

A LONGER LOOK AT THE LESSONS

Study Guide and Leader Guide

for Pericopes as Listed in *Lutheran Service Book*

Series A

Pentecost–Proper 14

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 semicontinuous 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 they 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 they 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

Day of Pentecost

The Holy Gospel: John 7:37–39

Jesus and His disciples were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths. This was the last of the three great annual festivals that attracted Jewish people from all over the world to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. The celebration hailed the completion of the harvest and lasted seven days—with an eighth day added to note the end of the period of festivals. Jewish families fashioned small shelters (booths) outside their homes and “lived” in them during the celebration, remembering their ancestors’ forty years of wanderings in the wilderness. In the temple, the feast was observed with a daily sacrifice of bullocks on the altar of burnt offering. Another daily ceremony involved a procession of priests going to the Pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher to bring water to the temple. The procession circled the altar and then the water and a pitcher of wine from the drink offering were poured into two large, perforated, flat bowls—and the water flowing out of the bowls symbolized the water that gushed out of a rock to ease the thirst of their ancestors in the desert. During the ceremony, the people sang Isaiah 12:3, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation,” and Psalm 118:25, “Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!”

It was probably in connection with this water ceremony that Jesus positioned Himself so He could be heard by the crowd and called out: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.”

1. What was the drinking that Jesus was inviting people to do? What would be the result of their drinking what Jesus was offering? When had Jesus referred to the gift of living water prior to this?

2. Why did Jesus back up His offer to the people with a reference to Scripture?

Jesus did not quote verbatim from an Old Testament passage but gave the general thrust of passages such as Isaiah 58:11 and Zechariah 14:8. Though the Spirit of God had been present and active among God’s people throughout Old Testament history, John interpreted Jesus’ words in terms of what happened later on the day we are remembering today, Pentecost.

3. How could John, in verse 39, say, “The Spirit had not been given”? What did he say had to happen before the Spirit could be given in the way he was recalling and to which he was pointing? What, then, is the essential difference between the Spirit’s activity in Old Testament times (also in the ministry of John the Baptist) and the Spirit’s activity on Pentecost and thereafter?

4. How are the rivers of living water that flow *from* Christians related to the water they *receive* when they “drink” of Jesus?

5. How does this living water flow from you to those around you?

The Old Testament Lesson: Numbers 11:24–30

The seventy elders “prophesied.” The *Concordia Self-Study Bible* explains, “The Hebrew verb here is not in the form in which it is usually found to express the mediation of a prophetic message through the Spirit. It probably means that they gave ecstatic expression to an intense religious experience” (p. 206). We are not told that Eldad and Medad opposed Moses’ call to meet at the tabernacle, though for some reason they didn’t come to the meeting. But when the Lord gave the Spirit who enabled Moses to the elders, the Spirit came also upon Eldad and Medad, who prophesied among the people in the camp.

6. What motivated Joshua’s suggestion that Moses put a stop to their prophesying? What does Moses’ response reveal about this great leader of God’s people?

7. What does this incident teach us for life in the Church today?

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

The Epistle for the Day: Acts 2:1–21

Pentecost, a Jewish harvest festival, was celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover, which was the fifteenth day of the month of Nisan. As a result, it did not occur on the same day of the week each year. In the year of the great event that we remember today, AD 30, Pentecost occurred on a Saturday, a Sabbath Day. As the Early Church began to observe Pentecost, celebrating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it was observed on the fiftieth day after Easter, counting Easter as day one. Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox—making it a variable date, but always a Sunday. Pentecost is celebrated on a Sunday seven weeks later.

“There came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.” It helps to know that both the Hebrew word *ruach* and the Greek word *pneuma* conveyed the concept of “spirit” as well as the concepts of “air” and “wind.” Jesus also used the wind as an illustration of the Spirit’s “blowing” wherever He wishes.

9. What was God’s purpose in the sound like a violent wind on Pentecost?

10. Jesus had blessed His apostles with the Holy Spirit when He commissioned them to speak for Him as His representatives on Easter Sunday in the Upper Room. What was added by the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost?

11. What looked like “divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them” in token of what was taking place. Why fire? (See Luke 3:16.)

12. Who are the “each one of them” and the “they were all” upon whom this outpouring of the Holy Spirit came? (See Acts 1:12–15; 2:1.) What does it say about this group that they were all together in one place?

The sound like wind and the tongues like fire evidently were temporary signs of what was taking place. The crowd heard the sound and gathered, but there is no indication that the tongues like fire were seen by people other than those in the house. The manifestation of the Spirit that lasted longer and that touched the crowd was the newly enabled ability of these followers of Jesus to speak in tongues. The Greek for “tongues” is *glossais* and means “languages.” The experience evidently was a happy surprise.

13. What was God’s purpose in giving the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost? How did the Pentecost experience differ from later manifestations of this gift of tongues in places like Corinth? (See 1 Corinthians 14:1–4.)

Some of the “Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven” in Jerusalem at this time were pilgrims who had come for the festival days. Others were elderly Jews who had moved to Jerusalem to live their last years near the temple after having lived their whole lives in other countries. These foreign Jews probably could handle some Aramaic and Greek, but they were surprised and pleased when they suddenly found Galilean Jews declaring the wonders of God in their mother tongues.

14. How was the crowd divided about what they were witnessing and experiencing?

Peter used the skeptics’ “They are filled with new wine” as a springboard for his message, first making it clear that “these people are not drunk.” Jews of that time carried out morning sacrifices before the first meal, a meal of bread. They did not drink wine until the evening meal, a more complete meal when also some meat might be eaten. So Peter dismissed the idea of their being drunk at 9:00 a.m. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he quoted the prophecy of Joel to explain what was happening. It was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was predicted in their sacred Scripture as part of God’s plan that “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Having gained the full attention of the crowd by quoting Joel’s prophecy to explain what was happening, Peter went on to proclaim Jesus as the Christ to his eager listeners. Sample key Christ-centered sentences in Peter’s Pentecost message: Acts 2:22–23, 32, 36, 38–39.

Lesson 2

Holy Trinity

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 28:16–20

The angel at the tomb had said, “He has risen from the dead, and behold, He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him” (v. 7). The Eleven and the others went to keep this appointment—and were given the Great Commission. It was another mountaintop experience. Most interpreters consider this the last of Jesus’ appearances and think Paul was referring to it when he wrote about Jesus’ being seen by five hundred at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6).

“They worshiped Him.” The Greek describes them doing obeisance, bowing low before Jesus.

15. “But some doubted.” Why were some still doubting, and why did Matthew include this fact here?

16. What does Jesus’ “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” say about His person? What does this say about Jesus’ work as the Savior?

“Go therefore” connects the Great Commission directly to Jesus’ position of supreme authority—a vital connection, for the emphasis is not on “go” (a participle in Greek) but on “make disciples” (an imperative verb). Literally, it says, “Having gone, disciple!” We can *go* in our own strength if we are willing, but only God can *disciple*. Though written primarily for Jewish readers, Matthew’s Gospel extends the Kingdom to all nations.

Two participles bring out the methods to be followed in discipling: ___ and ___. Though many Scriptures refer to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in various ways, this is the only place where the name is given in this formal way. It is determinative in Christian doctrine.

17. How is this peculiarly Christian name of God a capsule form of the Gospel?

Baptism brings God’s grace, so it is one of the Means of Grace given to the Church. The holy name of the Trinity conveys the saving Word, and the water personalizes its message to the one thus washed.

18. What does “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” imply about discipling and discipleship? With what promise did Jesus back up His command? How is this promise a vital part of the Great Commission?

19. How is it that twenty centuries later, we are still being challenged to go and disciple the world, baptizing and teaching?

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 1:1–2:4a

Genesis, the book of beginnings, speaks of the meaning of life as God's gift. The creation song of chapter 1 uses broad, sweeping terms to praise the Creator. Genesis is traditionally seen as one of the Five Books of Moses, the Torah. *Torah* means "law," but in the Scriptures its meaning is much broader than just "laws." It tells also of God's covenant of grace and gives instruction about life under the covenant.

20. Hebrew poetry uses repetition of key phrases. Which do you see in the creation song? How is the creation song divided into stanzas?

There is disagreement about the meaning of the word "day" in this song. Those who favor literal interpretation argue that the Hebrew *yom* means a day, a twenty-four-hour day, and point to "there was evening and there was morning" to support this view. Others look at the size and the apparent age of the universe and argue that the "day" of Genesis points poetically to an era, a period in the progression of creation toward our inhabitable earth—and they show that "day" is used with various meanings in other parts of the Bible. Really, the length of time does not seem to be the major concern. If God could create over long eons of time, He could create the universe in six twenty-four-hour days or, for that matter, in one instant. Of greater importance is seeing God working by divine fiat, creating from nothing through His Word of power, producing the desired results, and leading to His creation of mankind in His own image.

21. What was the effective instrument in God's creative activity? (See John 1:1–3; Hebrews 11:3.)

22. God said, "Let there be light," but this was before sun, moon, and stars were created. What might this "light" be?

23. How was the earth moved progressively toward a place for man's habitation?

24. What is indicated by the phrase "according to its kind"?

25. In a song that is basically repetitive, why does the wording change when it speaks about the creation of man? Why is man the key figure, next to the Creator, in the creation song?

26. What is meant by “the image of God”?

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

The Epistle for the Day: Acts 2:14a, 22–36

This is Peter’s sermon on Pentecost. In his first remarks, he addressed the scoffing skepticism of some and the wonderment of others. He explained that what they were witnessing was a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter moved then to what had produced this momentous occurrence: the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Peter began with “Men of Judea”—a formal address that emphasized the covenant and prompted them to “think covenant.”

28. What did Peter say was behind everything that had led to Jesus’ being “delivered up” to the Jewish leaders, who then arranged for His crucifixion?

29. What assurance may we find in this emphasis on God’s will and desire? What was Peter emphasizing about Jesus with his “it was not possible for Him to be held by [death]”?

30. Why did Peter quote from David’s Psalm 16 and later from David’s Psalm 110 to undergird his proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus?

Note the contrasting phrases in the quote from Psalm 16: “You will not abandon my soul to Hades” and “or let Your Holy One see corruption.” In the first, we see David’s hope for his own life beyond the grave; in the second, we have an inspired prophecy regarding God’s Holy One, the promised Messiah.

31. Why did Peter contrast David’s being dead with Jesus’ being alive? What connection did Peter make between David and Jesus, the Son of David?

32. How did pointing to Jesus' exaltation to the right hand of God and Jesus' being given the Holy Spirit by the Father to pour out on His followers—and Peter's backing it up with Scripture—add impact to Peter's message? What is the significance of Peter saying God made Jesus "both Lord and Christ"?

Lesson 3

Proper 3

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 6:24–34

“No one can serve two masters.” The Greek verb indicates a slave. A slave belongs wholly to the master who owns him. Jesus’ words make us deeply aware that we will belong to and be mastered by one or the other: God or money. They lay on us the need to be decisive about being true disciples of Jesus, eager to catch His spirit and to learn to relate all of life to the One who is His heavenly Father and ours. Franzmann says in *Follow Me*, “If a man loves things; if he commits himself to laying up treasures on earth, to the pursuit and attainment of a ‘decent standard of living’ or ‘the good life,’ he has committed his heart to that which perishes—and his heart will perish with the things that fill it. . . . When a man wholeheartedly takes things, he cannot any longer take or leave them; he is taken by them, and his eternal destiny is determined by them” (pp. 56–57).

“Therefore”—someone has said that when that word appears in the Bible we need to ask what it is there for. Therefore, because we have set ourselves to be Jesus’ disciples, to learn from Him to serve God and not money, Jesus sets before us very practical guidelines in the matter of the whole direction of our lives.

33. “Do not be anxious.” In what way does anxiety or worry about material needs contradict our commitment to trust and serve our heavenly Father as Jesus’ disciples?

34. “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” Of what is Jesus reminding us with His question?

35. In what ways are the birds and the flowers encouragement to us to stop being anxious and trust God?

Anxiety usually shortens life, but a person who is concerned about health and is very careful about good diet and exercise may indeed add “an hour” to his span of life; to what end though?

36. If just lengthening our lives here has become our focus, what may we be overlooking and missing out on?

Jesus said to His disciples, “O you of little faith.” His reprimand recognizes some trust on the part of His disciples, but it reproves them because of the narrowness of their faith.

37. We generally focus our trust in Jesus on the fact that He forgives our sins and has promised us eternal life. How may we enlarge the dimensions of our faith to apply to all of life here and now?

38. Like whom does Jesus say we are behaving if we continually worry about and run after the material things we need and desire? What antidote to anxiety does Jesus offer us as His disciples?

39. How do you reconcile Jesus' telling us "do not be anxious about tomorrow" with the good planning for the future that Christian stewardship requires?

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 49:8–16a

The second part of Isaiah brought prophetic encouragement to the exiles about the Lord's continued love and care. Isaiah 49:1–13 is seen as the second of four Servant Songs—along with 42:1–9; 50:4–11; and 52:13–53:12. In this lesson, the Servant is told that in the day of His favor and salvation, the Lord had ___ Him and ___ Him and would ___ Him and give Him as a ___ to the people.

40. What promises were given to the exiles through the covenant embodied in the Servant? When will these idyllic promises be fulfilled, and who is the Servant who will fulfill them?

Isaiah called on all creation to rejoice because "the LORD has ___ His people and will have ___ on His afflicted."

41. Zion is Jerusalem and, more specifically, the site of the temple. Why did Zion say, "The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me"?

The Lord brought reassurance to Zion in terms of a universal maxim: a mother will not forget her nursing child or fail to have compassion on the baby to whom she gave birth. The Lord made His reassurance all the stronger by acknowledging that sometimes a mother *will* forget. Our society, for example, supporting "a woman's right to choose in matters of reproduction," casually discards more than a million aborted unborn babies every year, and, as a result of this immoral attitude, it has seen also an increase in the abandonment or murder of living little ones. Sad to say, some mothers do forget. But the Lord promised His people, "Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you."

42. How did the Lord take a step further His assurance that He is permanently committed to remembering His people?

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

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 1:8–17

For seventeen Sundays, beginning today, the Epistles will be from Paul's Letter to the Romans. Luther called Romans "the chief part of the New Testament, truly the purest Gospel." Romans formulates the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ more than any other New Testament book.

As he did in many of his Epistles, Paul began by complimenting the Roman Christians that their faith was being reported all over the world. He told them that he had longed to visit them, and even had planned to do so many times. He said he wanted to impart some ___ to ___ them, so that they and he might be ___. He made it clear to them that he had been obligated by Christ to bring the Gospel to the Gentile world, but that he also wanted to preach to them, a congregation that he had not planted, a congregation that included many Jewish Christians as well as Gentile Christians. He got right to the point. He pointed out that his whole life as an apostle was dedicated to the Gospel, the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

44. Why was Paul never ashamed of the Gospel, even though he knew from experience that it was a stumbling block for Jews with their legalisms and foolishness to Greeks with their self-styled wisdom?

45. Why did Paul say this blessing was first for the Jew, then for the Gentile?

Paul stated the theme that he would develop: "In [the Gospel] the ___ of God is revealed from ___ for ___."

46. Why did Paul back up this statement of the mystery of the Gospel with Old Testament Scripture?

In theologian and professor Martin Luther's struggle for assurance regarding his own relationship with God, Romans 1:16–17 were the verses of Scripture that he said opened heaven's gates for him and led finally to his becoming the great reformer of the Church.

Lesson 4

Proper 4

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 7:15–29

Today's Holy Gospel is the concluding verses of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, a pericope that stresses the vital importance of doing the will of God as disciples of God's Son.

With His analogy of sheep and wolves, Jesus warned against ____, who are hard to detect just by outward appearance but may be recognized by their ____. Sometimes, however, "thornbushes" do hypocritically produce what appear to be "grapes," and "thistles" may produce what looks like "figs."

47. Though we cannot always judge the outward appearance of "good fruit," what test may we and must we apply to teachers of religion? (See 1 John 4:1–3.)

48. How could Jesus speak of people who prophesied, cast out demons, and did many mighty works in His name as "workers of lawlessness"?

Again and again, the Bible emphasizes that faith is not just a matter of agreeing with religious teachings, but is always an investment of self in a relationship with Jesus—and is displayed in obedience to His teachings. James' "Faith apart from works is dead" (2:26) aligns with Luther's emphasis that we are saved by faith alone, but that faith is always accompanied by love. Luther echoed St. Paul's "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6).

49. How is Jesus' illustration about the two men building their houses both a word of encouragement and a word of warning to us?

50. What was it about Jesus' teaching that amazed the crowds who heard Him?

51. In our Christian faith and discipleship, how are Jesus' person and His Word (commands) intimately related?

52. What are the two basic expectations that Jesus lays on those who believe in Him and want to follow Him? (See John 13:35; Matthew 28:18–20.)

The Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 11:18–21, 26–28

Deuteronomy means “second law.” The Israelites were at the point of entry into the Promised Land. Moses was told he would not enter with them and was concerned about preparing them for what lay ahead, encouraging their faithfulness to the Lord. His “second law” was more than just a review of the first. In his farewell address, Moses added theological application and amplification of the Law, encouraging Israel to remember it and apply it to daily life—and he promised blessings as a result. Moses recounted the history of the faithless generation who had died in the wilderness, and said, “Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?” (10:12–13).

53. What was Moses encouraging with “Lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul”? In a day when we have books and computer programs available to help us remember and recall things, of what value is committing them to memory?

54. Why were hands and foreheads singled out in his “bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes”?

The Jews later took these words literally and used phylacteries as aids in their prayer life. Phylacteries are leather or metal boxes containing scrolls of Scripture—including their *Shema*, or creed (6:4–5)—which they strapped to the left arm and the forehead for morning and evening prayer.

55. Why did Moses stress “teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise”? What significance was there in “write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates”?

This, too, was followed literally in later years. A Jewish household attached a *mezuzah*—a wooden case containing a scroll of Scripture—to the frame of the door of their home, and this was reverently touched by family members as they left and returned.

56. What purpose would be realized, according to Moses, if Israel were to follow his recommendations and make the Word a constant part of their surroundings and their lifestyle?

57. In what do his suggestions find their counterparts in the lives of modern Christians and their families?

58. What was Moses emphasizing by saying, “I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse”? (Note the practical implications in 11:13–17.)

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

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 3:21–28

Paul had concluded that “by works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (v. 20).

“But now . . . ,” said Paul. God has His own answer to this dreadful human condition! His answer is “the righteousness of God . . . apart from the law.” 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 comes through ___ for all who ___.

60. 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* 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, [God] 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” (p. 1721). (See also 2 Corinthians 5:21.)

“Redemption” is related, 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.

61. 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 called it the chief part of the New Testament, 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.

62. If we are justified by faith, apart from observing the Law, where does Jesus' emphasis in today's Holy Gospel on putting His words into practice enter in?

Lesson 5

Proper 5

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:9–13

As Matthew told of his call to follow Jesus and of his ready response, he did not provide any background details. He just told the immediate story. Matthew was a tax collector. The Romans hired people from conquered nations to collect the taxes imposed on them—and generally made the arrangement lucrative for those who worked for them. Jews who worked for the Romans in this way were considered traitors to the nation and unfaithful to the covenant with the Lord. They were social outcasts and were removed from the synagogues because of their defection.

63. What does it say about Matthew that he had become a tax collector? What does it say about Jesus that He was ready to call a tax collector to join His select group of disciples? What does it say about Matthew that he was ready to forsake all to follow Jesus?

64. How has your calling to be a disciple influenced your work life?

Matthew invited “tax collectors and sinners” to his house to have contact with Jesus.

65. How may we cultivate friendships with people who are not in the Church with us in ways that will give us opportunities to introduce them to Jesus?

When the Pharisees complained about Jesus associating with this kind of people, Jesus quoted from Hosea: “I desire ____, and not ____.”

66. How could this be worded to address our world today?

67. How is Jesus’ “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” both an incisive judgment and a surprising invitation? What is necessary if a person is to respond to Jesus’ call to follow Him? (See 1 John 1:8–9.)

68. Why is it difficult for the respectable, contributing members of our society to come to personal faith in Jesus Christ?

69. How may we increase our awareness of our own sin and need so we will continually look to Jesus as our Savior? (See Romans 3:19–20; Matthew 15:19–20; Galatians 5:19–21.)

The Old Testament Lesson: Hosea 5:15–6:6

Hosea’s prophecy is the first of the Minor Prophets—so called only because of their relative brevity compared to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Hosea lived and worked in the Northern Kingdom, beginning in the time of prosperity under Jeroboam II and continuing into the years of rapid decline that led to Israel’s fall to the Assyrians. Hosea’s message was dramatized by his life circumstances.

Preceding this pericope are words of judgment against Israel, ending with statements of the Lord such as “I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah” (5:12) and “I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue” (v. 14). Against that background, we hear the Lord say, “I will return again to My place, until . . .”

70. What was the Lord’s purpose in bringing misery upon the people of Israel?

In his call to return to the Lord, the prophet wanted the people to recognize that it was the Lord’s hand that was behind the tearing and injuring they were experiencing.

71. What assurance did Hosea bring them in the midst of all this? What is the assurance of “after two days” and “on the third day”?

72. Why did the prophet speak of the Lord’s blessing if the people would acknowledge Him in terms of His coming to them “as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth”?

73. What judgment is placed on God’s people with “Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away”?

74. What disappoints the Lord most in those He has chosen to love and serve Him?

75. How does it help us when we recognize that God's hand is behind circumstances that are beyond our control, circumstances that alter and shape our lives?

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

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 4:13–25

Paul had boldly stated: “We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (3:28). Then he pointed to no less a figure than Abraham, the father of the covenant people, as the classic example of justification by faith. He quoted Old Testament Scripture: “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (4:3). The object of Abraham's faith was the Lord and His covenant promise of a land, a seed, and a blessing through him to all peoples. (See Genesis 12:1–3). Romans 4 is devoted to this argument from Scripture, pointing to Abraham: “He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised” (vv. 11–12).

In this lesson, Paul renewed the proposition that the original covenant promise to Abraham “did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.” The promise of a seed, a land, and a blessing that would encompass “all the families of the earth” (Genesis 12:3) was given before Abram took his family and went to the Promised Land—years before the “law of circumcision” was added as a sign of the covenant promise.

77. In what sense does the Law bring wrath and is thus unable to build a relationship of love between the Lawgiver and those who live under the Law?

78. What was the situation that made Abraham's faith a “hope he believed against hope” that God “gives life to the dead”?

Abraham and Sarah did, of course, waver and question, and finally even took matters into their own hands. (See Genesis 16:1–4, 15–16.) But God continually encouraged and strengthened Abraham's faith in the covenant promise. (See Genesis 15:1–6; 17:15–22.) Paul wrote that Abraham was “fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised.” His being convinced led him to willing obedience, even under severe testing. (See Genesis 22:1–14.)

79. What does all of this say to us regarding our own life of faith?

Paul insisted that Abraham's being credited with righteousness because of his faith was recorded not just as history but so that we might see that also our faith is credited to us as righteousness. Abraham was credited with

righteousness because he believed the covenant promise of a line of descendants through whom the One would come who would be God's blessing to all peoples. We have the advantage over Abraham, for we look in faith to the One who fulfilled the covenant promise and dramatically displayed that God wants nothing more than to give us His gift of righteousness. (See 2 Corinthians 5:21.) We are to take God at His Word. Indeed, FAITH is an acronym for "Forsaking All, I Take Him!"

80. The pericope ends with a succinct statement of the Gospel. In God's saving plan, what was the purpose of Jesus being delivered over to death? (See 1 Peter 3:18.)

81. Why is our justification completely dependent on Jesus having been raised again? (See 1 Corinthians 15:17–23.)

Lesson 6

Proper 6

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:35–10:20

In the second year of His ministry, called the “Year of Popularity,” Jesus focused on Galilee. He went out from Capernaum to the towns and villages. The Galileans were a mixed bag of people and included many Gentiles, so much so that Galilee was sometimes called “Galilee of the Nations.” Galilee was far enough away from Jerusalem that the Jewish communities did not feel the controlling presence of the Council (Sanhedrin) as strongly as those in Judea did. Large crowds came to Jesus, bringing the sick, the infirm, and the troubled to be blessed with healing. During this second year, Jesus called the Twelve to follow Him. The instruction of the Twelve occupied much of Jesus’ time and attention, and on several occasions He took them out of Galilee, away from the crowds, for that purpose.

82. What elements made up the ministry of Jesus? What motivated Jesus in His hands-on ministry to people in need?

The ancient world thought of the viscera as the seat of the emotions because that’s where we usually feel strong emotions such as compassion. The Greek word also referred to this and might best be rendered “His heart was stirred.” Hearing of Jesus’ deep compassion is indeed comforting.

83. What does “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” say about Jesus’ main concern for the crowds of people? How is this a good description also of many people in our crowded modern world? Why does supplying workers for the harvest begin with prayer to the Lord of the harvest?

A principle in teaching little children says, “If it’s not in the hand, it’s not in the head.” It says that they do not learn by having concepts or procedures explained to them, but by actively being involved in doing the concepts or procedures. To an extent, this is true of adults too, so Jesus gave the Twelve opportunities to learn by doing “fieldwork.” He sent them out to minister in His name. The Greek *apostello*, “sent out,” comes across in our English *apostle*.

84. Why were the apostles at this point still restricted to working among Jews? What message were they to announce? (See Matthew 3:1–2; 4:17.)

85. What was Jesus encouraging with His “You received without paying; give without pay”? How were their personal needs to be supplied? Why would their preaching result in such a strong either/or responsibility on the part of their hearers?

86. Jesus gives the same authority and responsibility to the Church today in our apostolic mission. How has the assignment changed? How is the message different? How are both shrewdness and innocence still important in today’s mission?

87. How do you reconcile Jesus’ “give without pay” with the Church of today having professional, paid clergy? (See 1 Corinthians 9:3–18.) What advantages and what dangers are there in having professional clergy who are paid by those whom they serve?

The Old Testament Lesson: Exodus 19:2–8

Israel had witnessed the mighty deeds of the Lord as He called them out of Egypt to go to the Promised Land as His chosen people—death of the firstborn had struck every home in Egypt except those where the first Passover was being eaten and where the blood of the lamb was on doorpost and lintel; the waters of the Red Sea had parted to allow their crossing on dry land and then had returned to drown the pursuing Egyptians; they had been sustained in the wilderness by the Lord’s provision of manna in the morning and quail in the evening and water from the rock; the attacking Amalekites were defeated as Moses held his hands up in blessing over the battlefield. And now Israel was camped at the base of the mountain that had been their immediate destination (Exodus 3:10–12).

Mount Sinai, which means “desert,” is in the southeast region of the Sinai Peninsula. It rises to some seven thousand feet in elevation. This “mountain of God” (Exodus 18:5) was the site of Yahweh’s appearance to Moses in the burning bush. When Moses later led his newly freed people to the mountain, he became the mediator of the covenant that Yahweh established with Israel as a nation—the covenant He had initiated with their ancestor Abraham six hundred years earlier. (See Genesis 12:1–4.) God interacted with Israel through Moses. Through Moses, He gave the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments; the ceremonial laws that governed their religious practices under the covenant of grace; and a system of civil laws aimed especially at their years as nomads on their way to their homeland. Israel revered Moses as the greatest of the prophets, the Lawgiver, the one who met with the Lord “face to face” (Exodus 33:11).

88. In establishing the covenant, how did the Lord again show that He is the initiator of His relationship with His people? (See Deuteronomy 7:6–9; John 15:16.) What was to be Israel’s response to His initiative? What assurance would be theirs as they kept the covenant?

89. How did the elders respond on behalf of the people? How faithful were the Israelites in keeping their promise? (See Exodus 32:1–4.) Why did the Lord never give up His love for Israel? (See Isaiah 54:5–10.)

90. How has God extended His covenant of grace to us? When have we responded to His initiative in the covenant?

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

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 5:6–15

No words emphasize the gracious nature of salvation more clearly than “while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” and “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Salvation is not something we work at; it is the work of God for us and in us.

92. We are justified and reconciled to God by the blood, by the death, of His Son. That’s an accomplished fact. How then are we saved even more by His life?

93. Most religions encourage people to serve God. How does our Christian faith lead us to enjoy God?

Paul contrasted Adam and Jesus and the effect they and their actions had on all of humanity. It is the contrast between sin and righteousness, between death and life, between judgment and grace. Through the willful disobedience of one man, Adam, spiritual death, innate sinfulness that inevitably expresses itself in sinning, came to all. In contrast, God acted in one man, the Second Adam, His own Son born of woman as Jesus the Christ, to win righteousness and renewal of spiritual life for all, which is effectuated as His free gift of grace to all whom the Holy Spirit leads to believe in Jesus Christ and live in that faith.

Paul’s opening words in verse 12 are a “seat of doctrine” for what is called original sin. Paul’s sweeping words reach out to include every human being and place all of humanity under the reign of sin and death. The first page of *The New England Primer*, the first book printed in America, an alphabet book, reflected this as it taught: “In Adam’s Fall, we sin-ned all.” Paul began his thought here with “just as,” but having stated his premise, he digressed, eager to give the argument that backs up his sweeping statement. At the end of the chapter, he picked up his premise again to state also the other side: “so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

94. Paul wrote, “Sin is not counted where there is no law,” but how did he then show that sin was present and did indeed have its effect also on people who lived and sinned without awareness of God’s Law?

95. The Law instructs people in the true way of life, but coming as it does to people who are already sinners, what is always its first effect? (See Romans 3:19–20; 5:20; 7:7–13.)

96. In what sense was Adam “a type of the one who was to come”?

97. In what significant way is “the free gift” radically different from “the trespass”?

Lesson 7

Proper 7

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:5a, 21–33

This Holy Gospel continues Jesus' instructions to the Twelve when He sent them out for fieldwork experience in their training for their apostolic mission. In addition to giving them their basic message and authority to heal in His name, Jesus had warned them that many would not be responsive to their mission. In fact, He said they would be like “sheep in the midst of wolves” and would experience rejection and betrayal, hatred and persecution (vv. 16–20).

98. Why does Jesus' message that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (v. 7) cause His messengers to be rejected and betrayed, hated and persecuted by many?

Jesus related such experiences to their ties to Him as their Teacher and Master—and encouraged their faithfulness even in the face of deadly opposition. (See John 15:18–25.)

99. Why should a disciple expect to elicit the same reaction from people as his teacher does and a servant as his master? What would such experiences say about the disciple and the servant?

Martin Franzmann wrote in *Follow Me*, “The kingdom of heaven [must] . . . shake man out of all his settled secular serenity, including religious and ethical serenity. The Christ and his apostles are walking question marks to all secular securities. Therefore the Kingdom and the Christ arouse contradiction and persecution.” The derivation of *Beelzebul* is still in question. It evidently had become a name used by the Jews for Satan.

100. How do Jesus' words about the covered being revealed and the hidden being made known apply to the world of evil? What do these words of Jesus say about the truths of the Kingdom?

101. What was Jesus encouraging with His “say in the light” and “proclaim on the housetops”?

With “fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell,” Jesus was encouraging the apostles to holy seriousness about their mission, even under threat of death.

102. With what positive statements did Jesus follow His warning in order to help His disciples rise above fear?

Identification with Jesus in faith is personal, but it is not private. No one can do it for us, but it is essential that others hear our testimony of faith and see it evidenced in our lives. Many early Christians accepted a martyr's death rather than negate their witness—and still today Christians are facing persecution and death because of their testimony to the Lord. We American Christians, however, who live in a deliberately pluralistic society, are not yet confronted with that choice—though the possibility of it is growing. Our tests, however, generally are subtler.

103. In our world, what might compromise or contradict a Christian's public declaration that he or she belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ? When might such circumstances become a public rejection of the Lord? (See Matthew 18:15–18; Luke 9:26.)

104. It is easy to be timid when it comes to our faith. How is your identification with Jesus Christ being heard and seen publicly?

The Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 20:7–13

Jeremiah was God's prophet during the last years of the Kingdom of Judah. To a people who were being told by their religious and political leaders that the presence of the temple guaranteed their safety, Jeremiah steadfastly brought the Lord's word of judgment and destruction. This pericope is part of Jeremiah's complaint. He had prophesied in the temple that Jerusalem and the surrounding villages were doomed. Pashhur, the chief officer of the temple, had had him beaten and placed in stocks for twenty-four hours near the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the temple, making him an object of scorn and ridicule. When Pashhur had released him the next day, Jeremiah had told him, "The Lord's name for you is *Magor-Missabib* ['Terror on Every Side']," and had again prophesied Jerusalem's destruction and Pashhur's death in exile in Babylon. "Terror on Every Side" may have become the nickname the people gave Jeremiah himself because of his doleful messages. In his complaint, he heard them whispering it in cynical rejection of him and his prophecy. Even his friends were hoping that he and his message of God's judgment would be discredited.

Jeremiah suffered much, even death threats, because of the unpopular message he had to proclaim. His complaint, the last and most bitter of his six "confessions," reveals his inner struggle. Jeremiah's complaint was voiced because of mistreatment at the hands of those who rejected his message. Nevertheless, it leads to a section of his writing in which he declared Judah and Jerusalem to be irrevocably doomed. The fire burning in Jeremiah that brought him so many troubles, including eventual exile to Egypt, would not be quenched.

Jeremiah was a priest. He had not become a prophet of his own volition. The task that brought him so much unanticipated suffering had been "forced on him" by the Lord, so he complained that the Lord had ___ him and that the word of the Lord he was given had brought him ___ and ___. Yet he had to speak it!

105. How did Jeremiah describe the compulsion inside him that drove him to speak the prophecy the Lord had assigned him? (Compare 1 Corinthians 9:16–17.)

106. Jeremiah awakened his faith with an acknowledgment of the Lord's ability to help him like a mighty warrior. What did Jeremiah invite God to do as the one who "tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind"?

Jeremiah's committing his cause to the Lord led to a confident song of praise. But the recurring ups and downs that tormented Jeremiah are shown again in the depression expressed in verses 14–18.

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

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 6:12–23

Paul talks a lot here about the body: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body," "Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness," and "You once presented your members as slaves to impurity."

108. What part does our physicality, our bodies, have to do with our sinning? If we work hard at controlling our bodies, will we learn to stop sinning?

109. In the matter of our not letting sin reign in our bodies and instead offering our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness, how is living under grace effective in producing this result while being under the Law is not?

110. What resources are available to us to help us and enable us when we make it our aim to offer ourselves as slaves to righteousness and thus be led to sanctification?

111. What is the essential difference between "wages" and a "gift"?

Lesson 8

Proper 8

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:34–42

These are surprising words from the Prince of Peace. He *did* come to bring peace. That was His legacy to His disciples as He brought His work of salvation to completion. (See John 14:27; 16:33.) Through faith in Him, we have peace with God. (See Romans 5:1.) As we live in Him, we can be at peace within ourselves. (See 1 John 3:19–20.) As we walk with Him, we may aim at enjoying peace with those around us. (See Romans 12:18; Colossians 3:15.)

112. What did the Prince of Peace mean, then, by saying, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword”?

In his book about discipleship, *Follow Me*, Martin Franzmann wrote: “The Messiah . . . brings no cheap peace, no half peace, no peace by compromise. He can create peace only by destroying evil; and since men love evil and cling to that which excludes them from the whole peace of God, His coming forces a decision between good and evil and proves to be, for all its peaceful intent, the sundering sword” (p. 96).

“A man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household” is a quotation from Micah’s prophetic description of how badly Israel’s society had degenerated

113. How was Jesus using Micah’s words here? When commitment to Jesus brings division into a family, what can be done to promote peaceful relationships? (See 1 Peter 3:1–9, 15–16.)

114. How did Jesus emphasize the priority claim that He asserts on those who are His disciples? (See Luke 9:57–62.)

115. What is meant by the “cross” that those who follow Jesus must carry?

When, by the grace of God and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, we take Jesus seriously enough to empty ourselves of our own inclinations and will, He fills us with Himself. Then we will be neither attracted away from Him by competing attachments (not even to loved ones) nor repelled by possible suffering (the cross) as a result of following Him.

116. In the light of all this, interpret Jesus' *mashal*: "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

Martin Franzmann summed up this consideration in *Follow Me*: "To find life in this world is to find a doomed life; to lose one's life in this world for the Christ's sake is to lose the doomed life and to find the one real life in Him" (p. 96).

117. What great blessing would be enjoyed by those who would receive Jesus' disciples when they were on their apostolic mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus? Why was it important for His apostles to hear these words?

118. A "prophet" is a speaker of God's Word; a "righteous person" is any Christian brother or sister who is serving in Jesus' name. What is implied by their being "received"? What is meant by the "prophet's reward" and the "righteous person's reward"?

119. Why does even a cup of cold water have reward value in Jesus' sight?

The Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 28:5–9

Jeremiah consistently prophesied that Babylon would be God's instrument of judgment against the leaders and people of Judah because of their faithless trust in perfunctory performance of temple ritual. At the Lord's command, he even fashioned a yoke that he wore publicly in visual demonstration of his message. As Babylon grew more powerful and tensions in Judah grew, Jeremiah suffered persecution, imprisonment, and death threats because he was prophesying what the leaders did not want to hear. Nebuchadnezzar besieged and conquered Jerusalem in 605 BC. He made Judah a vassal state and confiscated and carried off many of the temple's sacred vessels and appointments—along with the first deportation of influential Jews into exile in Babylon. Because the temple still stood, the leaders promoted the hope of early liberation and the return of the articles from the Lord's house. The "house prophet" Hananiah responded to Jeremiah's dire prophecies by "speaking for the Lord" to assure that the hoped-for events would happen within two years. It was that false prophecy that Jeremiah addressed in this pericope.

Jeremiah said he sympathized with what Hananiah was hoping for and predicting but pointed out that prophets sent by the Lord generally had brought calls to repentance at times when Israel had been faithless or had fallen into pagan worship. The prophets' messages generally warned of ____, ____, and ____ if the faithless, rebellious ways continued. Jeremiah said that his own coming as the Lord's prophet and the message he had brought had been consistent with that tradition, while Hananiah and his cohorts, being professional prophets attached to the royal court, consistently prophesied the peace and prosperity the political leaders wanted to hear.

120. What did Jeremiah point to as the deciding factor in determining the validity of a prophet and his prophecies?

Read the rest of the chapter to see how this conflict between Jeremiah and Hananiah continued and was concluded.

121. In today's Church, as we look to the future and trust God's grace and blessing, what should be emphasized: realism or optimism?

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

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 7:1–13

Here Paul is asserting that life under grace is more effective at producing the relationship with God that God desires than is life under the Law. The Law, when taken seriously, deadens desire for relationship with God because it continually exposes our sin to our view. We simply cannot accomplish what it requires of us. But life under grace renews us for living with God as it continually reminds us of His forgiving love and acceptance. It encourages our willing response as it covers our failures with forgiveness and blesses our successes.

Paul gave a brief illustration from marriage. He pointed out that when a husband dies, the wife is no longer tied to him but is free to marry another man. With his analogy, he is saying that the Law is like a husband who has died. It has lost its power, its ownership, and the deadliness of its effect on us.

123. How is it that we have died to the Law? For what purpose have we been set free from the Law's deadly effect on us?

124. How is it that the Law, which in itself is holy, righteous, and good, arouses in our sinful nature the inclination to reject and disobey its good commands? What fruit does this good Law end up producing in us? Which commandment does Paul point to as a clear example of how the Law prompts the sinful nature to rebel and disobey the command?

125. What is always the first effect of the Law on those, including Christians, who take it seriously? How does God use that effect in the dynamic of leading us to salvation in His Son, Jesus Christ?

In chapter 6, Paul wrote that we “were baptized . . . into [Christ’s] death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (vv. 3–4). Here he wrote, “You also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead.” Martin Luther echoed this in his Small Catechism, as he wrote that baptizing with water signifies that the old Adam in us, with all its sinful deeds and desires, should be drowned through daily repentance. We find, however, that the old Adam, the sinful nature, is a pretty good swimmer and hard to drown. Our struggle with sin is a daily reality. We readily relate to what Paul described as the tensions involved in the paradox of the Christian’s being at the same time a saint “through the body of Christ,” and a sinner still carrying around the sinful nature of the old Adam. We’re glad we have Jesus, our Savior.

Lesson 9

Proper 9

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 11:25–30

Chapter 11 begins with Jesus' interaction with John's disciples when they brought the question from their master in prison: "Are You the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (v. 3). Jesus told them to remind John of the messianic prophecies that were being fulfilled in His ministry: "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." The miraculous signs in Jesus' compassionate ministry would encourage the faith of John, who, as the Lord's Way-Preparer, had keyed in on the more forceful and decisive prophecies about the Messiah. Jesus then spoke to the crowds about John and Himself, their contrasting lifestyles and ministries, and how neither of them had satisfied those who carry their own preconceptions about the kingdom of God. Jesus then denounced the callous unbelief of the cities in which most of His miracles had been performed.

Suddenly, with an abrupt change of thought and mood, Jesus praised the Father because He had hidden "these things from the ___ and ___ and revealed them to ___."

126. What is it about humanistic religious thought that causes its proponents to reject the Good News of Jesus? (See Luke 18:9–14; 1 Corinthians 1:18–25.) What is it about "little children" that lets them be responsive to the Gospel? (See Matthew 18:1–4.)

That it is the Father's good pleasure to *reveal* spiritual truth to "little children" and to *hide* it from the worldly wise is expanded on in Jesus' words about Himself and His Father and those who are led to know and follow Him.

127. In what sense have all things been handed over to Jesus by His Father? (See John 5:21–23.) What is implied by "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him"?

That the Son *chooses* to reveal the Father to *some* is not to be taken in any arbitrary sense, but is a way of emphasizing that this revelation must be received purely as a gift of grace. (See 1 Timothy 2:3–5.)

128. In light of this, who are the ones to whom the Son chooses to reveal the Father? Who are the ones from whom spiritual truth is hidden by the Father?

129. Jesus' familiar words of invitation that end this Holy Gospel were based directly on the fact that He is the revealer of the Father. Who are the ones who "labor and are heavy laden" to whom Jesus extended His invitation?

130. A yoke is a wooden bar or frame by which two draft animals are joined at the heads and necks so they can work together. What does this analogy suggest about Jesus' promised "rest for your souls"?

131. What promise is implicit in Jesus' invitation to learn from Him as we wear His yoke? How have you experienced the truth of Jesus' words in your life as a disciple?

The Old Testament Lesson: Zechariah 9:9–12

Zechariah means "Yahweh remembers." He was both a priest and a prophet. He brought a message of encouragement to the remnant of Judah who had returned to complete the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. In 538 BC, Cyrus, king of Persia and conqueror of Babylon, authorized the return under Zerubbabel, a prince of the Davidic line, of some fifty thousand Jews to reestablish their identity as a nation and to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. In two years, the foundations were completed, but then opposition by the Samaritans and other neighbors halted the work. During the reign of Darius, the project was promoted again. Zechariah and Haggai brought prophetic encouragement, urging spiritual renewal and rededication to the task, and in 516 BC, the temple was finished and dedicated.

Zechariah's prophecy has a strong messianic emphasis. He brought assurance that the saving will of the Lord toward His people would be fulfilled. We are accustomed to hearing this lesson on Palm Sunday, when we see Jesus going out of His way to fulfill what it prophesied about the meek King entering Jerusalem on a donkey.

132. What are the messianic qualities of the promised King? Most kings assert their rule through force of arms, but what will be the approach of this King?

133. What will be the result of this King extending His rule from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth?

134. What is cited as the reason for the Lord's freeing the prisoners from the "waterless pit" of exile? (See Genesis 15:1–20; Exodus 24:1–11.)

135. How are the benefits of restoration by this messianic King described?

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

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 7:14–25a

In last week's study, we heard Paul tell us that we have "died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God" (v. 4). Martin Luther echoed this in his Small Catechism as he wrote that baptizing with water signifies that the old Adam in us, with all its evil deeds and desires, should be drowned through daily repentance. We find, however, that the old Adam, the sinful nature, is a pretty good swimmer and hard to drown. Our struggle with sin is a daily reality, and we can readily relate to what Paul openly confessed: "The law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin."

Paul used himself as the example as he described the tensions involved in the paradox of Christians being at the same time saints and sinners.

137. What practical evidence did Paul point to that showed he was a regenerated saint in Christ? What kept Paul from consistently carrying out his desire to do what is right?

138. What did the fact that Paul wanted to do what is right, even though he often ended up doing the evil he did not want to do, lead him to conclude about the Law? What did Paul say all of this revealed about him?

139. Does the fact that we are "captive to the law of sin that dwells in [our] members" excuse us for our sins of thought and word and deed? How does God rescue us from this wretched anomaly in our lives as disciples?

140. In "Rock of Ages," we sing, "Be of sin the double cure: Cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r" (*LSB* 761:1). The Gospel continually assures us that our guilt has been removed once for all by Christ. How may we make progress in breaking with the power of sin in our lives as Christians?

141. Throughout this section, why did Paul give a personal testimony ("I") instead of just giving the Roman Christians apostolic instruction ("you")?

Lesson 10

Proper 10

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

In Jesus' day, a teacher would sit to do his formal teaching. His students gathered around him, either seated or standing. This custom was definitely followed in the synagogues, but Jesus evidently usually sat as He taught also in the countryside. In this instance, because the size of the crowd required that He be some distance from them, Jesus arranged for an unusual chair from which to teach.

Our English word *parable* comes directly from the Greek *parabole*. It carried the meaning of placing two things side by side. Jesus told stories that His hearers could understand and relate to—placing them “side by side” with a truth about life in the kingdom of God. A simple definition has been suggested: “A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.”

This is an effective way of teaching, as every preacher or teacher knows. According to Jesus, He used parables to serve two purposes: to deepen the understanding and interest of those who listened in faith and to hide the truth from those who would not believe. (See Matthew 13:10–17.)

The lesson of a parable turns on its point of comparison. It is important to look for that point. It is a mistake to give some symbolic meanings to every detail of the story. He didn't always explain His parables, but here Jesus did explain His parable of the sower. With His help, we easily analyze the parable and get the point.

142. What is the point of comparison on which the spiritual lesson turns? Select an adjective to describe each of the kinds of people pictured by the four kinds of soil.

143. With which of the kinds of soil do you relate in your life experience? What does each kind of soil teach you for your life as a Christian?

144. The traditional title of this parable is the parable of the sower, taken from the text of Matthew itself. As Jesus explained the parable, what title might more appropriately focus on the point it makes?

145. What encouragement does this parable bring to sowers of the Word?

“He who has ears, let him hear” places awesome responsibility on those who hear the Word. Franzmann says in *Follow Me*, “Man has the fatal freedom of shutting himself up against the word which God speaks to him, the very word which he hears and understands” (p. 123). All preachers know that the effectiveness of their sermons lies only 10 percent in their tongues and 90 percent in the ears of their hearers.

146. How can you approach Bible study or the lessons and sermons in church in ways that will make you a more effective hearer?

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 55:10–13

These familiar words are part of what Horace Hummel, in *The Word Becoming Flesh*, calls “an invitation to ‘every one who thirsts’ to a free Messianic banquet” (p. 225). Then he adds parenthetically: “Yet in the afterglow of chap. 53 we do not forget that it was very costly to the Giver.” The Giver, the Servant of the Lord, invited the thirsty to “come to the waters” to “buy wine and milk without money and without price” (v. 1). He promised renewal of the “everlasting covenant, My steadfast, sure love for David” (v. 3). He urged, “Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near; . . . for He will abundantly pardon” (vv. 6–7). He reminded that the Lord’s ways and thoughts are as high above man’s “as the heavens are higher than the earth” (v. 9).

147. In this pericope, the Lord spoke through the Servant to point to the effective agent by which He will accomplish His purpose in the world. What is that agent? What simile is used to illustrate its effectiveness?

148. What is the double purpose for which God sends His Word into the world? (See Romans 3:19–20; 1:16–17; 10:14–17.)

149. What assurance do we gain as we hear the Lord say about His Word: “It shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it”? What is the picture that awaits those who will “go out in joy and be led forth in peace”? What will be the end result of the fulfillment of this prophecy?

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

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 8:12–17

Romans 8 is Paul’s great description of the Holy Spirit as God at work—making the redemption accomplished by Jesus fully effective *in us*. The continuing activity of the Spirit is seen in the Greek *agontai*, “being led,” in a grammatical form that describes a continuing, durative process.

151. How does the Holy Spirit assert His leading in our lives? (See Romans 1:16–17; 1 Corinthians 1:18, 23–25.)

152. What will be the continuing result of the Spirit’s leading? How is the spirit of slavery different from the Spirit of adoption as sons?

153. Of what is Paul reminding us by telling us that by the Spirit we cry, “Abba! Father!”? How does the Spirit bear witness with our spirit that we are God’s children?

“Provided we suffer with Him” is immediately softened, and our reception of its message is encouraged, by Paul’s pointing to the glory that Jesus Christ is given now and will be given forever—a glory that those who are His will fully enjoy with Him in heaven.

154. How may we “suffer with Him” as His disciples? How may we also “be glorified with Him”?

Note that Paul continued in verse 18 with this reminder for his readers: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Lesson 11

Proper 11

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

Jesus' parable was a true-to-life earthly story. Those who heard it knew that in their society, it sometimes did happen that people played a dirty trick on their enemies by scattering darnel seeds in a field that had been sown with wheat. It happened often enough that there was a Roman law forbidding it and specifying the penalty for perpetrators. As the two kinds of plants sprouted together, it was almost impossible to distinguish them from each other, and any attempt to pull out the sprouts of darnel would damage the tender sprouts of wheat. As Jesus said in His story, the only option was to wait until the plants went to head. Then the difference became apparent and the darnel could be cut off and the wheat left, but this was tedious and costly, and the weeds' competition for the soil's nutrients had already effectively limited the wheat harvest.

155. As Jesus explained His parable to the disciples, what did He make the point of comparison on which the meaning of the parable turned?

156. Is the parable about believers and hypocrites together within the Church, or is it about God's dealings with people in general?

The use of "sons of the kingdom" and "sons of the evil one" is significant. Both imply a decisive *belonging*. Sons, in biblical usage, are those who have rights of inheritance, whether in the kingdom of the Son of Man or in the kingdom of the evil one. (See John 3:16–21; Romans 6:16–18.) Salvation and condemnation are presented side by side in Holy Scripture, and each must be seen in the light of its opposite for its reality to be appreciated.

157. How did Jesus describe the contrasting fates in eternity of these two sets of sons?

158. How would any attempt forcibly to root out the "weeds" from human society be harmful also to the "wheat" and frustrate its purpose in God's plan for His kingdom?

Once again, Jesus says, "He who has ears, let him hear." This places awesome responsibility on all who hear the Word. God does let people say no to Him. We can shut our ears to the promptings of the Word if we want to, but the parable and its application show the awful results of that—just as they show the blessing that results from hearing and acting accordingly.

159. How can we perk up our ears to listen to the Word more effectively in our daily lives?

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 44:6–8

In this pericope, the Lord spoke through Isaiah to declare Himself to be the one and only God. His words are in the context of another of His promises of deliverance of Israel from exile and His blessing them as His chosen people—and their enthusiastic response to Him as displayed in their identification with His name, “the LORD,” or *Yahweh*. (See vv. 1–5.) As He pointed to Himself and His uniqueness as the One and Only, “the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts,” He ridiculed the lifeless man-made idols some were foolishly worshiping instead of worshiping Him. (See vv. 9–20.) He then concluded with a reminder of the privileged position Israel enjoyed with Him under the covenant of grace and blessing He had established with them. (See vv. 21–22.)

160. What is the significance of the Lord calling Himself Israel’s “King”?

161. What did the title “Redeemer” add to their understanding of their relationship with Him?

“The LORD of hosts” describes God as the Lord of the armies of heaven and of all the host of creatures in the created world.

162. What assurance was there for God’s people in knowing Him as “the LORD of hosts”?

163. What does “I am the first and I am the last” say about the Lord?

164. What is emphasized with the Lord’s “besides Me there is no god”? (See Deuteronomy 32:36–38.) What did the Lord point to that most obviously distinguished Him from all other “gods”?

165. What is pictured by the Lord’s calling Himself “Rock”?

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

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 8:18–27

In his great statement about life through the Spirit, Paul has said there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” because “the righteous requirement of the law” is “fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (vv. 1, 4). He proclaimed freedom from the control of the sinful nature because “if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (v. 10). He said this makes us debtors to the one who freed us. By the Spirit, we are to “put to death the deeds of the body. . . . For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (vv. 13–14). And Paul concluded, “We are . . . heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him” (vv. 16–17).

That led to Paul's comparison of the present sufferings with that future glory. The Greek speaks of “the sufferings of the now time,” the time of our earthly existence.

167. What all is included in “sufferings of this present time”? What is the “glory that is to be revealed to us”? Why are the sufferings of this present time not even worth comparing with that glory?

Paul says the creation itself is waiting for the coming glory. The Greek word *metaiotes*, “futility,” carries the idea of “being without truth or meaning.” This is the word used throughout Ecclesiastes for “vanity” in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Here in Romans, Paul used it to suggest that the creation, because of human sin, was subjected to a situation in which it could not fulfill its intended purpose. (See Genesis 3:17–18.)

168. When will the creation's “pains of childbirth” end? (See Revelation 21:1–5.)

169. Why is it significant that Paul spoke of “the redemption of our bodies” and not “the redemption of our souls” or “spirits”? (See 1 Corinthians 15:50–57.) What is the key word for us in this consideration?

The word “likewise” refers back to Paul's preceding thoughts. He now points out that “the Spirit helps us in our weakness” and “intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words”—in the same way as “the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth,” and in the same way as we Christians “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

170. What is it that the Spirit prays for as He “intercedes for the saints according to the will of God”? What is implied by the fact that the Spirit does this “with groanings too deep for words”?

Charismatic Christians, who believe that the Holy Spirit has given them the gift of tongues—a “prayer language”—and that He prays and praises through them in unknown languages when they turn over their minds and tongues to Him, sometimes refer to this passage to support their view.

171. How can you see that this passage does not refer just to speaking in tongues?

172. What assurance is there for us in the fact that God, the one who searches our hearts, “knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God”?

173. What is to be our Christian attitude and lifestyle as we wait patiently in hope? (See 1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Peter 3:3–15.) In the light of all this, what would Paul say to us when we get down and think, “Oh, what’s the use?”

Lesson 12

Proper 12

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:44–52

Matthew 13 provides us with eight of Jesus' parables about the kingdom of heaven—emphasizing its acceptance by some and its rejection by others. This little pericope includes four of them. Since they all begin with “the kingdom of heaven is like,” their applications are similar, but they show various facets of the Kingdom.

174. The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value have the same point of comparison. What do both parables say about the kingdom of heaven? Is it necessary to sell all you have to gain the hidden treasure or the valuable pearl—the kingdom of heaven? What difference is there between a man finding a hidden treasure in a field and an importer of fine pearls finding the one pearl of great value that he has been looking for? What does this tell us about the kingdom of heaven?

175. What is the point of comparison in the parable of the net between the kingdom of heaven and the fisherman's net filled with good fish and scrap fish? (See vv. 37–43.)

Scribes were professional students of the Law and the Prophets. But in telling His little parable, Jesus appears to have been speaking more generally about anyone versed in the Word of God. “Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven” more literally is “every scribe who has been made a disciple of the kingdom of heaven.” More than just information is involved in this.

176. What would be the case of a teacher of the law who has *not* been made a disciple of the kingdom of heaven? What point was Jesus making with this little parable or simile?

The Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 7:6–9

Deuteronomy means “second law.” The Israelites were at the point of entry into the Promised Land. Moses was told he would not enter the land with them, but he was concerned about preparing them for what lay ahead, encouraging their faithfulness to the Lord. His “second law” was more than just a review of the first. In his “farewell address,” Moses added theological application and amplification of the Law, encouraging Israel to remember it and apply it to daily life—and he promised blessings as a result. Moses recounted the history of the faithless generation who had died in the wilderness wanderings and then said, “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?” (Deuteronomy 10:12–13).

In today's lesson, we hear Moses reminding the people that they were who they were only as a result of God's gracious choosing.

177. What is the significance of Moses' calling them "a people holy to the LORD your God"? Why was their being chosen to be the Lord's treasured possession not to be a source of pride and boasting for them?

178. What was the reason the Lord chose Israel out of all the peoples on the face of the earth? What was the Lord demonstrating about Himself by rescuing the Israelites—after their being slaves in Egypt for more than four centuries? What was the Lord's faithfulness to His covenant to encourage in them?

179. What does this lesson encourage us to see about ourselves in our life in the Church?

180. How does this lesson relate to the emphasis of today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 8:28–39

"For those who love God all things work together for good" is often said to comfort those in suffering or to reassure those in circumstances that have surprised or puzzled them. But Paul did more than offer a cliché. He told *who* it is for whom the promise is abundantly true, and he unfolded the mystery of God's eternal purpose and will so we may know in faith *why* it is true that God works for good in everything. *Prothesis*, "purpose," indicates a "plan" or an "intention."

"All things." Really? A young Christian husband and father is killed in a collision with a drunk driver; the life of a Christian wife and mother ends after a painful battle with cancer; drowning claims a Christian child, age four—is God at work in all of these? Yes! It is He who permits them to happen, and He is at work in them to assert His good purpose for all the individuals affected.

181. Who are the recipients of the assurance that God's purpose is that all things work together for good? What good is evidently foremost in God's heart as He works out His purpose in all things?

Paul listed the gracious actions in the process by which God has drawn us into new life in Christ.

Foreknew. God's foreknowledge is more than just "knowing in advance." God has an active choice in the matter.

Predestined states the fact that God is the gracious agent of our being called according to His purpose. While God has predestined us to salvation, the corollary is not true: He predestines *none* to damnation.

182. On what is God’s foreknowledge of those He predestined to be His own based? (See 1 Peter 1:1–2.)

Called brings the eternal into the present to make God’s foreknowledge and predestination effective.

183. How is God’s gracious, life-enabling call extended? (See Romans 10:14–17.)

Justified is a forensic term, meaning “declared right with God.”

184. What is it that allows God to say that sinners whom He foreknew and predestined and called were also justified? (See Romans 3:21–28.)

Glorified adds the eternal dimension of God’s love and its ultimate purpose for us. (See Philippians 3:20–21.)

185. How is it significant that this verb also is in the past tense?

186. What does it mean to you that God’s knowing you from eternity in Christ, His predestining you to be His son or daughter, and His calling and justifying and glorifying you are all part of His eternal purpose for you? How has God worked in surprising ways for your good in “all things” in your life?

With irrefutable logic, Paul asked, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” With additional oratorical questions, he then showed just how much God *has been* and *is* for us in Christ. Then he asked, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” and specified seven things that might seem to threaten our confidence in His love for us: ____, ____, ____, ____, ____, ____, ____. These had been realities in Paul’s own life and were being experienced by many Christians during times of official persecution. The list ends with *machaira*, the short sword worn by Roman soldiers—included by Paul as a symbol of the possibility of their arrest and martyrdom.

Quoting Psalm 44, Paul used the experience of Israel as a case in point. The psalm was a cry for help when they were suffering at the hand of enemies—not because of unfaithfulness, but even “though we have not forgotten You, and we have not been false to Your covenant” (Psalm 44:17).

187. What makes us “more than conquerors” even in such experiences?

The questions lead finally to Paul’s answer. Let’s end today’s study by joining Paul in his exultant expression of confident faith: “In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Lesson 13

Proper 13

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 14:13–21

This miraculous sign was recorded by all of the evangelists in their Gospels. They saw it as a striking display of the Lord's compassion for people in their need and of His power to do something about their need. The miracle surely led the people to think of the Lord's miraculously filling their ancestors' needs with the manna in the wilderness.

"Now when Jesus heard this" refers to the execution of John the Baptist by Herod (vv. 6–12).

188. What does it say about Jesus that this report made Him withdraw to a desolate place? What does it say about Jesus that even at such a time in His life and ministry, He did not decline to minister to the crowd?

189. What motivated the disciples to come to Jesus with the suggestion that He send the crowd away so they could buy themselves some food? How did Jesus challenge them, and how did they respond?

190. How do Jesus' words pose a challenge also for us today? (See 1 John 3:16–18.) How can we best approach the challenge of feeding the hungry of America and of the world?

Matthew did not mention the lad who supplied the loaves and the fish; John did. He also did not mention the distribution of the fish; Mark did. Matthew hurried to the miracle itself.

191. How did Jesus focus attention on the divine nature of what was happening?

The Greek *ephagon*, "they ate," is the word that was used for feeding cattle as much as they can eat to fatten them for market. It emphasizes the abundance of Jesus' provision.

192. What numbers did Matthew include to emphasize the magnitude of the miracle?

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 55:1–5

The banquet invitation is part of the messianic assurance that is so strong in Isaiah 40–66. The Servant Songs of chapters 42–53 picture the Servant as the agent through whom the gift is given, and now this invitation to the free banquet offers the benefit He made available through His faithful service. The promises of Isaiah found their immediate meaning in the assurances they brought to the people of Judah in exile, but they find their ultimate, full meaning in the eternal messianic kingdom.

193. What do the phrases “everyone who thirsts” and “he who has no money” say about those to whom the invitation is given?

194. What does “buy wine and milk without money and without price” say about the One extending the invitation?

195. How were the people of Judah spending “money for that which is not bread” and laboring “for that which does not satisfy”?

196. What did the prophet point to as the key for those who wish to “eat what is good” and “delight yourselves in rich food”?

197. What is the everlasting covenant the Lord made with David? (See 2 Samuel 7:8–16.) Who is the One who will be “a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples” and will, as a result, attract the nations to Israel?

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

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 9:1–13

There are many indications that the Church in Rome was quite Jewish in cast and may have had misgivings about the approach Paul had taken in including Gentiles in the Church. They did not know Paul in person, so in chapters 9–11 he took up the subject of Jew and Gentile in God’s purpose. He was immediately confronted by his own deep feelings about the general rejection of the Gospel by Jews, and he wanted to express these feelings openly and honestly to the Jewish Christians of Rome.

It was right for Paul to be concerned about the Jews. He was one of them. In his Letter to the Philippians, he wrote of his Hebrew heritage: “circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (3:5–6). But when Jesus, the risen Lord, came to him and called him to faith and apostleship, Paul had been led to discount bloodlines and legalistic observance of laws. He was ready to say, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:8–11).

Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles and resisted every effort to make Gentiles become “Jews” in order really to be Christians. Yet he had strong feelings for his own people—so strong that he said that for the sake of the people of Israel (if it would turn them to Christ) he could wish “___.” None of us would think of wishing something like that for the sake of the people of America, but Paul did for his people!

Paul’s “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” were caused by the rejection by Jews of their promised Messiah in spite of the fact that historically they enjoyed great spiritual advantages: ___, ___, ___, ___, ___, and ___, as well as ___, and the fact that ___.

199. Why was Paul so pointed in saying Christ is “God over all, blessed forever. Amen”?

Paul followed that with a strong argument, backed up with Scripture, that “not all who are descended from Israel [Jacob] belong to Israel [God’s chosen ones].” He was saying clearly, “It is not the children of the flesh [biological descendants] who are the children of God, but the children of the ___ are counted as [Abraham’s] offspring.”

200. How did the experience of Abraham and Sarah validate Paul’s argument? (See Genesis 21:8–14.)

201. What did Rebekah’s being told “The older will serve the younger” and Malachi’s saying “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” add to Paul’s argument?

202. How did Paul apply this Bible history to the mystery of God’s gracious election of those who are His own?

203. What did all of this say to the Church in Rome? What does it say to the Church today about our mission?

Lesson 14

Proper 14

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 14:22–33

This Holy Gospel follows the feeding of the five thousand. As evening had approached, the disciples had suggested that Jesus send the crowd away so they could buy food for themselves. Jesus, however, had multiplied loaves and fish and had provided an abundant supper for everyone there on the grassy hillside. Then, after that display of compassion and power, He had sent His disciples ahead in the boat while He stayed and dismissed the crowd.

204. What was Jesus looking forward to for Himself at this time?

205. What does being alone with God in the Word and in prayer add to your life as a Christian?

The disciples met with a storm as they sailed across the lake and evidently made little headway against the storm, for it was the fourth watch—3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.—when Jesus went to them, walking on the lake.

206. What was the disciples' reaction at seeing Jesus coming toward them? How did Jesus calm their fears and reassure them?

The Greek has *egō eimi*, "It is I." It is the same emphatic phrase used by Jesus in His great "I am" statements. In the Septuagint, the Old Testament in Greek, these words were used for the name *Yahweh*, by which God revealed Himself as Israel's covenant Lord.

Impetuous Peter, brimming with excitement and faith at seeing what his Lord could do, wanted the experience for himself.

207. Was Peter being presumptuous in his request? How is it that he was able to walk on the water to Jesus? Why did Peter sink into the water when his faith began to fail?

There is no indication that Peter ever walked on water again—or even tried to. The miracle had served its purpose in Jesus' plan for Peter and the others.

208. Why did some see Jesus' miracles and believe He was the Son of God, while others rejected Jesus in spite of His miracles? (See John 9:35–41.) Someone has said, "Trusting the word of Jesus sometimes means we have to get out of the boat and onto the water." What is meant by this? How have you experienced this in your Christian life?

The Old Testament Lesson: Job 38:4–18

Luther praised the Book of Job "magnificent and sublime." It was written by an unknown Israelite poet-philosopher and is generally dated anywhere from the time of Solomon to the time of the exile and later, which is suggested by its "wisdom literature" and "apocalyptic" style. Horace Hummel, in *The Word Becoming Flesh*, points out that the unusual nature of the Hebrew, both in terms of the words and the meaning given to them, as well as the syntax, may suggest an origin in more ancient, even patriarchal, times.

The writing explores the meaning of faith when confronted with the mystery of the suffering of the righteous. In the book, the consideration is prompted by Satan's being given permission by God to test righteous Job. In effect, it is also to test and possibly discredit the Lord Himself for building His relationship with man on faith and faithfulness. Because of this, the experience of Job and the analyses that follow give the book a cosmic significance.

What occasions the search for understanding is righteous Job's being tested by losing everything but his life itself, which God declares to be off-limits for Satan. Three friends come to comfort Job, but they end up offering only the logical explanation: Job was guilty of some serious sin that had brought God's severe judgment on him. They urge him to confess this and repent. But Job steadfastly maintains his innocence and his commitment to trust the Lord "though He slay me" (13:15). A fourth friend rebukes Job for his hasty, defensive talk and points to the value in divine chastening and God's redemptive purpose in it. Then God Himself speaks to Job, declaring His preeminence and His unsearchable wisdom. Job is led to repent of his questioning and arguing and to submit to God's mysterious will, admitting, "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:3). And in the end, Job, who had lost everything, is blessed by God more abundantly than ever.

Job's fourth friend, Elihu, listened as Job and his three older friends sought the reason for Job's suffering. Then he spoke, and in conclusion, said, "Out of the north [from Mount Hermon, the source of storms] comes golden splendor; God is clothed with awesome majesty" (37:22), thus preparing Job to hear the Lord speak to him out of the storm he was experiencing. Today's lesson is the first part of four chapters in which the Lord speaks to Job; it begins with "The LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind" (38:1). Right from the outset, the Lord makes it clear that Job's complaining and blaming Him were unjustified because Job's words were spoken without knowledge and understanding.

209. How did the Lord's series of rhetorical questions (which continue through chapter 41) underscore for Job his lack of knowledge?

210. Though the Lord's questions did not deal with Job's suffering nor with his complaints, what did they accomplish in Job? (See 40:3–5; 42:1–6.)

211. What can we learn from Job’s experience and the Lord’s words to him? (See Romans 8:28, 31–39; 11:33–36.)

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

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 10:5–17

Paul was writing to Jewish Christians to explain how faith in Christ “fits” with Jews and how Jews “fit” with faith in Christ. Naturally, he quoted Old Testament Scripture to them. He began with Leviticus to show what the Law required doing. Then in Deuteronomy, he showed how Israel’s hopes and its faith in the promised Messiah were to be at the center of their doing the ceremonial laws. Then he ended with Deuteronomy’s assurance that this prophetic Word was not something strange and foreign, but was near them—in their mouths and hearts. He then used that Old Testament base to move to the word of faith that he was proclaiming.

In this lesson, the apostle Paul is urging his readers to remember that the convictions produced by the “word of faith” are to be expressed. The Word is to be in our mouths as well as in our hearts. The Christian faith is, of course, deeply personal, but it is not private. Jesus calls people to salvation and immediately makes them His representatives to one another and to the world. The Bible knows of no silent Christians who will not identify themselves publicly as part of the Church through their confession of Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Paul wanted his Jewish readers—and us—to be bold in confessing Jesus Christ!

“Jesus is Lord.” This first creed was just two words in Greek: *Kurios Iesous*. *Kurios* was the Greek word used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, for *Yahweh*. By saying *Kurios Iesous*, the first Christians were confessing Jesus to be the covenant Lord, *Yahweh* Himself, who had come to fulfill His covenant.

213. Why did Paul focus his “if you . . . believe in your heart” on “that God raised [Jesus] from the dead”?

214. If it is the heart’s faith in Jesus that *justifies*, making the believer right with God through faith in Jesus, why is it the mouth’s confession that *saves*? (See Matthew 10:32–33; Luke 9:26.) Why is there an inseparable connection between heart and mouth in this matter of Christian faith and discipleship?

215. What part does our membership and participation in the Church’s fellowship play in all of this? How do Paul’s quotations from Isaiah and Joel relate to this consideration?

The quotation from Joel is especially significant because Joel’s Hebrew said, “Everyone who calls on the name of *Yahweh* will be saved.” Paul, quoting from the Septuagint, wrote, “the name of *Kurios*”—but from his previous statements, you know he was referring to Jesus, pointing to Jesus as *Yahweh* acting to fulfill the covenant of salvation.

216. What comfort is there for us in Paul's saying "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him"?

217. What challenge is there for the Church and for us as individual Christians in being part of the process? What is at the heart of the process by which the Church leads people to a faith that confesses Jesus Christ to be Savior and Lord?

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

Day of Pentecost

O God, on this day You once taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending them the light of Your Holy Spirit. Grant us in our day by the same Spirit to have a right understanding in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy consolation; 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 7:37–39

1. Jesus' "Whoever believes in Me"—a phrase used in some form forty-one times in John's Gospel—makes it clear that the drinking He was inviting people to do is faith in Him as the Promised One. The Greek uses present imperatives, *erchestho*, "come," and *pineto*, "drink," which imply continuing action. We do get new life from Jesus the very first time we drink of Him by faith, but the coming and drinking surely are to continue throughout life as we live with Him in a daily relationship of faith and love. The result of this drinking is that "rivers of living water" would, in turn, flow from them to others. Prior to this, Jesus had spoken of giving living water to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. (See John 4:4–14.)

2. Jesus used Old Testament Scripture to show He was not offering something new or strange, but was Himself the fulfillment of God's ancient covenant promise. The Old Testament had already used the picture of water to describe God's refreshing His people and their becoming a source of refreshment to others as they testified of His love.

3. John interpreted Jesus' words as referring to the Pentecost gift of the Holy Spirit, who enabled the message of the apostles. The Spirit had not been given in the same fullness of impact in Old Testament times through prophetic utterances as He was given by Jesus after completing His saving work. John said Jesus had to be "glorified"—through His obedient death, His victorious resurrection, and His exalting ascension—before the Spirit would come. The Old Testament prophets, including John the Baptist, pointed ahead in the power of the Spirit to the Promised One. The Spirit, who filled the apostles at Pentecost and would dwell in all who would come to Jesus and drink, proclaimed to them and through them the assuring message of a salvation that was completed once for all in Christ.

4. The Spirit's activity through Christians (rivers of living water) always relates people to the Good News of salvation in Jesus—the same living water that continually refreshes their own spirits. All of this is the Holy Spirit carrying out His life-renewing work! (See John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26–27; 16:5–15.)

5. The testimonies of faith and praise and service that flow from Christians are the means the Spirit uses to touch the hearts of others. Evangelism studies show that almost 90 percent of new Christians have found their way to Christ and the Church through the influence of friends and families, not through preachers and evangelists. Christ commissions all of us to the ministry of reconciliation! (See 2 Corinthians 5:18–21.) Ask your group to suggest practical ways in which they can let the living water flow to the world in its need.

The Old Testament Lesson: Numbers 11:24–30

6. As Moses himself indicated, it was probably jealousy for his master's position as the Lord's prophet to Israel that led Joshua to urge Moses to stop Eldad and Medad. Moses was not so concerned about a threat to his leadership. He knew who he was and that his authority rested squarely on the Lord's call. Instead of being insecure, he welcomed this evidence of the Lord's moving to help His people.

7. This incident teaches us that while the Lord does have individuals whom He has called and enabled for leadership, their ultimate purpose is to equip all of God's people for ministry in the power of the Spirit. (See Ephesians 4:11–16.) Sometimes powerful ministering arises in the Church from unlikely sources as the Spirit's gifts are given "to each one individually as He wills." (See 1 Corinthians 12:1–11.) We need to be open to the Lord's surprises.

8. Eldad's and Medad's receiving the Spirit along with the seventy elders says that the living water that Jesus offers is for any and all. It flows where God wills it to flow.

The Epistle for the Day: Acts 2:1–21

The Book of Acts is more a historical account than a letter, although it was written as a letter to Theophilus. It sometimes provides the Church with the Epistle for the Day—as well as being used occasionally instead of the Old Testament as the First Lesson.

9. The sound like a wind no doubt gave Jesus' gathered followers a clue to what was taking place, but it also attracted a crowd of people who heard it and were curious about what was happening.

10. The gift of the Spirit in the Upper Room on Easter Sunday was to enable them to believe the resurrection of Jesus and understand how it fit into God's saving plan. The outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost enabled them to be bold witnesses and empowered their witness to have impact on those who heard. It signaled a change in thrust. They were no longer watching the Lord carry out His saving mission; now they would be carrying out their mission in His name and by His power. It was the beginning of a new dimension in Jesus' ministry as He would now work through His faithful followers.

11. John the Baptist had pointed to the Greater One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Fire is a symbol of energy or power, able to warm or consume. We still use the flame of fire as a symbol of the Holy Spirit and His work.

12. Acts 1 lists the apostles and the women and speaks of 120 followers of Jesus in Jerusalem. It is not out of the question to think that all of these received the outpouring of the Spirit and praised God and declared His wonders in languages they had not known. This surely appears to be the thrust of the experience as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. That they were all together in the house indicates that they trusted Jesus' promise and were expectantly and prayerfully waiting for the gift the Father promised.

13. On the day of Pentecost, the gift of tongues was given for the purpose of communicating the Good News of Jesus in the mother tongues of the foreign Jews in Jerusalem. Its purpose was to call the attention of Jews from every nation to the Good News of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, as Savior and Lord! On Pentecost, Galilean Jews, who were generally considered to be country hicks, said things that spoke right to the hearts of those who heard because they were speaking the languages they had known from childhood, the languages they thought in. Later manifestations of the gift of tongues in places such as Corinth involved a more ecstatic, unintelligible speech. This edified the tongues-speaker by evidencing the Spirit's presence, but it did little for others, for they could not understand what was being said. Read all of Paul's apostolic instructions about tongues-speaking, which had been used divisively in Corinth—1 Corinthians 12–14.

14. Many in the crowd who heard the followers of Jesus speaking in this variety of languages were amazed and perplexed, but their curiosity and interest were deepened. "What does this mean?" they asked—and the Spirit had them ready to listen to Peter's explanation. As is usually the case, there were also those in Jerusalem on that day who had to make a joke of everything. They made fun of the tongues-speakers, saying, "They are filled with new wine."

Peter had to address such charges, and probably welcomed them, because he used them as an introduction and scriptural base for what he really wanted to tell the crowd. Notice that once he explained what was happening and backed it up with Scripture, he eagerly moved to the message about Jesus' resurrection, the message that makes all the difference in the world in any proclamation about Jesus as Savior and Lord. It is never enough to talk just about Jesus' life and His death on a cross. We are to witness to the living Lord, who comes in the power of the Holy Spirit to confront us and all around us with our need for Him and with the wonderful way in which He fills our need.

The message and effect of Pentecost then and now is that our daily lives may be lived *in Him* because He comes to live *in us*!

Lesson 2

Holy Trinity

Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 28:16–20

The Gospel accounts do not tell of Jesus' disciples worshipping Him in this way before His death and resurrection. But now they knelt before Him with heads bowed low, worshipping Jesus fully as God.

15. Matthew's "some doubted" brought a familiar human element into the occasion—one to which we can easily relate. There are many reasons they could have doubted: cynicism, stunned amazement, or confusion over what they'd really seen could have clouded their judgment.

16. Jesus' "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" says the divine power and majesty that always were His as the eternal Word are now extended also to His human nature. It is our brother Jesus who is the either/or person in the Kingdom, God's right-hand man in charge of everything for the benefit of His Body, the Church. The fact that Jesus, the God-man, has been exalted to God's right hand says His saving work was fully successful, fully accepted by the Father. He now rules all things for the blessing, benefit, and extension of His kingdom.

Help your group understand that "make disciples" is the key command and that to accomplish this, we are fully dependent on God's power. It is our task to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts through this Gospel, which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. (See Romans 1:16; 10:14–17.)

Fill-in Answers: The methods to be followed in discipling are baptizing and teaching. Both methods involve use of the dynamic Word of God, which is the active ingredient in the Means of Grace the Church is to utilize faithfully.

17. The name *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* points to God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier—God over us, for us, and in us. The name is a capsule that contains the whole truth of the Gospel, as the creeds imply. Calling Him the triune God not only expresses the mystery of the Three being One, but also says clearly that He is the one God of our salvation. The Sacraments add visible signs that touch individuals and personalize the Good News.

18. "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" implies that discipleship is more than believing that Jesus is the Savior. We are not to be content with elementary truths but are to grow in depth of understanding and application of the Word as it undergirds our faith and stimulates our Christian living. The Church's task is to make every Christian a "theologian" who can correctly apply Law and Gospel in his or her own life and in the lives of those around him or her. (See Hebrews 6:1–3.) Jesus backed up His command with the promise that He would be with His disciples always.

Without Jesus' presence and power in the Holy Spirit, the proclamation of the Gospel would lose its convicting and regenerating dynamic. Missionaries who leave home and family to carry the Gospel into other cultures and nations especially experience the reality of Jesus' promise. James Gilmour, nineteenth-century missionary to Mongolia, said, "No one who does not go away, leaving all and going alone, can feel the full force of this promise."

19. We are still challenged to go and disciple the world because the Church has tended to become inward-looking, serving its own needs instead of dedicating itself to mission. These verses challenge us to devote manpower, money, and technology to the task.

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 1:1–2:4a

The Book of Genesis is approached in a variety of ways by scholars. The Study Guide tries to state this in simple ways and give some of the reasons for it. Those who favor the traditional, conservative approach will feel at home with the view of the creation song being oral tradition by which God helped His people remember their Creator, which then was incorporated, under the guidance of the Spirit, by Moses into his writing. Remember, however, that also those who take a more liberal approach and question Mosaic authorship and literal meaning recognize Genesis and the creation song as part of the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament, see it providing God's inspired instruction for His people, and look to it for theological insights into life as God's children. Recognize that you can't solve all the questions about interpretation and approach in your class. Underscore the truth that this Old Testament Lesson is God's inspired, instructive Word also for us today.

20. The creation song has many key phrases that are repeated: "And God said, 'Let there be,'" "And it was so," "God saw that it was good," and "According to their kinds." The stanzas of the song begin with "And God said" and end with "there was evening and there was morning. . . ." The Hebrews reckoned their days from sunset to sunset, not from sunrise to sunrise. Whether this grew out of the tradition of the creation song or the song was written to reflect the Hebrew approach is hard to say.

21. The effective instrument in God's creative activity was His powerful, creating Word. God's Word is more than words. It is power to make things happen.

22. Sir James Jeans, an English scientist and a Christian, said, "The whole story of creation can be told in the six words, 'God said, Let there be light.'" He saw this as God supplying the cosmic energy that is the building block of the material world in its atomic structure.

23. Your group will easily recognize the progression: energy; atmosphere; landmasses; vegetation; sun, moon, stars; living creatures; man, the manager and caretaker.

24. "According to its kind" established the distinctions between kinds of animals and birds and limited reproduction to within the kind. That limit still applies today.

25. The account of the creation of man is not begun with "And God said, 'Let there be . . .'" as in preceding stanzas of the song. It describes God as "talking things over" beforehand, and says something about man that it does not say about anything else: that we were created "in the image of God." This change makes you sit up and take notice; the song has moved to its climax, its main point. The creation song and all of the Bible was written with man in mind—that we might know who we are, why we are here, where we are going, and how to get there.

26. "The image of God" cannot mean that man was designed to look like God, for God is spirit and has no material composition or appearance. It must mean that man was designed to be like God in having personality, with the full ability (in the original creation) to reflect God's holy personality in thought, word, and deed.

Ask yourself and your group: "How does the creation song make you feel?" Responses may range from "small and insignificant compared to the awesome Creator and His creation" to "important and secure in awareness of the Creator's intentions for mankind."

27. This lesson focuses on the One who has revealed Himself as the triune God in regard to His work as Creator and gives its own insight into why God was loving enough also to be Redeemer and Sanctifier.

The Epistle for the Day: Acts 2:14a, 22–36

28. The popular response to Jesus' miracles was one of high expectation—they showed Jesus to be the promised King who would restore Israel. This led the religious leaders to see Him as a threat to the status quo that gave them their positions of prominence and power. When Jesus did not fulfill their expectations of a political hero who would make Israel a prosperous and prominent independent nation, the crowds pointedly rejected Him and turned against Him as well. Peter said that all of this happened “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.”

29. It surely gives us added assurance as we trust Jesus for salvation to know that the momentous events that were the setting for His atonement for sin were not just happenstance, but were a fulfillment of God's saving purpose in human history. This does not make the principals involved just puppets mindlessly following God's script. They acted out of their own motivations, but according to God's will, His plan of salvation was being accomplished. Peter's saying “God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it” pointed to Jesus as the Son of God, the Author of life, for whom death was completely foreign.

30. Peter quoted Psalm 15 and Psalm 110 as “proof-texts” from Scripture, tying his witness to the authority of God's prophetic Word. We still want our preachers and teachers to be able to say, “Thus says the Lord.”

31. David was the Jews' hero of heroes. Pointing out that David still lay in his tomb while Jesus had risen emphasized Jesus' far greater importance for God's people than even David. David had been given the promise that one of his descendants would establish his throne forever. (See 2 Samuel 7:16–19, 25–29.) Peter's reference connected this prophecy of an eternal King to the man they themselves had acknowledged at times as the Son of David—whose identity was now fully established by His resurrection from the dead.

32. By emphasizing Jesus' exaltation to God's right hand and His being the one who poured out the Spirit, Peter brought the crowd beyond what had happened—Jesus' death and resurrection—to what was happening in their own experience. It was Jesus, risen and ruling from heaven, who was confronting them in this Pentecost event. Jesus did not rise just to die again at some later time, but to rule forever and to save eternally.

“Lord and Christ” referred to the expected Promised One, but they had reduced the promise to purely earthly expectations. Note the directness and boldness of Peter's preaching: “God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Lesson 3

Proper 3

*Eternal God, You counsel us not to be anxious about earthly things.
Keep alive in us a proper yearning for those heavenly treasures awaiting
all who trust in Your mercy, that we may daily rejoice in Your
salvation and serve You with constant devotion; 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: Matthew 6:24–34

33. With His “You cannot serve God and money,” Jesus says that we cannot focus our attention in two directions at the same time. We cannot serve both God and money, which represents every material thing we may need or want. It is a case of misplaced priorities. To the extent that we are anxious and fret about and focus on material things, we are not trusting and serving God. To the extent that we trust and serve God, we will set our hearts at rest and not worry and fret about our material needs and desires, but will let God determine what is right for us.

34. Jesus’ words remind us that our life itself and the bodies in which we live are the products of God’s creative hand. He is telling us that because it was God’s will to make us who and what we are, His essential creation, He will not neglect to supply us with the less important things, such as our daily needs.

35. Luther pictured the little birds as “living saints” who sing their praises to God without the least worry and are fed by Him day by day. If God takes care of the birds and flowers, surely we who are the Father’s very own children will be cared for and nourished far beyond our basic needs.

36. If we are concerned mainly about the length of our earthly lives and devote our energy to extending them, we may be overlooking the fact that this life is a prelude to eternity and that our days are in God’s hands. We might be agreeing with the world that this earthly life is all there is and we’d better hang on to it for as long as we can. We surely are wise to practice good health habits, but our purpose should be so we will be well and have the energy to serve God and others more effectively. If we are just focused on this life for our own enjoyment, it may mean we have not learned to appreciate the Life that is life indeed.

37. To enjoy forgiveness and the promise of eternal life surely is at the heart of our faith, but our trust may be enlarged by learning to relate God’s gracious will to every aspect of living. In his explanation of the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Luther offers the insight that our need for trusting God and seeking His direction moves well beyond food and clothing. (See also Philippians 4:4–7; James 4:13–16; 5:13–15.)

38. When we worry about and run after material things, we act like “the Gentiles,” the nations, or the pagans. We are acting like unbelievers. The antidote is to remember that our heavenly Father knows what we need and how to provide it. Earlier, Jesus said the Father knows even before we ask Him. Because He has supplied our greatest need in His Son, our Savior, how will He possibly withhold from us our lesser needs? (See Romans 8:31–32.) When we thus trust our heavenly Father and fully appreciate that our greatest need is to live in relationship with Him, we will make it our aim to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness as the focus of our whole lives. Seeking first His kingdom means more than serving God in worship on the Lord’s Day—leaving six days that are “ours” in which to pursue our own goals. It means more than giving the Lord His first share of

income, His tithes—leaving the rest of our income to be our own, to use to serve us as we desire. We belong entirely to God, and that is a great comfort, for He will surely take care of His own.

39. Worrying about tomorrow implies that how you will fare tomorrow depends solely on your abilities or on your enjoying fortunate circumstances. Christian stewardship plans for tomorrow but with a sense of priority, putting God's kingdom first and trusting the One who has brought us into His kingdom.

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 49:8–16a

Fill-in Answers: In this lesson, the Servant is told that in the day of His favor and salvation, the Lord had answered Him and helped Him and would keep Him and give Him as a covenant to the people.

40. The promises given to the exiles through the covenant embodied in the Servant were restoration of the Promised Land and reassignment of tribal inheritances; food beside the roads and pasture on barren hills; no hunger or thirst; no oppressive desert heat; the Lord's guidance to springs of water; leveling of the land for convenient travel; newcomers from all around will join them. Like many Old Testament promises of the restoration of Judah to a time of prominence, this is best seen as eschatological in character, pointing to the gathering of *all* of the *spiritual Israel* from all the nations of the world. The Promised One, the Messiah, is the Servant of the Lord through whom all of this will be accomplished.

Fill-in Answers: Isaiah called on all creation to rejoice because “the LORD has comforted His people and will have compassion on His afflicted.”

41. These words pointed to the time when Jerusalem and the temple would lie in ruins. They suggest that Jerusalem and the temple themselves were lamenting with the people—wavering in trust, convinced that the Lord had forsaken and forgotten them.

42. The Lord is committed to remembering His people. He takes His assurance of the validity of His promise a step further by picturing Himself as having engraved them on the palms of His hands. The analogy is, of course, anthropomorphic, but it strongly puts forth the permanency of the Lord's commitment.

43. This lesson says, “Be confident. The Lord won't forget you.” The Holy Gospel says, “Don't worry. Keep your focus. The Lord knows your needs and will provide.”

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 1:8–17

Fill-in Answers: Paul wanted to impart some spiritual gift to strengthen them, so that they and he might be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

44. The reference is to 1 Corinthians 1:18–25. Paul knew from experience the frequent negative reaction to the message of the Gospel by stubborn Jews and skeptical Greeks, but he also knew from experience that the Gospel of Jesus is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24) and “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

45. That this blessing was first for the Jew, then for the Gentile, was appropriate not only in terms of time but also in terms of privilege. “Salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22), and the Messiah is a Jew. As they were God's covenant people, God's revelation of grace had come to them. They were the appropriate ones to hear the Good News of Jesus first. The privilege was not a result of their superior merit, but a result of God's gracious plan for them and for mankind. It was necessary that the invasion of the world by the Gospel begin at a particular point with a particular people, who in turn were responsible for carrying that Gospel to the other nations.

Fill-in Answers: The theme that Paul stated: “In [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith.”

46. Many of the Christians in the Church in Rome were Jewish Christians. It would be particularly meaningful to them that Paul base the theme of his message to them on a quotation from their sacred Scriptures. Here he quoted from the prophecy of Habakkuk, the first of many references to the Old Testament Scriptures in Romans: “The righteous shall live by faith,” or, as it may be translated, “Those who are righteous through faith shall live.”

Lesson 4

Proper 4

Lord of all power and might, author and giver of all good things, instill in our hearts the love of Your name, impress on our minds the teachings of Your Word, and increase in our lives all that is holy and just; 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: Matthew 7:15–29

Fill-in Answers: Jesus warned against false prophets and said they may be recognized by their fruits.

47. It would be easy to say that their “fruit” is their lifestyle—and a Christian lifestyle is surely to be expected of anyone who is a Christian teacher. But a lifestyle may be a veneer that covers insincerity, which only God can judge. It may also be that a religious teacher is sincere in what he teaches and displays a lifestyle that is consistent with his teaching, but he is teaching what is inconsistent with the Gospel. John says we are not to just “believe every spirit,” but are to “test the spirits” for their authenticity as they relate to the Gospel (1 John 4:1). What a teaching does to the person and work of Christ is the key.

48. The Greek suggests an abuse of freedom that has become license willfully to do our will instead of God’s—covered by a facade of religiosity.

49. Jesus’ illustration about the two houses encourages us to take our Christian discipleship seriously and not “receive the grace of God in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1; see also 1 Corinthians 15:10). At the same time, He warns against playing fast and loose, honoring God with our lips, but keeping our hearts and our lives from really being His. (See Mark 7:6–8.)

50. Jewish rabbis and scribes taught by explaining the interpretations of the great leaders of their schools of thought, just as we quote Bible interpreters. Our entire theology is based on inspired words of others, the apostles and prophets—and must be. Jesus, however, spoke out of His own authority as the Son of God. He basically said, “My teaching is not My own, but His who sent Me,” but He was also ready to say, “It was said by them of old . . . but I say to you . . .” The sense of authority in Jesus’ teaching amazed the people of His day and thrills us—for He announces Good News and calls us to a new life in the Spirit.

51. Jesus’ person and His Word are intimately related in that He did not call people just to accept ideas or theological formulations, but to accept Him and relate to Him as Savior and Lord. As we relate to Him, there is always the evangelical imperative to imitate His radical love. If He is our Lord as well as our Savior, we cannot ignore His call to a new lifestyle as His disciples.

52. The two basic expectations Jesus lays on His disciples are “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12) and “Go, and bring the Good News to the nations.” He expects our relating to His love as our Savior to open our hearts to all the needs of those around us, whom He loves just as He loves us.

The Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 11:18–21, 26–28

53. “Lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul” urges memorizing the Word. (See Proverbs 2:1–5.) The Word is surely accessible to us in many ways, but it becomes ours when we treasure it up within ourselves. Then it is not only accessible but influential.

54. Hands represent our strength; foreheads signify our thinking capability. Both are to find their guidance and their source of power in the Word of God.

55. Unless parents teach their children faith and discipleship as part of their everyday living, children may get the idea that faith is something separate from real life. When synagogues became centers of the faith and study of the Word, the rabbis assisted parents in the formal education of their sons, much as instruction of boys and girls is part of the program of our churches today. But only parental instruction and example will make the Good News of Jesus fully applicable to life. A survey of Lutheran homes revealed that in 20 percent, parents talked with their children about God and Jesus and led devotions and prayers; in another 20 percent, there was occasional talk about church and what goes on there; in 60 percent, the only “God-talk” was in the formal setting of the church service. Is this behind the problem of dropouts in churches?

Psalm 121:8 promises, “The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in.” Going out into the world and returning to the security of home and family describes daily activity. Moses’ “write them on the doorposts” encourages us to take the Lord with us and enjoy awareness of His companionship in our discipleship always and everywhere.

56. Moses encouraged obedience to his recommendations so “that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.” Stability and security become the hallmarks of such a society.

57. Modern Christians still find it helpful to memorize Scripture, hymns, and prayers, just as the ancients did; we read Bible history to our children and grandchildren and even use video presentations of this; we wear items of jewelry and adorn the walls and the entries of our houses with Christian symbols and sayings.

58. Moses’ “a blessing and a curse” points to the personal responsibility of each individual to be decisive about God’s Word. When we make the Word a vital part of our everyday living, we enjoy the blessing of continual awareness of our faith and fellowship in Christ. When we deal with the Word only sporadically, the continuity of our relationship with the Lord becomes shallow and ultimately is threatened completely. The Word is a Means of Grace. It makes our lives the site of the Holy Spirit’s saving work. Also material blessings may result, as verses 13–17 indicate.

59. In the Gospel, Jesus essentially said, “Don’t just hear, but do!” This Old Testament Lesson encourages taking the Word into every part of our lives.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 3:21–28

Paul said clearly that by works of the Law, no human being will be justified in God’s sight.

Fill-in Answers: God’s own answer is a righteousness of God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. This is truly righteousness apart from the 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.

60. 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 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 being 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.”

61. **Fill-in Answer:** 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. “Good people” do not qualify for eternal life by keeping 75 percent of the Law any more than “bad people” who keep only 25 percent, or 10 percent, or 5 percent. Since the gift of God’s grace in Christ is the only way to salvation and it is offered to “good” and “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 called it “the chief part of the New Testament, truly the purest Gospel.”

62. The redeemed and justified, tied in faith and love to the Redeemer, become His disciples. We want to receive the Spirit of our Master and want nothing more than to do the will of our Savior. (See Romans 12:1–2; Colossians 3:12–17; 1 John 4:19–21.)

Lesson 5

Proper 5

Almighty and most merciful God, You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to seek and to save the lost. Graciously open our ears and our hearts to hear His call and to follow Him by faith that we may feast with Him forever in His kingdom; 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: Matthew 9:9–13

63. That Matthew had become a tax collector shows that he had fallen from faith and hope in the messianic promises. He was making the best of a bad situation for himself. He was now focused on getting rich, as the evident size of his house indicates, even at the cost of being ostracized. Jesus knew the deep needs of mankind and came to fill those needs. He knew the deepest need of Matthew; He loved Matthew and wanted Matthew to find new life in Him. Jesus truly is the Friend of sinners. By grace, He is our Friend too.

Matthew probably had his tax booth in or near Capernaum and exacted the Roman toll on commerce traveling on the Way of the Sea, the trade route from Damascus that passed near Capernaum and then north and west to the cities on the Mediterranean coast. He was educated and multilingual—and no doubt had heard the gossip about the prophet from Nazareth who was doing all those miraculous signs. Matthew was decisive, as may be seen from his becoming a tax collector when he gave up on the covenant faith. Perhaps he had gone to hear Jesus for himself. Now, when confronted by the Fulfiller of the covenant, he responded to the opportunity decisively.

64. Give your group a chance to tell how their work is influenced by being disciples of Jesus. (See Colossians 3:23–24.)

65. Matthew wanted his friends, the only ones who would still socialize with him, to get to know Jesus as he had. The phrase “tax collectors and ‘sinners’” had come to mean those who had openly broken with the faith, ceremonially or morally. Matthew felt that Jesus’ love and acceptance would mean the same to them as it did to him. The comment about friendship evangelism is significant. We need to continue to cultivate friendships with people outside the Church; by entertaining them in our homes and other social settings, we open ourselves to opportunities the Holy Spirit may give us to witness to Jesus and to invite them to church with us.

Fill-in Answers: When the Pharisees complained about Jesus’ association with those who didn’t value and practice the faith—addressing the complaint to His disciples, as if to say, “And you follow such an unsavory master?”—Jesus quoted, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.”

66. In our setting today, God might say, “I want you to show active love to your neighbor, not be content to practice your religion only in church on Sunday mornings.”

67. One modern version paraphrases Jesus’ words this way: “I did not come to congratulate ‘righteous’ people, but to call sinners to repentance.” His words incisively force us to examine our self-righteousness and see that it does not stand up under God’s scrutiny. When we admit our sin and need, we are glad to hear His call. We must deal honestly with our sin; otherwise, His offer as the Savior from sin will not have its full impact, and we will not really be looking to Him for forgiveness and renewal.

68. There are many good people in our society who are good purely for humanistic reasons and are applauded by others who look only at outward performance and cannot judge motives. Self-dependence and self-satisfaction make it as hard to accept the Good News of a Savior from sin as it was for the Pharisees. That's why the name and the message of Jesus are scorned by so many who have adopted the outlook of secular humanism. They see "trying to be good and honest and helpful" as enough to satisfy God—if they are ready to bring God into the picture at all.

69. We increase our awareness of our sin and need by looking honestly into the mirror of God's Law. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) forces us to look beyond the outward to examine also our thoughts and motives. Thus we see that the problem is deep within us. We are by nature sinful and need the Spirit's cleansing and renewal.

The Old Testament Lesson: Hosea 5:15–6:6

70. The Lord's purpose in bringing misery on His covenant people always was corrective. He wanted them to acknowledge their guilt and earnestly seek Him. It's the same with His discipline in our lives. He wants to strengthen our ties to Him, but sometimes He pursues this by withdrawing until we earnestly seek Him. (See Hebrews 12:4–13.)

71. Hosea's assurance was that the One who tore to pieces and injured will heal and bind up wounds. The two phrases go together to say that God's help will not be delayed but will come at just the right time in His plan for us.

72. The area known as Israel is very dependent on these seasonal rains. But Israel had become involved in pagan worship of fertility gods as the source of the rainfall. Now, in assuring them that the Lord would respond to their returning to Him, the prophet used the rain as the picture of the Lord's appearing to them. He, not the pagan gods, was the true source of blessing for them.

73. With these words, the Lord was judging Israel's inconstancy. Their professions of love for Him were as short-lived as the morning clouds and dew—disappointing to the One whose love for them is as sure as the sun and the rain. In the inconstancy of Israel, we readily see ourselves and our sometimes short-lived repentance and enthusiasm.

74. What disappoints the Lord most is a heartless, perfunctory grinding out of religion without it influencing lives and producing loving interaction with those in need. The temple rituals were being carried out, but at the same time, the Israelites were dabbling in paganism, and the affluent in this time of prosperity were oppressing the poor and the weak—all the while telling themselves they were God's people. Sound familiar? The Lord's words through Hosea surely make us examine our approach to God and correct any lack of active mercy toward the world's needy.

75. If we are ready to look behind circumstances, we will see the hand of our heavenly Father. He does not cause evil and calamity, but He does permit it to come—always with the assurance that He will be with us to help us find our way through it and come out stronger on the other side. (See 1 Corinthians 10:13.) Your group may be willing to share some personal experiences of this. Be ready to lead the way.

76. The obvious tie to today's Holy Gospel is Jesus' quotation from Hosea: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13).

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 4:13–25

77. The Law arouses God's wrath against sin when the Law is broken, and it arouses wrath in the sinner who is confronted with demands that are beyond his ability to obey. The Law doesn't say, "Believe this, agree with it." It says, "Do this. Don't do that." God cannot just arbitrarily change that—which is why His Son had to fulfill the Law for us and suffer for our sins to provide atonement. A saying has it that "God's justice and His mercy met at the cross of Jesus, and both went away satisfied." Nor can we arbitrarily change the Law into a softer "Try to be good." A relationship based only on Law and obedience is frustrated from the outset. Works-

righteousness glorifies the works-worker. Faith based on God's grace and mercy in Christ builds a living relationship that enlightens the believer and glorifies God.

78. Abraham faced the "hopeless situation" of his body and Sarah's womb being "as good as dead," yet he was called on to believe God's promise that he would be the "father of many nations," which is what *Abraham* means. He had to count on God's giving "life to the dead" so the promise would be fulfilled.

79. The review of the Genesis passages that tell of Abraham's questioning, God's strengthening, and Abraham's willing obedience in the face of testing helps us see that there is a difference between faithless skepticism and questioning that marvels at and struggles with the wonder of the promise. Abraham also shows us clearly that faith is more than believing. It is *acting* on the promises of God.

80. Our Lord was delivered over to death for our sins, which He carried in His body to the cross (1 Peter 2:24). He is the Lamb of God, the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world (1 John 2:1-2).

81. Paul makes it clear that a dead hero will not suffice to take away our sins. Unless Jesus arose from the dead in victory, our faith is futile.

Lesson 6

Proper 6

*Almighty, eternal God, in the Word of Your apostles and prophets
You have proclaimed to us Your saving will. Grant us faith to believe
Your promises that we may receive eternal salvation; 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 9:35–10:20

82. The elements that made up Jesus' ministry were teaching, preaching, and healing. Together they displayed God's loving concern in His kingdom for people, body and soul. Preaching and teaching are two sides of the same effort to bring God's Word to people. Preaching is proclamation, announcing truth, and calling for a proper reaction. Teaching is explaining the truth, aiding understanding, and application. Jesus was motivated in His hands-on ministry to those in need by deep feelings of compassion. *Compassion* means "to suffer with."

83. The Greek words for "harassed" and "helpless" are descriptive of sheep that have been torn and scratched by thorns and rocks in their aimless wanderings and are so exhausted that they finally just lie there. Jesus' concern was to be the Shepherd through whom the people would enjoy true guidance and find real meaning in life. Millions of economic and political refugees combine with the needy and oppressed to fit the picture of the "harassed and helpless." Also, in our affluent society, many have poor relationships with those with whom they should be closest, and this is exacerbated by their busy attempts to get ahead or just to keep up by pursuing things that have no lasting value. Anxiety, depression, stress, and so on abound as people seem to have everything but don't have the hope and confidence of life in God's kingdom.

It is appropriate to ask the Lord of the harvest for workers because it is His harvest. He is really the one who sows the seed that produces the grain, and He is the one who calls and motivates and enables workers to bring in the harvest that belongs to Him.

84. A ministry that focused on the lost sheep of Israel was appropriate at that time, for Jesus had come as the promised Messiah. It was fitting that the announcement of the kingdom of heaven being near be carried first to those who were the children of the covenant. Jesus, too, dealt primarily with His own people and only occasionally and incidentally with Gentiles. It was after He had completed His saving work that the commission became "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). The message of the apostles was to be the very same as that of John the Baptist and of Jesus Himself: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

85. With His "You received without paying; give without pay," Jesus was underscoring the grace, the undeserved love, that is the basis of life in the Kingdom. New life in Christ is God's free gift; it is to be offered on that basis to others. No true apostle will "merchandise" the Gospel for personal material gain. We, the Church of today, are apostolic only when we see that we have been sent and are in fact proclaiming the Gospel we have been sent to proclaim. Their personal needs, their "keep," was to be supplied by those who received and hosted them. Preaching and teaching God's message of salvation always confronts the hearer with an either/or responsibility to decide. We are free to say "No," but it is God's Spirit who calls us to and enables our "Yes."

86. Our assignment today is different from that of the apostles in this Holy Gospel in that it extends to all peoples. The message is different in that it proclaims a completed work of salvation through Jesus' death and

resurrection. Being shrewd or clever may help you gain a hearing for the message; being innocent leads you to trust the power of the message and not try to trick people into a response that is not from God's work within them.

87. Paul's words support the propriety of the Church providing a living for those it wants to work full time in Gospel ministry, which is offered freely to all. Advantages: a theologically educated and trained clergy with time for ministering to people. Dangers: a laity that lets the "hired hand" do the ministering; a clergy that does a job instead of carrying out a calling, that may become authoritarian, and that is not above bargaining for more money.

The Old Testament Lesson: Exodus 19:2–8

88. In calling Abraham, Yahweh was clearly the initiator of the covenant—and here He reminds Israel of "what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself." Throughout Israel's history, the exodus was pointed to as the pivotal act by which the Lord made Israel His own. The unilateral covenant had to become a bilateral covenant through Israel's faith and obedience if it was going to be meaningful to them. Israel's response was to be a commitment to obey the Lord fully and keep His covenant. As they kept the covenant, they were assured that they were Yahweh's chosen people, His treasured possession out of all the nations. Their being "a kingdom of priests" implies that each one of them would be consecrated to the Lord's service in personal faith and devotion; their being "a holy nation" says they would be set apart from, different from, other nations.

89. Speaking for their people, the elders said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." The people's enthusiasm was short-lived. With Moses on the mountain interacting with the Lord, the people defected and wanted more "manageable," less threatening gods to worship. Their history is the story of repeated defections, God punishing them to bring them to their senses, their repentance, and the Lord accepting them again in forgiving love. We easily see ourselves in them. God's determination to act in love to rescue His people from the sin that hurts them and their relationship with Him does not waver. He is true to Himself, so He is always true to His promise. He yearns for His people when they wander from Him and is always ready to receive them when they return.

90. God has extended His covenant of grace to us through the Good News of Jesus and has personalized that Good News through the interactions of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We have responded as we grew in appreciation of His grace and love and committed ourselves to love and serve Him. The rite of confirmation focuses us on the gift of understanding and commitment. His gift of rebirth by water and the Spirit commits us to new lives. (See Romans 6:1–14.) Like Israel, we often fail to live up to our side of this covenant with the Lord Jesus. But we may continually come to our Lord to hear Him confirm and reconfirm His covenant of grace with us. We may renew it continually in personal ways throughout life, but in this process it is always vital to remember that He is the initiator and our responses are built on the assurance of His gracious love. (See 1 Peter 2:9–12.)

91. God became Israel's loving Shepherd in the covenant at Sinai; Jesus' sending of His apostles with the Good News of the Kingdom initiated the new covenant with the new Israel—which would include people from all nations.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 5:6–15

92. Justification—our being declared right with God through Jesus' atoning death—is the base on which we are to grow in a living relationship with God as our loving, heavenly Father. *Salvation* has as its root meaning in the "healing" of our relationship with Him. Thus healed, we are motivated and enabled by His grace to learn to love and serve Him and those around us happily. That Jesus is alive, ruling all things, and sending the Holy Spirit to us enables that continuing process in us. If He were dead, we might still think His death had won forgiveness for us, but the dynamic of His presence with us would be missing. We would be on our own in the matter of learning to live in relation to Him.

93. The word *reconciliation* describes a two-sided relationship. God looks at us in love through Jesus; we rejoice and enjoy our relationship with Him through Jesus. Religion makes people fear God. Christian faith, hope, and love take us beyond fear to enjoy living as children of a heavenly Father, brothers and sisters of His Son, Jesus (1 John 4:7–21).

We all know about sins. We see them in our lives and in the lives of others every day. But understanding sin as original sin, humanity separated from God by self-will and self-determination—man making himself his god—is not as easy for us.

Adam, in his position as the man created in God’s image, has been described as “the federal head of mankind.” As federal head, his act of rebellion and disobedience thus has affected and infected all who follow him. Jesus, the “Second Adam,” became the new “federal head of mankind.” His righteous human life, His carrying humanity’s sin in His body and vicariously suffering the deadly consequences, and His rising from the dead as “the firstfruits of those who sleep” have obtained new life with God for all—and effectuate that new life with God in those who are led by the power of the Holy Spirit to believe.

94. The people between Adam, who disobeyed God’s direct command, and Moses, through whom God provided His people with the Ten Commandments, were without a specific Law from God. They developed their own law codes, of course—political and religious. As Paul explained earlier, they were “a law to themselves,” evidencing that God had “written on their hearts” the basic principles of right and wrong (Romans 2:14–15). Here Paul stated that those who had not received God’s specific commands did experience the effect of sin in the fact that they died—“death reigned from Adam to Moses.”

95. One purpose achieved in God’s giving the Law in specific commands—and the Law’s continuing first effect—is that sinners become conscious of their sin and its consequences. This does not stop sinners from sinning. Paul even suggests that the commands stimulate the sinful nature to rebel all the more. (See Romans 7:7–11.) But the Law does force sinners to deal with sin as sin and thus makes them look for the solution to the problem of sin and death outside the Law and outside themselves, for they are sinners and Law breakers. Thus it prepares people for the grace of God in Christ.

96. Adam was a pattern or type (*tupos*) of Christ in that he was confronted with sin while fully in the image of God, just as Jesus was. Adam entertained the devil’s temptations and willfully disobeyed his Creator. Jesus was confronted by Satan’s temptations and rejected them in willing obedience to His Father.

97. The significant difference between the contribution of Adam, “the trespass,” and the contribution of Jesus Christ, “the free gift,” is that Adam’s trespass led to condemnation and death for all and Jesus’ gift led to justification and life for all. That surely is the significant difference for us who suffer under Adam’s legacy of original sin but have been redeemed and rescued through Jesus’ free gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

Lesson 7

Proper 7

O God, because Your abiding presence always goes with us, keep us aware of Your daily mercies that we may live secure and content in Your eternal love; 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: Matthew 10:5a, 21–33

98. “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (v. 7) is a summary statement of the Gospel, pointing to the One who brought it near through His incarnation and His redemptive life and death and resurrection. It makes those who hear it immediately responsible for an either/or decision about Jesus as Savior. Many, in their self-righteousness or in their disinterest, don’t want to hear about needing a Savior.

99. A disciple who not only brings the message of Jesus but also displays the spirit he has caught from Jesus can expect the same reaction Jesus experienced. Some will receive him and be blessed; others will reject him and even oppose him. The disciple accepts this willingly because he has chosen to imitate his teacher in every way. The servant (slave) has no choice but to represent his master as the master requires. Both pictures apply to a Christian as he represents Jesus. When the world responds to the disciple or servant in the same way it would respond to Jesus Himself, it indicates that the disciple or servant is being a faithful representative of Jesus.

100. The truth will come out. Evil deeds done in secret eventually will be exposed; evil teachings will eventually be known for what they are. Many have found this to be true in human society, to their chagrin. How much more will it be true when the glorious Son of Man exposes all evil with His divine judgment! The truth of the Gospel is hidden from natural human understanding, but it is revealed as God’s own truth as the Holy Spirit opens the hearts and minds of those who believe—and it will receive its ultimate revelation when the King appears for all to see in His full glory.

101. “Say in the light” and “proclaim on the housetops” encouraged the disciples, who had been instructed by Jesus largely in private, to see that their message was to be broadcast publicly. To us today it would say, “Don’t engage in ‘God-talk’ only when you are safe in church; the message of Jesus needs to be part of your daily conversation in all of life, with your family and, as the Spirit gives opportunity, with your friends and co-workers.”

102. Jesus offered His apostles positive assurance through hyperboles: not a sparrow falls except by God’s will; the hairs of their heads were numbered.

Help your group see the difference between “personal” and “private” and explain that the Greek word for “witness,” *marturia*, has come into English word as our word *martyr*.

103. A Christian’s public declaration of belonging to Jesus is compromised when anything and everything is allowed to become a reason for not joining the Christian fellowship in public worship on the Lord’s Day or when his lifestyle and language are not consistent with the faith he professes. Such circumstances become a public rejection of the Lord when they persist despite warnings and admonitions of fellow Christians or when invitations to be personally involved in the congregation’s life of worship, witness, and service are continually rejected. At some point, the body of Christians, a congregation, may have to declare publicly that the way of Christ has been rejected or forsaken by such individuals and that they are no longer acknowledging Christ or

being recognized as members of the church. Church discipline always aims at helping church members respond to the either/or call of Christ in a consistent, participatory life as members of the Body of Christ.

104. Give your group a chance to offer personal testimony about how their identification with Jesus is seen and heard. Be ready to participate yourself.

The Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 20:7–13

Fill-in Answers: Jeremiah complained that the Lord had deceived him. The Hebrew word may also be translated “seduced” or “enticed.” The word of the Lord that he had to proclaim had brought him only reproach and derision. Jeremiah was blaming the Lord for his problems.

105. Jeremiah described his compulsion, which would not let him rest until he proclaimed the Lord’s message, as a burning fire in his heart and in his bones.

106. Jeremiah invited the One who tests the righteous and sees the heart and the mind, examining motives and thoughts, to see that he really desired to serve the Lord, and he asked the Lord to recognize the evil motives that prompted his opponents. Could we be that bold in inviting God’s scrutiny of our discipleship?

We can all relate to Jeremiah’s ups and downs—though his situation surely was more extreme than what we experience as we try to represent the Lord to our world. Take the time to read verses 14–18 with your group. They are a classic statement of someone so depressed that he wishes he had never been born. It helps us to see that we, too, may openly acknowledge also our down times as we communicate and plead with the Lord. Even more significant is the fact that the only relief Jeremiah felt was when he got the “fire” out of his system by proclaiming his prophetic message. When our faith is at a low ebb, that can be part of our recovery too—getting ourselves to do what we should be doing in Jesus’ name, even if we don’t feel like doing it at the time.

107. Jeremiah’s experience relates directly to the rejection and opposition Jesus predicted His apostles would experience. Jeremiah’s words of faith and hope relate to Jesus’ assurance of His Father’s care and His own acknowledging before His Father of those who acknowledge Him publicly.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 6:12–23

That we live in a state of grace, won for us through the suffering and death of our Lord for our sins, in itself has to compel us to take the new life of discipleship seriously and not let it become a “cheap grace.” We are to kill our sinful desires. We should not fool ourselves, however—the sinful nature does not die easily. We make progress as we live in Christ, continually plugged into the Word and Sacrament, through which the Holy Spirit works in us to lead us to live out our forgiveness and renewal by catching more deeply the spirit of our Master as His disciples.

108. We are physical people, and our bodies have their needs and desires that bring a sense of satisfaction when fulfilled—and they pursue that satisfaction of needs and desires. In a sense, our bodies are very selfish as they see to it that we are feeling good and satisfied. Because of our sinful nature, this pursuit of satisfaction can become *the* purpose in life. Materialism (pursuit of things) and hedonism (pursuit of pleasures) can indeed become our gods. Bodily discipline is encouraged by Paul as a way to avoid serving sin and living always with a view toward God. Focusing on the positive is vital in overcoming the negative in this regard. Ascetics soon discover that staying away from the world does not solve the problem and that a severe regimen of bodily discipline may itself become a god that seeks to earn righteousness and thus takes the focus away from God and His supply of all things to enjoy properly.

109. Being under the Law and turning to it for help in not letting sin reign in our bodies may influence some of our outward performance, but it will not give us the new hearts that we need to do this effectively. The Law will continually expose our failure and may even lead to the point at which we say, “What’s the use of trying?” Living under grace, on the other hand, frees us from the burden of sin and its consequences and gives us ready access to our heavenly Father with the assurance that He will receive us and bless us continually. Only the grace of God and the love of Christ will effectively break the rule of sin by leading us to something better—offering ourselves in responsive love to God for the new life to which He calls us and in which He blesses us.

110. In the final analysis, only the power of the Holy Spirit can enable us to make progress toward our goal of offering ourselves in willing slavery to righteousness and thus lead us to holiness. The Holy Spirit works in our lives by testifying to Jesus Christ, our Savior, through the Good News. It is as we hear the Word and receive the Sacrament, as we remember our Baptism and its significance, as we are encouraged in faith and life by fellow Christians, and as we devote ourselves to the Word and to prayer that the Spirit's dynamic is at work in our lives to accomplish God's purposes in us. (See Romans 8:9–14; 2 Corinthians 3:17–18; Ephesians 4:11–16; Colossians 3:16.)

111. Wages are earned and lead to a focus on the wage-earner. A gift, in order to remain a gift, must be received freely, and it focuses on the giver. Sin makes us focus on ourselves—our wants and our will. Receiving the gift of salvation from God lifts our sights to focus on the heavenly Giver, so that whatever we do, we do it to His glory.

Lesson 8

Proper 8

Almighty God, by the working of Your Holy Spirit, grant that we may gladly hear Your Word proclaimed among us and follow its directing; 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: Matthew 10:34–42

112. Jesus' saying that He came to bring a sword—Luke has “division” (12:51)—emphasized that faith in Him must be decisive and lead to discipleship in which relationship with Him is foremost. A Christian witness in word and lifestyle may have a judging effect on those who reject Jesus and His call and thus may produce tensions and animosity.

113. Jesus' quoting of Micah showed His disciples that friction resulting from one's relationship with Jesus will be felt most keenly right within a family that is divided over Him. In that situation, Jesus said, “A person's enemies will be those of his own household.” When there is division within a family over Jesus, the Christian needs to witness by loving deeds and lifestyle rather than by “nagging” words, asking the Holy Spirit to be operative in the situation to provide the right setting also for a spoken witness. Then, when the Spirit provides the opportunity, the Christian needs to be ready to speak clearly and earnestly. There is always the danger of allowing a quiet witness to slip into just going along with a negative situation. When that happens, the Christian's own faith and discipleship are threatened, and his witness is negated.

114. Jesus was asserting His priority even over life's good things and important relationships. Usually Jesus enhances such relationships. But as important as familial affection is, love for Jesus displayed in a life consistent with the faith is the primary responsibility of disciples and must be given priority when it is threatened.

115. The “cross” does not refer to problems and hardships that are just a part of life in an imperfect world—illnesses, accidents, losses, and the like. A cross is what a disciple carries because of his relationship with Jesus—self-denial, loving and forgiving in Jesus' name even when not inclined to, standing up and being counted as a disciple at the risk of opposition and rejection, and so on. If you soft-pedal faith and witness and just blend in, the cross is not noticeable; but if you are faithful in worship and witness, as the Spirit gives opportunity, the reactions and attitudes and actions of others may become a cross to carry. The priority place He has in our lives should be consistent with His priority place in our faith.

116. The Jews loved *mashals*, cryptic statements that required chewing on and digesting to fully appreciate the point they were making. “Find” life by making this earthly life and all it affords the primary focus of your search and you end up “losing” the life quality that really matters. “Lose” life by keeping earthly life and all it affords secondary to the primary “seeking of His kingdom and righteousness” and you “find” life—in which also “all these other things” are received as gracious gifts of your heavenly Father in His provident love.

117. Those who receive Jesus' disciples as they bring them the Gospel receive also Jesus and His Father. Jesus had just told His disciples that He was sending them out “as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matthew 10:16). They needed reassurance as His representatives that He meant it when He told them, “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20) and “The one who hears you hears Me” (Luke 10:16).

118. Receiving a prophet or a righteous man means being hospitable and providing for his needs, but more than that, it means honoring his faith and work and providing encouragement and support for his ministry.

119. The reward received is the same as that received by the prophet—the satisfaction of thus having a part in Jesus and His saving ministry. The righteous man’s reward is essentially the same—the blessing of walking on the way with Jesus. No gift given in love is negligible in the eyes of our loving Lord.

The Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 28:5–9

Fill-in Answers: Because the prophets were sent by the Lord to call a wayward people to repentance, Jeremiah said, their messages warned of war, famine, and pestilence if the faithless, rebellious ways continued. Professional prophets are always tempted to scratch the itching ears of those who pay their salaries.

120. Jeremiah said that it is only when predictions come true that prophecies are validated. Time did validate his message. In 597 BC, Judah was conquered and made a vassal state of the Babylonians. Ten years later, as a result of an unwise rebellion against Babylon as an ally of Egypt, Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed.

121. As we look to a future that is under God’s gracious guidance and blessing, we surely must be optimistic for those who are the Body of Christ in the world. He will not forsake us and will ultimately take all who belong to Him into the eternal kingdom. In the meanwhile, we can be assured of His strengthening presence in all our needs. At the same time, however, if we look honestly at our world and listen carefully to the instruction of Holy Scripture, we will not imagine that there will be some kind of millennialistic golden era in which the Church will have major, universal influence on the world. The kingdom of our Lord will continue to be a spiritual kingdom—“in the midst of you” (Luke 17:21)—and the Lord’s “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14) will continue to be the Church’s experience until the end.

122. Jeremiah had to take a decisive stand against the wishful predictions of “peace, peace.” Similarly, Jesus said that His coming into the lives of individuals would produce a sword and division instead of peace, requiring His disciples to take a stand and carry their crosses.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 7:1–13

123. We have died to the Law through the death and resurrection of Christ. He, the Second Adam, became representative man for us, lived in full accord with God’s holy will for mankind, gave Himself into suffering and death to atone for our sins, and rose again to new life. In Him, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. We have been set free from the deadly effect of the Law so we may belong to another. We are freed to “marry” God’s grace and so may serve in the new life of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

124. Paul said, “If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin,” and he concluded, that the law makes us recognize sin, “in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.” We might think that the Law would lead to good behavior, but the sinful nature opposes everything that God commands and makes the opposite behavior appear appealing. We hear the commands of the Law and might think, “I won’t think and act that way anymore.” Our sinful nature says, “Oh, really?” and we end up entertaining the very thoughts and actions we wanted to avoid. Paul says, “Our sinful passions, aroused by the law, . . . bear fruit for death.” Paul refers to what we number as the Ninth and Tenth commandments—“You shall not covet.” Coveting is an inner matter—the desire for our neighbor’s things or people. The American ideal of getting ahead and enjoying a good lifestyle, the pressure to “keep up with the Joneses”—or being frustrated because that stays beyond our reach—is easily dismissed until the commandment comes along and says, “You shall not covet.” (See 1 Corinthians 4:3–5.) Francis of Assisi said that in all his years of hearing the confessions of people, he had never had someone confess the sin of coveting.

125. The first effect of the Law for those who are serious about it is that it always reveals our sins. In fact, the more we try to keep the Law, the more we see how we fail at every point. For Christians, it is sins of omission that are the most revealing of how far short of the glory of God we fall. (See Romans 3:19–20.) The awareness of our sinning, recognizing that it is “sinful beyond measure,” as Paul says, either leads us to despair because we will never be able to overcome our sinfulness and be righteous in ourselves or it humbles us to receive God’s solution to our sinful predicament. A righteousness *from* God, His gift of grace in Jesus Christ, His Son,

our Savior, is the only solution for us. It is *from* God because He is the only one who would have thought of restoring relationship with sinners by acting in our stead to redeem and rescue. Christians must imitate St. Paul, who wrote, “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose” (Galatians 2:21).

It’s not the Law’s fault that it continually exposes our sins and produces death in us. The fault lies in our sinfulness and our sinning. *Torah*, the word used by Jews to speak of the Law of Moses, means “instruction.” Its call to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself directs people to inner attitudes and a lifestyle that is truly living in relation to God. Unhappily, sin has intruded and taken control of human nature. So Paul had to say, “The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.” But God has given us forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ. In the power of His Holy Spirit, the Torah is again instruction for living in relation to our heavenly Father under the grace and mercy of His Son.

Lesson 9

Proper 9

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 11:25–30

Fill-in Answers: Luke has Jesus' prayer follow the return of the Seventy from their mission. Matthew recorded it here as a more general prayer of praise to His Father for acting so wondrously in love to rescue the "little children" who believe the Good News. Jesus praised the Father for hiding "these things from the wise and understanding and [revealing] them to little children." The Greek *nepioi* means "infants," so this is a radical concept.

126. Humanistic religious thought logically concludes that man has to find his way to God and sets up religious systems that allow him to do this, systems that let him retain pride in his goodness and effort. The Gospel of Jesus, God's Son dying for sinners, is foolishness to that logic and, because it requires sinners to humble themselves to receive God's grace, is rejected in human pride. "Little children" know they are helpless and look to the Father to pick them up. Jesus said that that kind of humble faith and dependence are necessary to enter the Kingdom. The Gospel moves some to that kind of humility and dependence, but God does still allow people to say no to His invitation and to insist on doing it their way.

127. All things were committed to Jesus by the Father when the Word became flesh to carry out the work of salvation—and they will continue to be His to the end. These words of Jesus point to His person, one with the Father as the eternal Word. (See John 10:22–38.) They also emphasize His work, His coming to be the revealer of the Father to all who will approach God through Him. (See John 1:14–18.)

128. The ones to whom the Son chooses to reveal the Father are simply those who are moved by the Holy Spirit to believe the Good News and to put their trust in Jesus. (See John 16:6–11.) God wants all to be saved, but spiritual truth requires repentance, which many stubbornly reject. Those from whom spiritual truth is hidden are those who persist in and harden their unbelief and their own insistence on works-righteousness until they are unable to repent. (See Matthew 12:30–32; Hebrews 4:6–11.)

129. This invitation is given to those who are burdened by the weight of trying to fulfill the Law. All who make religion a ladder that they must climb to God will never find the rest of real assurance until they accept Christ's invitation to come to Him by faith alone.

130. The rest Jesus offers doesn't remove our obligation to work; instead, it makes our work joyful and refreshing and gives us companions in our labor, not the least of which is Christ Himself.

131. A yoke can be designed to allow two animals of different strength to work effectively together. When Jesus invites us to learn gentleness and humbleness from Him, qualities needed for truly Christian service, there is a promise that He is there in the yoke with us. Paul was able to say, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20), and, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). When we know the presence of Jesus as our "yoke-fellow," we are moved toward proper attitudes and enabled to express them lovingly in Christian service. Knowing His presence and that He works in everything for our good will surely lead us to find that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Your group may offer instances if you are ready to lead the way by offering one from your own experience.

The Old Testament Lesson: Zechariah 9:9–12

132. The messianic qualities of the promised King: “righteous,” doing what is right for His people; “having salvation,” bringing the ultimate covenant gift; “humble” (gentle) and “mounted on a donkey,” approaching His people in humility and love to serve them. This promised King will take away chariots and war horses and break the battle bows. He will offer peace through means other than forceful domination. He acts in hearts to bring us under His loving rule through the power of His Spirit. (See Zechariah 4:6.)

133. The result of this King’s extending His rule will be His proclamation of peace to the nations—and not just to His people Israel. This is one of the statements in the Old Testament that are precursors of Jesus’ Great Commission in the New Testament.

134. “The blood of My covenant” is cited as the reason for freeing the prisoners from exile. The references in Genesis and Exodus show that the shedding of sacrificial blood was integral to the covenant with Abraham and later with Israel as a nation. The covenant was ultimately fulfilled by the blood of Christ. (See Hebrews 9:11–14.)

135. The benefits of restoration are described as the exiles “return[ing] to your stronghold,” where the Lord would “restore to you double.” A “double blessing” is promised a number of times in the Old Testament. (A double inheritance was received by the firstborn son.) The promises of prosperity for Judah and of peace to “the nations” point us for fulfillment to the messianic kingdom. The New Testament refers to the Christian Church as “spiritual Israel” and commissions us as followers of Jesus to proclaim His offer of peace to all nations.

136. In the Holy Gospel, the Son, the Revealer of the Father, invites us to accept His gracious rule by wearing His yoke and learning from Him, the gentle and humble one. In this Old Testament Lesson, the promised King is described as gentle, riding on a donkey, replacing armaments of war with proclamations of peace and prosperity.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 7:14–25a

137. Paul pointed to the fact that he could want (*thelo* has the force of “to will”) to do what is right and good as proof that he was speaking as a regenerated saint in Christ. Though he could will to do what is good, he said that “sin that dwells within me”—his sinful nature—kept him from carrying out his desire.

138. That he desired the good shows that he recognized that the Law is good. The Law was not the cause of his sin; his own sinful nature was the cause. Paul said that nothing good dwelled in him—his flesh (his sinful nature). This emphasized that his desire for what is right was a product of the Spirit’s regenerating power.

We know the same truth in our experience. We may desire the good, only to find the evil that we don’t want showing itself: adulterous thoughts, covetousness, profane speech, sidestepping opportunities to serve, laziness in worship and devotions, and so on.

139. Our being “captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members” makes our sinning understandable but not excusable. Happily, it is also forgivable as we live under the grace of God in Christ. The challenge of discipleship is to work continually at putting off the sinful nature and putting on the new man in Christ. God rescues us through Jesus Christ our Lord. As we live under grace, we live in awareness that our sins do not separate us from Him. We are His saints even though we still carry around the sinful nature and its effects. We can, by God’s grace, live with being at the same time saint and sinner.

140. As we live under grace and faithfully use Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit works in us through the Good News to make us more responsive to God’s will and less assertive of our own.

141. Paul was not preaching at his readers but sharing a deep inner truth. As we hear him confess this about himself, we are encouraged to admit the same about ourselves, without getting defensive about it. This approach of telling the truth about yourself—your sin and your salvation—is one of the techniques of effective witnessing.

Lesson 10

Proper 10

Blessed Lord, since You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; 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: Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

142. Help your group understand the idea of a point of comparison. Someone has suggested that a parable and its meaning are like two circles that are side by side and touch each other only at the point of comparison, the point of the lesson. As Jesus explained His parable, the point of comparison is the four kinds of soil in their reception of the seed and four kinds of hearers in their reception of the Word of God. Other adjectives may be suggested, but these fit the kinds of hearers: *indifferent, shallow, indecisive, responsive*.

143. Each of us may relate to one kind of soil more than to another, but we surely have to see ourselves in each one of them at times in our lives. Sometimes we can be rather hardened and resistant to the Word; often we are lazy about putting down deep roots of understanding; frequently we have trouble breaking with those things that misdirect our lives and compete with God’s call in Christ; and by grace we may see that the seed of the Word has produced its fruit in us in a Christian life and in Christian service. Each kind of soil in which the seed does not realize its purpose is a warning against the attitudes in life that it portrays. The good soil, producing various amounts of fruit, encourages us to bear fruit and to recognize that Christians are different in their “productivity” for the Lord. Producing thirty times what was sown does not make us less loved or less valued by the Lord than those who produce one hundred times what was sown, but we should strive, in the power of the Spirit, to be as productive as we can be, to our Lord’s glory and to our benefit and that of our neighbor.

144. Some suggest, on the basis of Jesus’ explanation and the point of comparison, that the parable should be called the parable of four kinds of soil.

145. Earthly sowers of the Word sow as God leads. Those who resist the Word bear the guilt and consequences of rejecting it. So even though every seed does not prosper, we keep sowing nonetheless, confident in God’s promises about His Word and in His love for all people in Christ.

146. We may become more effective hearers of the Word by resolving to give it the time and energy it deserves—and by approaching it prayerfully. After all, it is the Holy Spirit who opens the ears of our hearts to hear and believe the Good News of Jesus. (See 1 Corinthians 2:6–16.)

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 55:10–13

Help your group understand Hummel’s comment about the cost of the banquet to the Giver by asking, “What does chapter 53 of Isaiah describe?”

147. This pericope points to God’s Word as the effective agent in accomplishing His purpose in the world. The simile that illustrates the effectiveness of the Word is the rain and the snow that water the earth and

effectively make it productive of the vegetation that supports life. All scholars recognize a division of Isaiah into two sections, the first being chapters 1–39, and the second, chapters 40–66. While critical scholarship sees the second section of Isaiah as a later addition, there is sufficient evidence of the unity of Isaiah—in similarity of language and concepts in both sections—to conclude that both are the product of Isaiah’s prophetic pen. In the New Testament, Jesus quoted from both sections as “the prophet Isaiah,” which confirms this conclusion and removes all doubt to the contrary.

148. God’s Word is effective in leading people to the truth—both the truth of their sin and guilt and the resultant consequences and the truth of God’s forgiving love fully expressed in the life, death, and rising of Jesus Christ and in His continuing power and presence in the Holy Spirit.

149. When the Lord says His Word will accomplish what He desires and achieve His purpose for it, we are encouraged to take it seriously as it speaks to us about life with Him and gives us assurance as we use it in the mission to which He has sent us as His Church. The Word *will* do its job; all we need to do is use it faithfully—for ourselves and others. For the exiles, the picture was of their Holy Land, rejoicing at their return—an agricultural version of the peaceable kingdom. We see its ultimate fulfillment in the eternal messianic kingdom. The result of the fulfillment of this prophecy will be “it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

150. This lesson’s assurance that God’s Word will do what He sends it to do corresponds to the Holy Gospel’s good soil, which receives the seed and produces a crop of faith and love.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 8:12–17

151. The Holy Spirit uses the Good News of Jesus to lead us to faith and discipleship. “Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again” is given dynamic, life-renewing power through the Spirit to make Jesus personally meaningful to us. The Spirit does not just directly “zap” people “magically.” He leads to Jesus Christ through the Word. That’s why we call the Word and the Sacraments the Means of Grace.

152. The continuing result of the Spirit’s leading is that we continue to be “children of God.” The New Testament uses “sons” and not the more general “children” because “sons” carried the weight of “one who is an heir to receive an inheritance.” We today would say “sons and daughters.” The “spirit of slavery” is one of fear or, at best, obligation; the “Spirit of adoption as sons” is freedom and love, with service willingly given by one who knows he belongs and the inheritance will be his by right of sonship.

153. “Abba” is the diminutive, endearing term used by children of Jesus’ day as they approached their dear fathers. The fact that our spirits can cry out “Abba! Father!” is itself continual evidence to us that the Spirit is at work in us and that we are in fact God’s sons and daughters through faith in Jesus. Luther’s Small Catechism urges, “Ask Him as dear children ask their dear father” (Lord’s Prayer, Introduction). The Spirit bears witness with our spirits through the Good News. It may be as we are reading or hearing the Word—or it may be His bringing to mind assurances and guidance from previous reading or hearing. He leads our spirits to testify about Jesus to others too. (See Matthew 10:32–33.)

154. Our suffering with Jesus speaks specifically to our being disciples of Jesus who are ready to take up our own crosses and follow Him. Taking up our crosses implies our readiness to leave other things behind, but it especially calls for a focus that makes Jesus and His Gospel the central concern in our lives—for ourselves and for others. He’s with us to guide and bless us also in other sufferings that are because we live in an imperfect world—illnesses, accidents, losses, frustrations, disappointments, and so on—but “suffer with Him” is much more specific than that. (See 2 Corinthians 4:5–11.) We may “be glorified with Him” as we glory in our redemption and live day by day as children of God, brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus, and as we look forward to sharing the glory of His exaltation in heaven. (See Philippians 3:20–21.)

Lesson 11

Proper 11

O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your final judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with You in perfect joy hereafter; 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: Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

155. The point of comparison is the wheat and the darnel with the children of the Kingdom and the sons of the evil one, and how both live in and compete for the same space. Jesus expanded the point to explain also how they got there and what the end result would be for both.

156. Jesus' explanation suggests that the field represents the world, not the Church. Still, some have applied it to picture the Church as an open fellowship in which lack of commitment and some sinful situations are not really to be disciplined. Certainly, the Church will ultimately succeed, but it is a mistake to look for this success in terms of the Church transforming human society into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' explanation lets us know that full success awaits the harvest at the end of the age.

Children of the Kingdom respond to God's grace and gain the "right" to inherit the Kingdom eternally; sons of the evil one actively reject the Kingdom and Jesus and gain the "right" to be thrown "into the fiery furnace," "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). The contrast and conflict between the two will continue throughout earthly history.

157. The sons of the evil one will be thrown into the fiery furnace; the sons of the Kingdom will shine like the sun. Both are paraphrases of Daniel (chapter 3 and 12:3).

158. Any attempt on the part of "purifiers" in the Church to root out "weeds" would harm also some of the "wheat," mistakenly judged by them to be not up to "wheat" standards. Such purifiers usually develop their own subjective standards of judgment. The Church's purpose is not to root out and destroy evil by force but to proclaim the Word, which has Spirit's power to change "weeds" into "wheat."

159. It is only when the Holy Spirit is the teacher that our ears and hearts are attuned to the Word. We must always pray for His guidance and power. With that attitude, we then must turn to the Word expectantly and energetically, for the Spirit uses the Word as His means. If we don't get into the Word, we are, in effect, shutting down our ears and hearts and frustrating the Spirit of Christ.

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 44:6–8

The first paragraph places this lesson into its context in Isaiah 44. Reading the portions indicated as they appear will provide a foundation for this study.

160. The title "King" emphasizes that Yahweh was the sovereign Lord of Israel. During the exodus, the wilderness wanderings, the conquest and settlement of Canaan, and the period under the judges, Israel was a theocracy. Then Israel wanted a human king like the other nations. (See 1 Samuel 8:1–7.) The use of this title

when Israel was in exile, in subjugation, was a call to return to the close relationship in which the Lord was her only sovereign.

161. The title “Redeemer” added significantly to Israel’s conception of the Lord their God. It says that the Lord had not just ruled them but was committed to being responsible for them. The *Concordia Self-Study Bible* points out that the Hebrew word “refers to an obligated family protector and thus portrays the Lord as the Family Protector of Israel. He is related to Israel as Father (63:16; 64:8) and Husband (54:5)” (p. 1076).

162. Knowing the Lord as “the LORD of hosts” was a solid basis of assurance for His people that He would surely be able to do for them what He was promising.

163. “I am the first and I am the last” glorifies the Lord as the Eternal One, the beginning and the end of everything in the created world, the One who exists totally in Himself and by His own power. Revelation 1:8 and 22:12–13 use this same terminology and apply this title to Jesus in His exaltation, emphasizing His deity.

164. “Besides Me there is no god” says that those who think they have found the meaning of life in themselves or in “God as I conceive Him to be” are fooling themselves. In the New Testament, this same concept of being exclusive and indispensable is directly applied to Jesus Christ. (See John 5:23; 1 John 2:23.) “Let him declare and set it before Me, since I appointed an ancient people” refers to the Lord’s choosing of Israel as His covenant people and His mighty deeds by which He miraculously cared for them and rescued them in the past. “What will happen” refers to the Lord’s prophetic Word in which He had foretold events and given His promises to His people. Thus the Lord pointed to events in His people’s experience that no other “gods” could match.

165. “Rock” conveys strength, stability, and reliability. Commercial companies—like Chevrolet trucks—use the same imagery.

166. This lesson’s emphasis of the Lord as the One and Only, Israel’s covenant Lord, underscores the importance of being children of the Kingdom and the folly of being sons of the evil one.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 8:18–27

167. “The sufferings of this present time” include not only suffering related to being Christians (our crosses) but also all suffering caused by our living in an imperfect world: illnesses, accidents, losses, frustrations, disappointments, and so on. The glory to be revealed in us is our becoming fully like our brother Jesus, living in God’s presence, joyfully serving His purposes completely. The temporary is always outweighed by the permanent—especially in this instance.

The purpose of the whole creation, as we see from Genesis 1, was to serve man, the “crown jewel” of creation. The deterioration of the jewel had a deteriorating effect also on its setting so that it accomplishes its purpose only partially.

168. The creation’s “pains of childbirth” will end when the “baby,” the new heaven and new earth, is born to be the appropriate setting for the eternal life God has promised to those whom He has redeemed and rescued in Christ.

169. Greek philosophy’s dualism and the teachings of Eastern religions see spirit as good and matter as not so good, even evil. The Bible, however, says God declared also His material creation to be “very good.” Now the created universe is corrupted by sin, and our bodies suffer accordingly. But the Christian hope is for perfected bodies just right for life in the new creation, “the new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells.” This hope rejects ideas of continuous reincarnations and that the goal of the spirit is to be freed from all connection to a material existence by being absorbed into the universal spirit. The Christian hope of resurrection from the dead to life in glorified bodies says that we will retain our personal identities in the new heaven and new earth—all in relation to our God and Savior. The key word in all of this is “hope” that produces “patience.”

170. What the Holy Spirit prays for on our behalf relates to His eagerness to see us enjoying our eternal destiny in Christ. “Likewise” connects the various forms of *stenazo*, “sigh” or “groan,” in the Greek text (vv. 22, 23, 26). The creation, Christians, and the Spirit dwelling in Christians all groan because the present situation has so many reminders that while we are in the “already” of our justification through Christ, we are still in the “not yet” as far as our glorification with Him is concerned. He surely supports us in our prayers for all our daily needs, but He is primarily concerned with strengthening our faith and helping us make progress in our

sanctification as we move toward our coming glory. (See Galatians 5:22–25; 2 Corinthians 3:17–18.) That the Spirit prays with groanings that are beyond words indicates the deep earnestness of His love, concern, and desire for us. His prayer for us wells up from a depth of love that is beyond words. The suggestion is that there is “emotional investment” in His desires for us.

171. The preposition is not “through” or “with” but “for.” This is not the Spirit assisting us in our praying, though He does that too. This is the Spirit of God praying *for* us out of His deep yearning for our ultimate good.

172. The assurance for us in the Spirit’s praying “according to the will of God” is that we know He is asking for the best possible blessings and is the one who is able to renew our hearts and move us into situations in which the blessings He desires for us, both physical and spiritual, will be realized in our lives.

173. As citizens of heaven, we are to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58), “to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives” (Titus 2:12), and to “be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace” (2 Peter 3:14).

Lesson 12

Proper 12

Almighty and everlasting God, give us an increase of faith, hope, and love, that, receiving what You have promised, we may love what You have commanded; 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: Matthew 13:44–52

174. Both parables say that the kingdom of heaven is *the* priority concern in life. Its value far outweighs every earthly value. Just as Jesus said His followers must “hate” mother, father, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even their own lives (Luke 14:26), so He also demands that we give title to everything we have to Him (Luke 14:33). He surely will not share the priority spot in our lives with evil, but these parables emphasize that even things and relationships that are basically good are not to be allowed to compete with Him for our highest allegiance and love. In His parables, the man and the merchant gladly sell all they have to get that which they recognize to have supreme value. The *anthropos*, “a man,” just happens to discover the hidden treasure. He displays the fact that the kingdom of heaven is sometimes found in surprising places and ways. The *emporos*, “a merchant,” is more than a local shopkeeper. He is an importer, an expert in jewels who traveled far and wide to make his purchases. He illustrates the person who has been searching for life’s true value and meaning, looking at this philosophy and that psychology, and then finds the truth in Christ. The one finds (or is found by) the Kingdom incidentally; the other finds (or is found by) the Kingdom only after a long search. But both are happy to “pay the price” to have it as their own once they have found it.

175. The net of God’s kingdom encompasses all. His call in Christ comes to those who will accept it and to those who will reject it, but all are inexorably drawn to the Judgment. Our job is to cast the net and leave results and judgment to our Lord.

176. *Mathetoutheis*, “trained,” is the word for “disciple,” here in passive form. This talks about a scribe who has not only been informed about the Kingdom but has been “discipled”—made a disciple in the Kingdom. A teacher of the law who had been exposed to the Good News of the kingdom of heaven but does not respond and is not made a disciple of Jesus will just continue in the old views and ways and resist the new, as did the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus’ point is that He did not abolish the old but fulfilled it and now has ushered in the new—and that the new really provides even greater appreciation and understanding of the old as it fulfills the purposes of the old. As a result, we Christians may see things in the Old Testament more clearly than the people who lived through them because we look at the Old Testament through the window of the New Testament. We see prophecy in the light of its fulfillment. This “new wine” of fulfillment requires “fresh wineskins”—new understanding and new attitudes (Matthew 9:17).

The Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 7:6–9

177. In its biblical usage, the word *holy* indicates “different from” or “separate from.” “Holy to the LORD your God” was an expression of an exclusive claim that the Yahweh had on His people’s allegiance and worship. Moses told them that they were not chosen because they were more in number than any other people

(or stronger or better or wiser), for they were “the fewest of all peoples.” They had no reason to boast in themselves, as if they were doing the Lord a favor by being holy to Him.

178. Moses told them that the Lord had chosen Israel because of His love for them. They were to be examples of His grace to their world. He had redeemed them from slavery because of the oath He had given to their forefathers. By acting to free His people from Pharaoh and leading them to the Promised Land, the Lord was demonstrating His faithfulness, which would continue into a thousand generations. The Lord’s faithfulness to His covenant was to encourage a response of loving Him and keeping His commands.

179. We, too, have been chosen by grace to live in His kingdom of grace. This encourages us to respond to our Lord’s love for us by giving Him our willing allegiance and trust expressed in obedient service.

180. The lesson says that God’s people are chosen by Him to be holy to Him in faith and obedience, agreeing with the parables of the Holy Gospel that show He deserves the priority place in all of life.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 8:28–39

181. The blessed assurance comes to “those who love God . . . , for those who are called according to His purpose.” The second phrase is the foundation for and validates the first. The good that God evidently has in mind for us is the eternal good of a living and eternally lasting relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ. He works in circumstances and situations to focus our attention on Him and on things above.

182. God’s foreknowledge is always based on His grace, His undeserved love, which He acted out redemptively in Jesus Christ and which He continues to act out through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. A play on words in Latin describes the mystery of God’s foreknowledge and predestining: *Noscere cum affectu et effectu*—“To know with affection and with resultant effect.” Theologians emphasize that the doctrine of predestination must be viewed as the Bible always does: *a posteriori*, after the fact, not *a priori*, before the fact. It does not encourage us to try to look back into eternity to “pick God’s mind” as to why He foreknew and predestined us.

The Bible’s assurance of our having been graciously predestined to be His own comes to us after we know His loving call in Jesus Christ—to give us greater comfort and assurance and wonder as it tells us that we were in the mind and plan of God already from eternity. Paul’s words here emphasize that from first to last our salvation is God’s gracious doing, and Jesus’ redemptive work is at the center of it.

183. God’s effective call is extended through the Good News of Jesus. The Gospel is not just words; it is God’s dynamic Word—power to make things happen in us.

184. *Justified* is an example of the Bible’s “prophetic past tense.” Because Christ’s redemptive work as God’s atoning sacrifice at the right time in human history was sure and certain, Paul could say that in God’s eternal will, those whom He foreknew and predestined and called were already right with God. It is a righteousness from God that declares us righteous. And it all revolves around His Son’s acceptance of the consequences of our sin on our behalf.

185. *Glorified* is another “prophetic past tense”—as sure and certain as if it has already happened. His grace in our here and now and His Spirit’s indwelling in us are His guarantees that we will realize that living hope when we are fully glorified in and with Christ in His eternal kingdom.

186. These questions invite testimonies on the part of your group members as you relate Paul’s assuring words to your faith and Christian experience. Be ready to lead the way, and they will be encouraged to participate.

Fill-in Answers: Seven things that might seem to threaten our confidence in His love for us: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword.

187. What makes us more than conquerors in such experiences is our relationship with the One who suffered on our behalf and won the victory over death and hell for us. It is when we can say with Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20) and “I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13) that we are led to become more and more what He wants us to be.

The only thing that can separate a Christian from his Lord is that person himself. The Bible gives too strong a warning against apostasy and cites too many examples of apostasy to find false comfort in any idea of “once saved, always saved.” Paul warned, “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians

10:12). Awareness of this should lead us to faithful communication with our Lord through diligent use of the Word and Sacraments—the Means of Grace—and through prayer. We also should be conscientious in our communication with fellow Christians, encouraging their faith and discipleship, admonishing them in the Lord when that is needed, and receiving the same encouragement and admonition from them. (See Colossians 3:16.)

Lesson 13

Proper 13

Heavenly Father, though we do not deserve Your goodness, still You provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may acknowledge Your gifts, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; 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: Matthew 14:13–21

188. Jesus' feelings for John, His faithful way-preparer, surely were a major reason for His wanting to get away for a time, but other circumstances entered in too. His disciples had just returned from their apostolic mission, and Jesus needed time alone with them to help them assess their experience. John's death underscored for Jesus what lay ahead also for Him, and the thrust of His ministry changed as a result. Jesus' readiness to minister displayed His sense of priorities. The Son of Man had come not to be served, but to serve.

189. The disciples were motivated simply by the practical realities of the situation—and perhaps wanted their Master to bring a busy day of teaching to an end. John tells us Jesus asked them, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” (John 6:5). The disciples had puzzled about this but had not looked beyond the material circumstances. Jesus challenged them by telling them that they should give the multitude something to eat. All they could come up with was the five loaves and two fish—the material reality. They had not progressed to the point where they could say in faith, “We have nothing to give them, but You can feed them if You want to.”

190. Jesus still says to us about the hungry, “You give them something to eat.” We may best approach this challenge through personal sharing with hungry individuals and families with whom we come into contact, through our financial support of responsible agencies of Christian social ministry such as LCMS World Relief, and through our encouragement of appropriate government programs that will not only supply present needs but will also equip people to supply their own future needs.

191. Jesus focused attention on the divine dynamic in this event by looking to heaven and blessing the bread and the fish. He probably spoke the usual mealtime prayer used by Jews, but His doing it in that setting, blessing what really was an insignificant supply, lent a drama to the event that the crowd did not miss.

192. Numbering the five loaves and two fish and the crowd at five thousand men, besides women and children, and telling of the twelve baskets of leftovers showed the size of this miracle. The baskets were probably the small wicker baskets often carried by Jewish travelers to assure that they would have kosher food to eat.

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 55:1–5

193. “Everyone who thirsts” and “he who has no money” describe people who know their need but have no way of filling it themselves. “Everyone” is truly universal in its invitation to this free messianic banquet—all you have to do to qualify is recognize both your need and the fact that you can't fill the need yourself.

194. “Buy wine and milk without money and without price” emphasizes the gracious character of the Inviter. He has provided the banquet at His own expense.

195. They were seeking material wealth in Babylon and confusing their priorities in life. When we seek first “all these things” and think of “the kingdom and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33) as just an add-on that doesn’t require much of our attention or effort, we have things turned around. Then we are buying what is not the bread of life and are laboring for temporary things that cannot supply the deep life-satisfaction that God wants to give.

196. The key for those who wish to “eat what is good” and “delight yourselves in rich food” is hearing and obeying the Word of God. We call Word and Sacraments the Means of Grace because of their Spirit-powered invitation to feast on what is available nowhere else.

197. The everlasting covenant the Lord made with David was that his throne and dynasty would be established forever. The line of David did rule Judah right up to the time of the exile in Babylon, and those who returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple were led by Zerubbabel, a prince of the Davidic line. But the promise of an everlasting kingdom in which the throne of David is established forever *has* to refer finally to the Son of David who came as the promised Messiah—the One who said, “My kingdom is not from the world” (John 18:36).

Some scholars insist that this witness and leader is David himself; others point to Israel as a nation. However, the One who truly expanded the thrust of His people to attract and to include the nations into a spiritual Israel is the One who gave Himself as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world and commanded, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). It is He, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the true witness, leader, commander, and attraction.

198. This lesson offers the free messianic banquet; the Gospel shows the Messiah providing a free banquet for the multitude. Both emphasize the grace of God in Christ.

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 9:1–13

Paul felt strong ethnic ties to his people and the historic faith but did not gloss over or dismiss the difference between the old dispensation of Law and promise and the new dispensation of grace and fulfillment. Before Christ came, the Jews had every advantage. Now that Christ has come as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—all have salvation in only one way: through faith in Jesus Christ. (See Galatians 3:26–29.)

Fill-in Answers: Paul’s feelings for his people were so strong that he said he could wish “that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers.” He was echoing Moses’ earnest intercession for Israel after their idolatry. (See Exodus 32:31–32.)

Historically, the people of Israel enjoyed great spiritual advantages: the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship, and the promises, as well as the patriarchs, and the fact that from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. As your group fills in the blanks regarding the Jews’ spiritual advantages, expand on the significance of each of them:

Adoption—We would add “as sons and daughters.” This indicated full rights of inheritance in God’s family as God’s chosen people, descendants of Abraham.

Glory—This refers to the *Shekinah*, the glory of the Lord that rested in a bright cloud on the tabernacle and displayed God’s continuing presence with Israel.

Covenants—With Abraham, the Lord established the covenants of land, seed, and blessing, especially the blessing that would bless all families of the earth. These promises were repeated again and again to the patriarchs, and all came together and were fulfilled in the coming of Christ!

Giving of the Law—This refers especially to the ceremonial law, the sacrificial system by which God mediated His grace to Israel and which was a prototype of the Messiah. (See Hebrews 9:1–14.)

Worship—The daily worship by priests and people in the temple was the binding factor for all Jews everywhere. Until the Babylonian captivity, it housed the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place. The temple was the only place at which the people’s sacrifices were to be offered.

Promises—Especially the promises of the Messiah and the new covenant He would bring. (See Jeremiah 31:31–34.)

Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the revered fathers of the race, the original recipients of the covenant of grace and blessing.

From their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ.

199. Paul pointed to the Christ as “God over all, blessed forever” to stress the glorious Good News of Jesus, the promised Messiah, and the crucial importance of believing in Him as way, truth, and life and not rejecting Him in unbelief—and not laying requirements on others that negate the message of salvation by grace through faith in Him.

Paul’s strong argument was that “the children of the promise are counted as [Abraham’s] offspring.”

200. Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands, and Abraham fathered Ishmael by Hagar. Though Ishmael was a natural son and dearly loved, Abraham finally had to send Ishmael and his mother away. God renewed the promise that was to be fulfilled when Sarah finally gave birth to the son of the promise, Isaac. (See Genesis 21:8–14.)

201. Rebekah’s twin boys were both Isaac’s biological sons, but Esau, the firstborn, was passed over, and Jacob, who was born second, was chosen to carry the covenant promise. This choice was made even before they were born. Later events validated the Lord’s choice of Jacob. (See Genesis 25:21–34.)

202. Paul wrote that the sons of the promise were chosen “in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of Him who calls.” In writing to the Galatians, Paul used Sarah and Hagar figuratively to contrast following a law covenant with embracing the covenant of grace. (See Galatians 4:21–31; Romans 8:28–30; Ephesians 1:3–14.)

203. The Church in Rome was reminded that they were chosen by grace through faith in Christ and not because of ethnicity or their works. The Church’s mission is always to be all-inclusive in its outreach with the Gospel, reaching out to all in Jesus’ name and leaving the results in the lives of those who hear the Gospel in the hands of the One who does the choosing—and then being fully accepting toward those whom our Lord has chosen.

Lesson 14

Proper 14

Almighty and most merciful God, preserve us from all harm and danger that we, being ready in both body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish what You want done; 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: Matthew 14:22–33

204. Having dismissed both His disciples and the crowd, Jesus was looking forward to some quiet time, being alone with His Father in prayer.

205. Give opportunity for participants to tell what personal, private devotional life means to them. Being alone with God really emphasizes one's own personal relationship with Him. In that setting, you are reading the Word and talking to Him in prayer not because you are part of a group that is doing that, but only because you want to communicate with your heavenly Father. We really find out what God means to us when we are alone with Him.

206. As Jesus approached them on the water, the disciples thought He was an apparition, a ghost, and they were terrified. They, of course, never expected Jesus to come to them in this miraculous way. Jesus calmed their fears by speaking to them reassuringly: "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." Help your group understand that *egō eimi* is the covenant name in the Greek Scriptures with which the disciples were familiar. *Eimi* by itself means "I am." When the pronoun *egō* is added, it gains emphasis, like "I, I only, am." Note the reaction evoked by another of Jesus' "I ams." (See John 8:48–59.)

207. That Jesus accepted and approved Peter's request indicates He did not consider Peter presumptuous but encouraged and supported his excited faith. Peter was able to walk on water by virtue of Jesus' divine power and Peter's faith that Jesus would grant him that experience. When Peter saw the wind and waves, he began to focus again on the problem instead of on Jesus' power over the problem.

208. Peter and the others did not need continuing power to walk on water physically during their ministries as apostles. The incident had served its purpose. The miracle was another confirmation of Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Jesus did not perform His miracles for flashy display, nor would He perform on demand to satisfy skeptics. He knew that even the miraculous will not overcome the persistent disbelief of the unbeliever. But for His disciples, the miracles of Jesus were His "credentials" as the Son of God. (See John 14:8–14.) "Getting out of the boat" means acting in faith and trust without insisting that outward circumstances themselves become ideal and thus substantiate the presence and promise of Christ. It is acting on the *promise* of His presence and power. Some in your group may share a personal experience of this, especially if you are ready to do so too. Martin Franzmann says in *Follow Me*: "Faith is not fancy and sentiment; faith is relatedness to the divine person and the divine act. Faith means personal involvement, assent, submission, and obedience. When the Christ says, 'Come,' the disciple comes to Him, committed to His will, without regard for all normal probabilities" (p. 143).

The Old Testament Lesson: Job 38:4–18

Whether Job was a historical figure, whose actual experience is described, as tradition has generally assumed, or whether the book is a kind of parable offering a philosophical expansion on a “legend” about Job, as modern critical scholars suggest, has been argued without either side convincing the other. No other Scripture really bears on the matter. Horace Hummel, in *The Word Becoming Flesh*, says,

The dialogues are couched in such a highly artistic and poetic form that it is hard to view them as any kind of exact transcription of actual conversations. Hence, we probably must assume a fair amount of creative literary development of the original exchanges by the author in order to better elucidate their theological significance. Such a concession need militate against neither the basic historicity of the book’s report, nor against the special inspiration of the book as we have it. (pp. 458–59)

209. The rhetorical questions dramatically emphasize the wondrous power and will of the Lord in His creation of all things. They ask Job if he has done things that are patently impossible for man and are possible only for the Creator Himself.

210. The Lord did not deal directly with Job’s complaints but led him to look beyond the obvious—to stand in awe before the Lord, recognizing the folly of his mistrust and bowing in humble repentance.

211. We learn from Job to let God be God and not expect Him to do things the way we think they should be done. We need to trust His wisdom—and even more than that, to trust His love for us, which He proved in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. A heavenly Father who loves us that much will not play fast and loose with us. We can trust Him even when we don’t understand the whys or the hows of life.

212. God’s speaking from the storm in Job relates directly to the saving action of Jesus in the storm on the Sea of Galilee. The rhetorical questions also strikingly relate to the disciples’ awe-prompted “Who is this?”

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 10:5–17

213. The resurrection of Jesus is the *sine qua non* of the Christian faith. Christ’s resurrection from death, to die no more, is the bedrock upon which our hopes are based.

214. Faith in Christ’s atoning work, and faith alone, justifies. (See Romans 3:28.) *Salvation*, however, with its root meaning of “healing,” suggests an ongoing relationship with the Lord, a life under the influence of the Holy Spirit that includes openly confessing His name and proclaiming the Gospel truth as the Spirit gives us opportunity. (See 1 Corinthians 1:4–9.) Our mouths must testify to what is in our hearts because we are commissioned to be Christ’s representatives in the world.

215. Our congregational membership and participation in the larger Church’s confession and fellowship identify us publicly as Christians. The fellowship we enjoy with other Christians then becomes the workshop of the Holy Spirit in which we grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus. (See Colossians 3:12–17.) One of the problems of the “electronic church” is that it fosters a privatism in which Christians attach outwardly only to people on TV screens. Isaiah brings the assurance that God is completely worthy of our faith and trust. Joel’s statement emphasizes “calling on the name of the Lord”—a phrase used consistently in the Old Testament with reference to public worship. Again we see that Paul stresses the Good News that Jesus is this Lord.

216. There is great comfort for us in seeing that ethnicity does not determine God’s acceptance. We Gentiles are God’s chosen people only by adoption, but that adoption is through His Son, Jesus Christ. (See Galatians 3:26–29.)

217. These words challenge the Church to be as inclusive as the Gospel is. There is a reality about life in society and in churches that a congregation made up of a certain kind of people will attract people who are similar to them. The inclusiveness of the Gospel, however, urges the Church to reach out to all and to rule out any *deliberate* exclusiveness in its approach. Some congregations are finding it effective to meet ethnic and language needs by providing ministries that meet the specific needs of distinct groups while still under the umbrella of and in fellowship with the larger congregation. For us as individual Christians, the challenge is to

overcome prejudicial feelings in which we feel that some are more suitable for hearing the Gospel of Jesus and living in the Church with us than others are. Paul's "How are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" challenges us to be serious about the mission tasks our Lord gives us, both personally and through those whose ministries we support. At the heart of the process is a recognition by the Church and individual Christians that just as the Holy Spirit works faith in their hearts and leads them to confess "Jesus is Lord," so, too, does the same Spirit motivate and enable them to confess Jesus' saving name to those who do not yet know Him by faith.