always to make us sinners conscious of our sin. A compliance rate of 75 percent obedience to the Law by "good people" does not qualify anyone for eternal life any more than 25 percent or 10 percent or 5 percent compliance by "bad people" does. Since the gift of God's grace in Christ is the only way to salvation and it is offered to "good" and to "bad" alike, then those who are the recipients of this gift have absolutely no basis for boasting about it.

Paul's Letter to the Romans formulates the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ more fully than any other New Testament book. Luther said, "This Epistle is truly the chief part of the New Testament and is the purest Gospel."

Lesson 14

All Saints' Day

Almighty and everlasting God, You knit together Your faithful people of all times and places into one holy communion, the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Grant us so to follow Your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that, together with them, we may come to the unspeakable joys You have prepared for those who love You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 5:1–12

207. Those who are sincerely poor in spirit and turn in humble faith to Jesus for His gifts receive nothing less than the kingdom of God—His gracious rule in their hearts and lives, an eternal rule with eternal blessings. But for Him to come and rule us, we must be led by the Spirit fully to acknowledge our own emptiness before Him. When He graciously fills us and rules us, we know we are truly saved by grace alone, the ultimate basis of assurance.

208. Those who mourn over sin, especially their own, are comforted by Jesus' gift of forgiveness, with all this means for our daily lives and for the gift of eternal life. With Jesus beside us to encourage and strengthen us, we can also endure sufferings, knowing that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). Nothing will be able to separate us from Him and His love (see Romans 8:28–39).

209. Those who are not pushy and do not grab just for themselves but trust God's guidance and blessing of their efforts will find that He knows how to care for His own. This beatitude encourages us to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," trusting that "all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). The promise is not overflowing wealth—though God can provide that, too, if it is His will—but with daily bread, the basic needs of life. That is what Jesus taught us to pray for, and Paul said, "If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content" (1 Timothy 6:8). The needy of the world, some of them fellow Christians, challenge us to become God's hand to provide them with food, clothing, and shelter and to carry out programs by which they will again be able to provide for themselves. Meekness is not weakness but is willingly looking beyond ourselves to see God's hand supplying our needs—also so we can be His instrument to help others.

210. We receive full righteousness before God through faith in Christ. That gift does not come to us piecemeal but is an ongoing gift to be received each day anew in faith and to be acknowledged with thanksgiving to the Giver. When we see how far we are from the ideal of discipleship that Jesus describes, it should make us all the more hungry and thirsty for His *continually* setting things right with us, filling us with His gift of righteousness.

211. God's "filling station" is the Word and the Sacraments. They are the Means of Grace that bring the gracious power of the Holy Spirit into our lives. We should never travel far without stopping to fill up.

212. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” has to remind us of “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” This is the healing dynamic that Jesus has brought into our lives. When we let God’s forgiving love flow through us to others, we find that the living water He supplies always remains fresh and supportive of the abundant life He came to win for us. Being unmerciful or unforgiving toward others indicates that a person thinks he can go through life without needing God’s mercy and forgiveness himself. It is when we see our own need that we become understanding and responsive to the need of others.

213. Pure hearts come only from Him whose pure heart led Him to love us and give Himself for us “while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8). Purity of heart is openness, single-mindedness, and integrity as we seek to do God’s will in serving others. The blessing of the pure in heart is that they will see God. That will be fully true in our life with Him in the eternal kingdom. In our present life, we see Him by faith and in the day-to-day experience of His presence and His interaction with us in our Christians lives (see 1 Corinthians 13:12–13).

214. Those who work for true peace between people and God and between people and people will be called “sons [and daughters] of God” because true peace is God’s will and purpose for humanity—it’s why He sent the Prince of Peace to be our Brother. There are times when peace with another person is beyond our achieving, when someone insists on being antagonistic. All we can do is consciously forgive that person in Jesus’ name, ask Jesus to forgive our own contributions to the impasse, and continue to be open to possibilities. Peacemakers are not to seek a peace at all costs. There are values in terms of Christian doctrine and morality that we are not to surrender just for the sake of peace—for example, bringing a clear witness to Jesus as the one way to the Father in the face of the world’s religious syncretism, rejecting the murder of the unborn in a society that legalizes abortion, and refusing to be pressed into participating in morally questionable activities just to follow the crowd.

Fill-in answers: Suffering for Christ leads Christians to rejoice and be glad because it is evidence of our identification with Christ. Ask yourself, “If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

The antithesis game may produce something like this: Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” but our world says, “Blessed are those with very high self-esteem.” Other opposites include mourn/self-fulfilled; meek/powerful; hunger and thirst after righteousness/are uninhibited and unrestrained; merciful/uninvolved; pure in heart/manipulators; peacemakers/movers and shakers; and persecuted/those who do what is expedient to avoid difficulties.

The First Lesson: Revelation 7:2–17

215. The great multitude in white robes are people from every nation, tribe, people, and language who have believed Jesus and have found eternal life in Him. They wear white robes because every soil and stain of their sin has been washed away in the blood of the Lamb. Blood itself is one of the most difficult stains to remove from cloth, but the blood of Jesus is a cleansing agent, cleansing us from all our sin. Palm branches symbolized victory and kingship—thus their use on Palm Sunday for what the people thought was a triumphant king coming to claim an earthly throne. The heavenly vision portrays the final culmination of their use in praise to God and the Lamb on the throne. “A great multitude that no one could number” says that the atoning work of the Lamb is effective for all of humanity and that millions have been its beneficiaries through faith. You and I may, by God’s grace, see ourselves included in the multitude.

216. They offer their praise to “God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” The focus of their praise is the salvation offered by God through the Lamb. At the multitude’s song of praise, all the angels and the elders and the four living creatures state their “Amen!” and join them in praising God.

217. The multitude in the vision “are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple” (specifically, the *naos*, the Holy Place in the temple). We are not given details about the life of service we will live in heaven, but this vision is more than a suggestion that life in heaven is one long worship service. It says that the throne of God and His temple, His evident presence with us, will be intrinsic to and pervade every aspect of the life of service that will happily occupy us in the new heaven and new earth. The rest of the paragraph and chapters 21–22 of Revelation underscore this.

218. Blessings promised in terms of negatives are “they shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. . . . And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

219. The great positive is expressed in these words: “The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water.” For people who lived and traveled on foot in a hot, dry climate, there could be no more appropriate pictures. Point out the striking wordplay in describing the Lamb as the one who will be the Shepherd.

The Epistle for the Day: 1 John 3:1–3

220. Christians may be recognized by the world in general because of humanitarian service—as Mother Teresa of Calcutta is honored by Christian and non-Christian alike. They may also be honored for their secular achievements in politics or business or science or the arts. But for Christians to be honored because we are born again as children of God through faith in Jesus is out of the question. The gift of rebirth in the power of the Holy Spirit is meaningless to those who have not themselves received the gift and its assurances. The world looks at outward actions; it doesn’t give credence to the inner beliefs of Christians as the basis of their actions. Witness the interview of a Christian athlete or other celebrity who credits the blessing of the Lord Jesus for his or her achievements. The interviewer usually doesn’t know how to handle this, and the network is eager to get on to something else. The world sees the Christian faith as just one of many ways by which people aim at becoming “good people.” It stumbles over testimony about being reborn to be “a new person” through faith in the one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

221. Charismatic Christians sometimes put down those who do not speak in tongues. Individuals in a congregation may feel they are out on the fringe of congregational life because the regulars and leaders are a clique concerned largely with themselves. A congregation led by an influential pastor may one-up other congregations that are not growing as rapidly or don’t have as varied a program of activities or services. Think of other possibilities.

Fill-in answers: John wrote, “What we will be has not yet appeared.” His words encourage us to recognize that for now it is sufficient to know that “we are God’s children now.”

222. We shall be like Jesus—with glorified bodies like His (Philippians 3:20–21), in full awareness of God’s presence with us (Revelation 21:1–4), in our “reigning” in glory with Him (2 Timothy 2:11–13), and in having God at the center of every aspect of our lives (Revelation 7:13–17).

223. The hope of eternal life that we have in Christ encourages us to begin living an other-worldly life, different from the general society around us. (In Bible terms, “holy” or “pure” means “different from” or “separated from.”) Verse 5 adds the motivational factor of always remembering that Jesus came to take away our sins. We love because He loved first.

Lesson 15

Proper 26

O Lord, stir up the hearts of Your faithful people to welcome and joyfully receive Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, that He may find in us a fit dwelling place; who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 19:1–10

224. Jesus' surprise for Zacchaeus was His stopping under the tree that Zacchaeus had climbed, looking him in the eye, calling him by name, and inviting Himself to Zacchaeus's house. It was as if Jesus was looking for Zacchaeus as He was walking through Jericho—which, of course, He was! He surprised the crowd by publicly stating His readiness to stay in the house of one who was shunned by all as a "sinner."

225. That Jesus surprised Zacchaeus by initiating this personal contact with him must have impressed Zacchaeus, while at the same time it dismayed the crowd. We're told Zacchaeus received Him joyfully. There evidently was more going on in his heart than just curiosity about Jesus. There was some hunger inside him for what he was missing in his self-centered way of life. His isolation from God's people had, perhaps, made him aware of his isolation from God. Jesus' personal interest and concern made it possible for Zacchaeus to pursue what was haunting him and to be open to accept it when he found it. We don't know about any conversation that preceded Zacchaeus's response, but you can imagine that Jesus probed into Zacchaeus's feelings about himself, his consciousness of the missing ingredient in his life, and what it was that he was hoping for and looking for—and Jesus assured him that his covenant Lord was ready to have him return to Him.

226. Zacchaeus saw that his materialistic ways, amassing wealth selfishly and even cheating people in order to gain more for himself, were clear evidence that he had separated himself from God. His turning to God meant he had to deal with what had taken over the place in his life that God demands, so he acted to give away half of his fortune to help the poor and to set matters right with those he cheated.

227. Zacchaeus became healthy in his relationship with God, turning from things to the higher values of life. He became healthy in himself, having dealt with the faulty direction of his life and having assumed a more beneficial one. He became healthy in his relationship with other people, aiming at what he could do for them instead of at what he could get from them.

228. Jesus' "he also is a son of Abraham" emphasized that Zacchaeus had returned to the family of faith. Zacchaeus had always been a son of Abraham physically; now he was a son of Abraham spiritually as well.

Fill-in answers: Jesus' mission is "to seek and to save the lost." Theologians refer to Jesus' being the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all as "objective justification." It has been accomplished, and it is true no matter how you feel about it. When you have been led to believe and have personally appropriated His gift of salvation, "subjective justification" has taken place. You who

were lost, an enemy of God by nature, have been found and have become His loved and loving child. Jesus interacts with us through the Good News of salvation in His name as it comes to us through Word and Sacrament and through the testimony and instruction of others. When we are found by Jesus, we are assigned the mission of representing Him, so He can seek and find others through us.

229. There is a coincidence of circumstances here: Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem to bring His ministry to its culmination; He had taken the “round-about” route east of the Jordan River; He “happened” to be passing through Jericho at that time. Zacchaeus had heard stories from some who had talked to Jesus, possibly other tax collectors. Their stories about Jesus’ surprising acceptance of sinners stirred in Zacchaeus a yearning he didn’t understand. When he happened to learn that Jesus was passing through Jericho, the yearning led him to go to that road and climb a tree to see Him. Someone has said that in God’s economy of things there are no coincidences—only God-incidences. You will encourage your group to cite examples of God arranging circumstances to touch their lives by being ready to point to one yourself.

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 1:10–18

230. The rulers of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah were the leaders and the people of Jerusalem. Isaiah’s identifying them with the cities God destroyed because of their wickedness was a dramatic way of getting their attention and emphasizing their need to repent.

231. Deal with all of the sections of this question as a whole. They combined to let the leaders and people of Jerusalem know just how serious their situation was. They were still carrying out the formalities of temple worship, and they thought that would be enough to assure God’s favor toward them, but they were not really allowing the Lord and His will for them be a part of their whole lives. In effect, they were trying to “buy God off” by their perfunctory worship, and He was telling them that this would never work. It won’t work for us either.

232. The context of what they needed to do to make themselves clean indicates that injustice and oppression of the poor were rampant in Jerusalem and Judah. Socially, they treated one another without compassion and in sinful selfishness. The remedy is to “wash yourselves” through sincere repentance and to “cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.” The New Testament places the same moral requirements on us (see Matthew 7:21–27; 1 John 3:16–18; 4:19–21).

233. When people devise a religion based on their reason, they come up with a religion that is works-righteous—people doing the right religious things and being morally upright in order to be right with God. That, of course, never works, for as Paul said, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The Lord was offering His sinful people what is always unreasonable—His mercy and grace and forgiving love toward sinners. It is by this that He was calling them back from their willful ways to live in relationship with Him. The Good News of Jesus Christ is foolish to man’s reason, but it is the power of God and the wisdom of God to those who believe—as it calls them to and empowers a living relationship with God based entirely on His grace. In the final analysis, it is this very quality, its unreasonableness, that provides philosophical evidence that the Good News of Jesus is God’s own truth! (See 1 Corinthians 1:18–25.)

234. Isaiah’s words call on us to repent of our sins of not loving God with our whole heart and not loving our neighbors as ourselves. They especially call us away from thinking that perfunctory worship is all that is required, so that we will instead carry our Lord and His Holy Spirit with us into our everyday lives and learn to practice Christian love and promote the mission of the Gospel to which He has called us.

235. The Holy Gospel tells of the complete turnaround made by Zacchaeus with his new attitude toward life. This lesson calls for the same.

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Thessalonians 1:1–12

236. The Thessalonian Christians were not being turned off by their experience of suffering. Instead, they were turning more firmly in faith and love to the Lord—while their persecutors were filling up God’s cup of wrath against them with their behavior. They were not, of course, being counted worthy of the Kingdom because of their suffering; rather, by their patience and perseverance in suffering, they were giving evidence that they had not received the grace of Christ in vain. “Worthy,” *axios*, had the meaning of “equal to.” Their patience and perseverance was “equal to” their Lord’s reaction to suffering. They were worthy representatives of the kingdom of God.

237. The fate of those who refuse to know God and obey the Gospel of the Lord Jesus will be this: “They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might.” This is one of the most striking indications of what hell will be: the continuing destruction that essentially is continuing awareness of one’s eternal exclusion from life with God. When the Lord comes, He is “to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.” The focus will be on Jesus, His grace and His glory. Our joy and wonder at life with Him, which fills us at times even now, will be fully and continually experienced and joyfully expressed.

238. As Paul prayed that God would make them worthy of His calling and would fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power, his major concern was that “the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you.” That had been the focus of Paul’s life throughout his apostleship, so he wanted it also to be the result of his work among the Thessalonian Christians. The word “worthy” is *axios*, which has the sense of being “of the same weight” or “of the same value.” Paul wanted his friends in Thessalonica to measure up to God’s goal for them in calling them to Christ.

Lesson 16

Proper 27

Living God, Your almighty power is made known chiefly in showing mercy and pity. Grant us the fullness of Your grace to lay hold of Your promises and live forever in Your presence; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 20:27–40

239. Jesus showed the Sadducees that they had been the absurd ones in arguing against the resurrection of the dead with their foolish story about the levirate marriages. He said marriage itself is not applicable to life in heaven. Marrying and giving in marriage will not be part of the eternal dimension of heaven, so their story was not relevant.

240. The three passages cited regarding God's purposes in marriage identify (1) companionship in all its dimensions; (2) the blessing of children, procreation of the race; and (3) safeguarding of sexual purity and faithfulness by providing a setting for proper sexual expression. The purposes identified are clearly temporal, providing blessings for earthly life. In heaven our fellowship with all and with the Lord will be complete. The intimacy of marriage will not be needed; in heaven procreation will not be needed. In heaven we will be removed from sin, so also the temptation to sexual immorality will be absent.

241. We will be equal to angels in our holiness and in the nonsexual love that will be displayed for one another. We will be different from angels because they are spirit beings, while we will continue to be human beings, with glorified bodies fit for life in the new heaven and earth.

242. That God is the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob assures us that in His view of them, which takes their resurrection from the dead into account, they were "the living." Jesus said, "All live to Him." He is the source of life. In this assurance, we send our loved ones on ahead of us, confident they are safe in God's care and will rise to eternal life on the Last Day. Jesus' words encourage us to live with an eye to eternal life in all our doings. We, too, shall live even though we die and our lifeless bodies return to the ground. Our bodies are His good creation, just as our spirits are, and have been redeemed for transformation into bodies that will be just right for the life to come.

The Old Testament Lesson: Exodus 3:1–15

243. The burning bush attracted Moses' attention first because it was ablaze with fire and then because it was not being consumed by the fire. Moses was to remove his sandals because God's presence made the location holy. Moses' sandals, which had walked through everything along the way, were not suitable. Only Moses himself, his feet bare, was to stand in God's presence. This

concept of being barefoot in the presence of God carried over into the tabernacle and the temple, where the priests were barefoot as they carried out their service.

244. God's identifying Himself as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" identified Him as the one who had established His covenant of grace and blessing with Israel. All the faith and hope of the Israelite people was focused in that moment. Moses reacted to God's speaking to him from the fire by covering his face because sinful people must always fear to look on the holy God—until we see His glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ (see 2 Corinthians 4:6).

245. When God outlined what He had in mind for Moses, Moses said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" Later he added other excuses—a natural reaction when confronted with a mission that is beyond one's strength and can be accomplished only in the strength of the Lord. However, God gave Moses the miraculous signs that would demonstrate to his people and to Pharaoh that God was with him. At this point, however, the sign given by God was this: Moses would lead the people out of Egypt and come back to "serve God on this mountain." It required Moses to exercise his faith and to trust that it would come to pass as God promised.

Fill-in answers: The paragraph about "Yahweh," the substitution of "the LORD" for "Yahweh" in reading the Scriptures, and its ultimate mispronunciation as "Jehovah" in English leads to an obvious conclusion. If God's name emphasizes His being, who He is, then our worship as we stand before Him must be not just a matter of what we say but of who and what we are. Honoring God's name is not satisfied by any "mechanical" avoidance of saying His name.

246. Yahweh is still one of God's significant names. We value and use it (even when we mispronounce it "Jehovah") because it reminds us that God is indeed the ground of all being. More than that, He is the God who established His covenant with Israel and fulfilled the covenant in Jesus Christ. Since our brother Jesus was Yahweh in action, the true revealer of God, His name, which means "Savior," has become "the name that is above every name" (Philippians 2:9). "Jesus" is the name that lets us know God in a way that assures us of life with Him forever. Jesus, the Christ, is also at the center of the name of God that Jesus used in commanding Christian Baptism: "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." It proclaims to us that God is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. He's the one Savior *from* sin, death, and hell, *for* life eternal.

247. This Old Testament Lesson ties in with today's Holy Gospel in that Jesus referred to the experience at the burning bush—Moses' hearing God identify Himself as "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Thessalonians 2:1–8, 13–17

248. A historical judgment is made on the basis of statements in the Bible that prophesy events that will come in human history but do not specifically identify the who, when, and where of such events. We are left with the task of analyzing the statements and what they describe and making a judgment about who or what fits the picture in the course of history. Scriptural truth, on the other hand, is statements of the Bible that need no such analysis and interpretation but speak directly to the mind and heart with a clear message. They may describe historical events in specific terms, or they may be the dynamic Word of God that convicts us of our sin and leads us to our Savior. In faith, they are readily understood. The conclusion that the papacy is the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist, is a historical judgment. Lutherans may agree with this judgment, or they may come up with other views. While many Lutheran theologians make a strong case for the judgment of the Lutheran Confessions, we are not bound to such historical judgments. However, we are to diligently study the Scriptures and apply them to the world around us prayerfully and with all the intellectual gifts and rigor God has given to us.

249. The temple was a complex of walls, porches, inner courtyards, and a building in the center that housed the Holy Place, where the priests offered daily sacrifices and prayers, and the Most Holy Place, where the ark originally was kept and that even without the ark was seen as the dwelling place of the Lord God. In Greek terms, the entire temple complex was the *hieros*; the building was the *naos*, the sanctuary. When Paul called the Church “the temple of God,” he always purposefully used *naos*, as he does here. God does not *sit* in, but *dwells* in His temple, the Body of Christ, the Church.

250. Jesus-plus teachings include these: The doctrine of purgatory—requires suffering for sins to make Christians ready for heaven. Veneration of saints—others benefit from their “treasury of merit” and are thus relieved from some suffering in purgatory. Papal indulgences—give release from the penalty for sins. Transubstantiation—the priest’s consecration changes the substance of bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Christ, which led to it being seen as an “unbloody sacrifice” offered by the priest for the people, even for people not present at the Mass or for people suffering in purgatory. Exaltation of Mary—in 1854, the immaculate conception of Mary became a doctrine by papal decree, that she was born without sin in spite of Mary’s own disagreement in her Magnificat, where she “rejoices in God, *my Savior*” (Luke 1:46–47, emphasis added). In 1950, the assumption of Mary was decreed—that she did not die but was taken bodily to be the Queen of heaven. Of greatest concern is the present movement to declare Mary to have been Co-redemptor with Christ. This would be the ultimate insertion of human effort and accomplishment into the process of salvation, the ultimate frustration of the Gospel. It would be the ultimate revealing of “the lawless one,” the papacy, going beyond error to heresy. Papal infallibility—in 1870, this decree claimed infallibility for the papacy when the pope speaks *ex cathedra*, from his official position as the “Vicar of Christ,” sitting as divine in the *naos* of God. (When a man is exalted to divine authority, he inevitably controls people by declaring teachings that are to be believed and obeyed by the Church’s faithful but which come from human theological thought and promote a “Jesus-plus” approach to God. All of the above came in that way and are still the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.)

251. Paul points to two reactions of Jesus to the man of lawlessness and his humanistic teachings: (1) The Lord will destroy him with the breath of His mouth—the double-edged sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Revelation 1:15). When the Reformation led the Church back to *sola Scriptura*, the breath of Jesus’ mouth destroyed the false teaching of Jesus-plus for many. (2) At the appearance of His coming, Jesus will bring to nothing the man of lawlessness and his misleading authority. Never again will God’s faithful chosen ones be subject to sin or threatened by false teachings about their salvation.

252. The three steps: (1) “God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved.” (2) “He called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (3) “Stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us,” and “Comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.” The first step emphasizes the wonder of our salvation by grace through God’s own choosing of us (see Ephesians 1:3–7). The second stresses the eternal benefits that are ours through God’s gracious call to faith in Christ (see 1 Peter 1:3–5). The third points to the responsibilities of Christian discipleship as we hold to the teachings and as Christ lives in us and reaches out through us in deed and word (see Ephesians 2:10). “Firstfruits” always presupposes additional fruits. This wording emphasizes that we are chosen and called also so we can reach out for Christ to others.

253. The instrumentalities used by God to achieve His salvation goals in us are “through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” and “through our gospel” and “the traditions that you were taught by us.” All of these stress the importance of the Word of God, the truth of the Gospel of Jesus, and the work of those who proclaim and teach the Gospel in the lives of Christians. The Holy Spirit works faith and life in us through the Word (see Romans 10:14–17; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). Because of this, the Word and the Sacraments are called the Means of Grace. If we get away

from these means, whether through neglect or rejection, we effectively block the work of the Spirit in our lives. To continue to be healthy as Christians, we need to nourish our faith and life with the written Word, the spoken Word, and the visible Word (the Sacrament) regularly in the community of believers.

Lesson 17

Proper 28

O Lord, almighty and ever-living God, You have given exceedingly great and precious promises to those who trust in You. Rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that we may live and abide forever in Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 21:5–36

254. Wars and revolutions and fighting between nations are signs that humanity will never solve its own problems and produce the peaceful situation here in the world that many hope for. Sinful human nature will not allow this. We are not to put our hope just in what we may do in this area ourselves—whether through agencies such as the United Nations or whatever. While we surely must work for political peace, we do so knowing that successes are always temporary and that continuing peace is to be found only in the coming kingdom of our Lord. Earthquakes, famines, and pestilence show us that nature itself is out of sync and does not provide us with a secure, lasting home. We are temporary, and the Bible reminds us that the world around us is also temporary.

255. Faithfully representing Jesus and proclaiming His Word will call forth the same kind of responses from the world that Jesus Himself experienced. The Gospel is not only an invitation to escape from sin and its consequences, but it also makes people deal with their own problem of sin and need in ways that force them to recognize that they won't really be solving the problem of sin for themselves. Paul called its proclamation "a fragrance from life to life" for those who believe but "a fragrance from death to death" for those who reject Christ. When His faithful representatives are threatened, they are presented with an ideal time in which to witness to their faith in confident and compelling ways. Jesus allows such threatening experiences to come to His own to give them significant opportunities to speak clearly to those who are doing the threatening.

256. The apostles were not unfamiliar with the sacred Scriptures. They had attended synagogue schools as youngsters, where they committed large sections to memory. They continued to hear the Scriptures read and explained each Sabbath. Their hearts were storehouses of God's Word. The Lord will provide the fitting words also to our minds when we are placed into difficulty by our faithfulness to the Gospel—and He will do so out of the treasure of His Word that we store up in our hearts. This encourages all of us not only to drink the milk of the Gospel but also to chew on some of the meat that challenges us regarding our discipleship. Jesus said those who stand firm as His witnesses will save themselves, because they will be standing firm in their Savior.

257. We are accustomed to seeing, hearing about, and experiencing the natural calamities Jesus points to as signs of His coming. But the proclamation that "there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken" points to cosmic events that people have never seen before. They will mark the end of this creation and the beginning of "the new heavens and the new earth" (Isaiah 66:22).

258. Our reaction to signs that Jesus is coming should be to “straighten up and raise our heads, because [our] redemption is drawing near.”

259. The leafing out of a fig tree or of any tree tells us that summer is coming. Trees, then, are to be continual reminders of the signs of the end and that Jesus is coming soon.

260. Since “that day” will spring suddenly and decisively “like a trap,” we Christians are to “watch [ourselves], lest [our] hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life” and that day’s coming catches us. Instead, we are to “stay awake at all times, praying that [we] may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

The Old Testament Lesson: Malachi 4:1–6

Fill-in answers: In this brief pericope, the prophet proclaims that “the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze.”

261. The destruction will be so complete that “it will leave them neither root nor branch.” They will in no way be able to revive and return to their wicked ways. Only those who fear (revere) the name of the Lord of hosts will escape the Lord’s devastating judgment.

262. Christ is the “sun of righteousness” from heaven, the giver of life to all who receive Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord. He heals us of the sickness and wounds of sin as His “wings,” the sun rays of His Gospel, shine upon those who are His own with the life-giving warmth of His love.

263. Turning the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers is a way of showing the effect of “Elijah’s” ministry—leading people to repentance and faith and demonstrating that in their relationship with one another.

264. The judgment of the arrogant and evildoer matches the Gospel’s warning of the destruction of Jerusalem. The promise of righteousness and healing for those who revere the Lord’s name agrees with the Gospel’s assurance that those who stand firm will be saved.

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Thessalonians 3:1–13

265. Paul’s words encourage us to pray for our spiritual leaders in the congregation, and they build in us confidence that the Lord will establish also us in faith, guard us against the evil one, and lead us to encourage one another.

266. Paul’s commands were given “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

267. Paul’s “keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness” directed the Thessalonian congregation to withhold Christian fellowship from idlers, to help them realize that their behavior was inconsistent with Christian faith and life. They surely were not to go on feeding them. It was shunning, not excommunication, but it was a strong call to repentance. Paul’s custom was to work at his trade of tent- and sail-making instead of having those to whom he brought the Gospel provide for his needs as an example to those whom he led to Christ. He agreed with the Lord’s principle that “those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel,” but he exempted himself so that he would be able to bring the Gospel to people in the Greek world free from any idea of their having to pay for, or somehow earn, salvation, which is always by grace through faith in Christ.

268. Compounding the problem of their depending on others for their food was the fact that the idlers had become busybodies. They spent their days idly chattering, gossiping, and arguing their views of the Lord’s return. They had become a nuisance and an embarrassment. Our “busy” and “busybodies” is the same play on words that appears in the Greek text: *ergazomenous* means

“working” and *periergazomenous* is “working around”—with the suggestion of their going from place to place with their arguing and gossip to gain some personal advantage.

269. Paul saw their idle gossiping as a serious problem in their discipleship. He commanded and urged them “in the Lord Jesus Christ” to get back to work.

270. Comparing Paul’s words here with those in Ephesians shows that while Paul was reprimanding willful idleness and forbidding the Christians to feed such idlers, he still encouraged Christian charity. Christians are to work conscientiously not only to support ourselves and our families but also so we will be able to assist the needy.

271. Your group may comment about today’s jobless and those for whom welfare has continued from generation to generation. Almost everyone will agree that government programs should aim at training the jobless for productive work and should have some built-in incentives to people to get on their own feet. Implementing such concerns as part of a system without making the system unsympathetic to real need is very difficult. Through political action, we as Christian citizens can encourage efforts to improve and refine government programs. We need to make a difference personally, too, by making support of Christian social ministry agencies such as Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Social Services a part of our own stewardship and a part of our congregations’ budgets—as well as by offering help to the needy with whom we come into personal contact. Adding 1 percent of our income to the percentage we set aside for the Lord’s work and devoting that percent to such social ministry will allow us to approach “doing good” in an organized manner and will provide more substantial amounts to help meet today’s challenges.

Lesson 18

Proper 29

Lord Jesus Christ, You reign among us by the preaching of Your cross. Forgive Your people their offenses that we, being governed by Your bountiful goodness, may enter at last into Your eternal paradise; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 23:27–43

272. The Jewish rulers would not believe in Jesus because of their stubborn spiritual blindness. Though they had acknowledged among themselves that He was a man of unique qualities, because He was not one of them, they persistently rejected Him as God's Chosen One, the Christ. They continually asked Him for miraculous signs to prove who He was but refused to accept all the signs Jesus was giving them through His ministry. If people do not want to believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, even God Himself cannot (and will not) force them to do so. The Jewish leaders plotted to get rid of Jesus in order to preserve the status quo, in which they enjoyed their positions of wealth and power. They rationalized the situation by telling themselves they were only trying to save the nation from destructive Roman action, but they surely had ulterior motives (see John 11:45–53).

273. The mob action and threat of a riot orchestrated by the Jewish rulers had put Pilate on the spot and forced him to bend to their will and order the crucifixion of one he knew was innocent. When they came with their request about the written notice on the cross, however, Pilate saw it as a chance to regain some “face” by insisting on the wording that irritated them. Much of this was a matter of political gamesmanship. But it's not hard to see God having a hand in all of this to proclaim the truth about His Son.

274. Jesus' words of assurance to the dying thief tell us that He is truly Christ the King. He preceded His statement with *amen*, “truly,” making it a pronouncement of special significance, and His “I tell you” shows that He spoke it in His own kingly authority. “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” emphasizes that the kingdom of Christ the King is not of this world. It is not dependent on earthly circumstances but is established when people are brought to faith in Him and when He rules their hearts and lives in His kingly grace and love. Our salvation is entirely a gift of grace. No conditions were placed on the dying criminal. We, too, may hear the same assurance from Jesus, not on the basis of who we are or what we have done, but on the basis of who He is and what He has done for us in His redeeming life and death and resurrection.

The Old Testament Lesson: Malachi 3:13–18

Malachi's use of a question, asked defensively by the ones to whom a statement has been made, is a literary form that really makes you take notice of the specificity of the concern in the explanatory response to the question. It is similar to the use of a rhetorical question that makes the listener search

his heart to see whether it applies to him. The dialogue format makes the reader a participant and gets the message across more pointedly.

275. The Lord answered His people's question by accusing them of saying, "It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping His charge or of walking like mourners before the LORD of hosts?"

276. Such a complaint reveals a lack of joy in worship and service of the Lord, a result of not appreciating the grace of God but carrying out religious duties in a slavish manner in order to get rewards from God. Still today, worship that is offered out of a begrudged sense of obligation is not joyous and misses the real point, which is celebration of God's gracious gifts to us in Christ and the living relationship we enjoy with Him through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

277. As those who revered the Lord talked with one another, they surely praised the Lord for His goodness and brought one another encouragement to be faithful to the covenant—just as they trusted the Lord would be. We are involved in a similar conversation today when we worship together and speak the good Word of God to one another, when we meet together to carry out the congregation's business, when we witness the Good News to others, or when we just testify to one another about the goodness of the Lord in our everyday lives.

278. In the meantime, we can follow the example of the psalmist and measure our blessings in terms of the Lord's loving presence with us day by day and find our true joy not in having many things or enjoying pleasant circumstances but in life with Him. And if He blesses us with many things and pleasant circumstances, we can receive them thankfully as His gifts to us—and conscientiously use them to serve the purposes of His kingdom.

279. Through this Old Testament Lesson, the Lord is saying to us, "Continue to trust My love and My will for your life in everything. Your future is assured."

280. In the Holy Gospel, we see God's Son, our Savior, going to the cross for us as our Redeemer. We have every reason to cling faithfully to God's promises, rejoice in Him, and count on eternal blessings, as this Old Testament Lesson encourages us to do.

The Epistle for the Day: Colossians 1:13–20

Fill-in answers: Our rescue from the domain of darkness to life in the kingdom of the Son is completely a gift of grace. "In whom we have redemption"—the Greek *apolutrōsis* means "paying the ransom to free a captive or a slave." We are redeemed, paid for in full, by Christ's suffering the consequences of our sins once for all. As a result, we may be assured that we enjoy forgiveness of sins.

281. Paul made it clear that the Son, the image of the invisible God, is the Creator of all creation and is in no way part of the creation Himself. Paul clearly stated here that this eternal Son is the Creator of "all things . . . in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities." Paul pretty well wraps it up: Everything was created *by* Him, and being the Preeminent One, everything was created *for* Him. He is God, distinct from creation, the source of all creation, and the purpose of all creation.

282. The Nicene Creed says of Jesus Christ that He is "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father *before all worlds*, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, *begotten, not made*, being of *one substance with the Father, by whom* [the Son, Jesus] *all things were made*; who for us men and for our salvation *came down from heaven and was incarnate* by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and *was made man*; and *was crucified also for us* under Pontius Pilate. He *suffered* and *was buried*. And the third day He *rose again*."

283. Paul says that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is the Head of the Church and that the Church is the Body of Christ. This word-picture emphasizes Christ as the ruler, the authority, the decision maker, and the One who gives life force and impetus to the Church so that the Church can

fulfill His purposes in the world. It also emphasizes that we are the Body of Christ only as we stay in relation to Him who is the Head. He acts and carries out His will through us and through all who are His Body in the world.

284. The Son is God from eternity, of one essential being with the Father who fathered Him from eternity. But the Son humbled Himself to be a true man to carry out His saving mission on behalf of mankind. It is in His humanity that all the fullness of deity was and is pleased to dwell. This says to us that the one who is our Brother in the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, was and is truly God, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. It says to us that He, being God, was fully able to reconcile all things to Himself and make peace through His blood shed on the cross.

285. That the Son of God has made peace by the blood of His cross assures us that nothing else needs to be added—either by Him or by us—to make our redemption sure and certain (see Hebrews 9:11–13, 24–28).