

Old Testament Reading:
Isaiah 35:4-7a

- 4 Say to those who have an anxious heart,
"Be strong; fear not!
Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you."
- 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall
be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
6 then shall the lame man leap like
a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing
for joy.
For waters break forth in the
wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
7 the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs
of water.

Epistle: James 2:1-10, 14-18

¹My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ²For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," ⁴have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷Are they not the ones

who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

⁸If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. ⁹But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. . . .

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

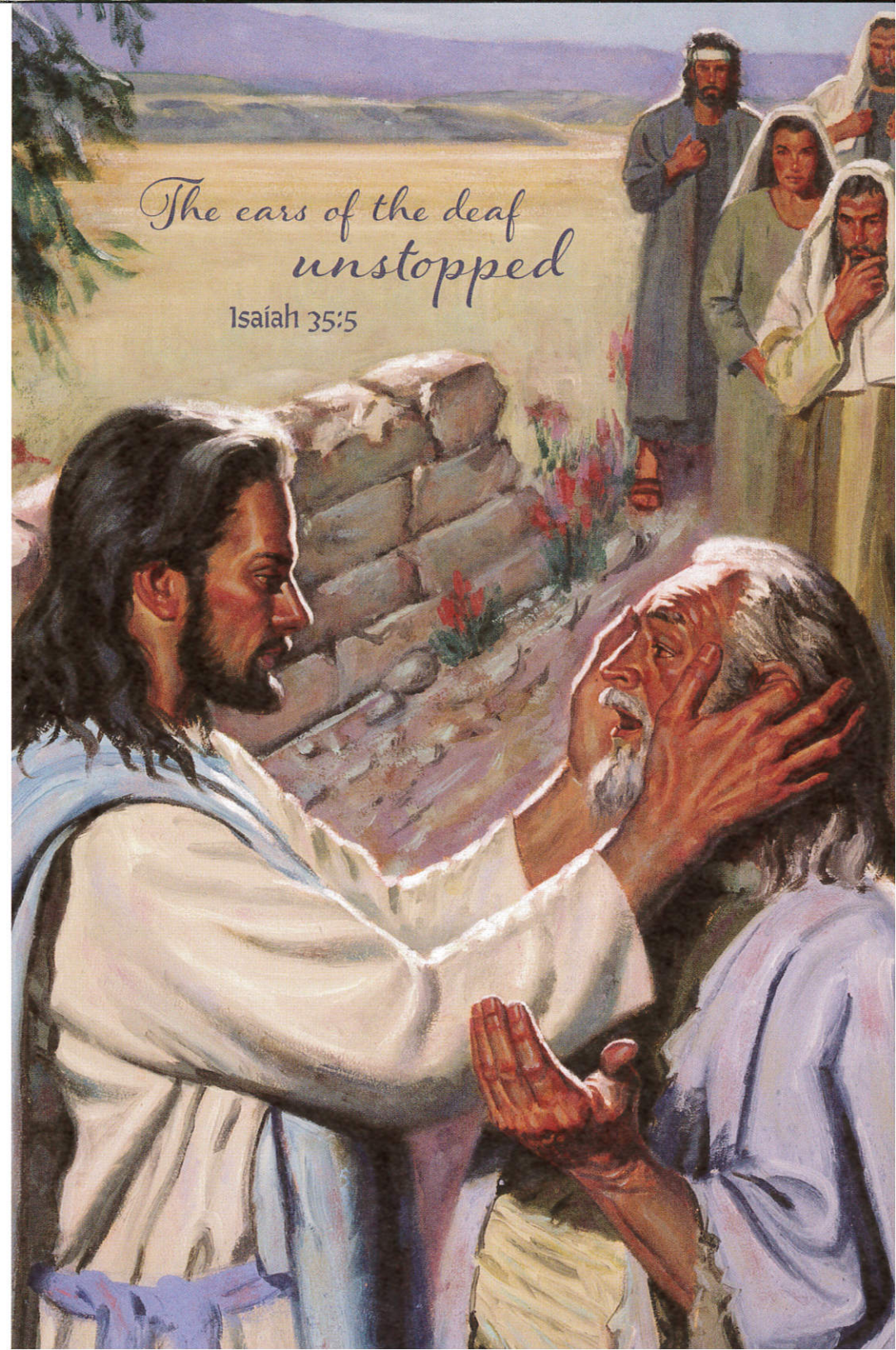
¹⁸But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Holy Gospel: Mark 7:31-37

³¹[Jesus] returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³²And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. ³⁴And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."



About the Cover: The beautiful picture of healing in Isaiah was literally fulfilled by Jesus. In His hands, "the deaf hear and the mute speak." Jesus has fulfilled all the prophecies about Him in the Old Testament. By His grace, He also has opened our ears to hear His Word, to repent, and to believe the Gospel of His forgiveness through His cross and resurrection. Moreover, He has opened our mouths to speak of how "He has done all things well" (Mark 7:37) for the sake of the world.



St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)

8948 N 1900 Ave Geneseo, IL 61254

309-949-2516

September 8, 2024

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Service of Prayer and Preaching (Lutheran Service Book, p. 260)

Hymn of Invocation 797 Praise the Almighty



1 Praise the Al - might - y, my soul, a - dore Him!
2 Trust not in rul - ers; they are but mor - tal;
3 Bless - ed, oh, bless - ed are they for - ev - er
4 Pen - i - tent sin - ners, for mer - cy cry - ing,
△ 5 Praise, all you peo - ple, the name so ho - ly



Yes, I will laud Him un - til death; With songs and
Earth - born they are and soon de - cay. Vain are their
Whose help is from the Lord Most High, Whom from sal -
Par - don and peace from Him ob - tain; Ev - er the
Of Him who does such won-drous things! All that has



an - thems I come be - fore Him As long as
coun - sels at life's last por - tal, When the dark
va - tion can noth - ing sev - er, And who in
wants of the poor sup - ply - ing, Their faith - ful
be - ing, to praise Him sole - ly, With hap - py



He al - lows me breath. From Him my life and
grave en - gulf its prey. Since mor - tals can no
hope to Christ draw nigh. To all who trust in
God He will re - main. He helps His chil - dren
heart its a - men sings. Chil - dren of God, with



all things came; Bless, O my soul, His ho - ly name.
help af - ford, Place all your trust in Christ, our Lord.
Him, our Lord Will aid and coun - sel now af - ford.
in dis - tress, The wid - ows and the fa - ther - less.
an - gel host Praise Fa - ther, Son, and Ho - ly Ghost!



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!

Opening Versicles

P This is the day which the Lord has made;
C let us rejoice and be glad in it.
P From the rising of the sun to its setting,
C the name of the Lord is to be praised.

P Better is one day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere;
C I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

P Make me to know Your ways, O Lord.

C Teach me Your paths.

P Sanctify us in Your truth.

C Your Word is truth.

P From the rising of the sun to its setting,

C the name of the Lord is to be praised.

C Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy
Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be
forever. Amen.

Psalm 146

(in place of Old Testament Canticle)

¹Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!

²I will praise the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

³Put not your trust in princes,

in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

⁴When his breath departs he returns to the earth;
on that very day his plans perish.

⁵Blessèd is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God,

⁶who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever;

⁷who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the
hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free; ⁸the LORD opens the eyes of
the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹**The LORD watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.**

¹⁰The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Readings (on back of bulletin)

Responsory

- [P]** Forever, O Lord, Your Word is firmly set in the heavens.
[C] Lord, I love the habitation of Your house and the place
where Your glory dwells.
[P] Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.
[C] Lord, I love the habitation of Your house and the place
where Your glory dwells.
[P] Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
[C] Lord, I love the habitation of Your house and the place
where Your glory dwells.

Catechism

Ten Commandments

- [C]** You shall have no other gods.
You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
Honor your father and your mother.
You shall not murder.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
You shall not covet your neighbor's house.
You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Apostles' Creed

- [C]** I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended into hell.

**The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living and the
dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life + everlasting. Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

- [C]** Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.

Augsburg Confession Chief Articles of Faith

Article III The Son of God

**Our churches teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God,
assumed the human nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin
Mary. So there are two natures—the divine and the human—
inseparably joined in one person. There is one Christ, true God
and true man, who was born of the Virgin Mary, truly suffered,
was crucified, died, and was buried. He did this to reconcile the
Father to us and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but
also for all actual sins of mankind.**

**He also descended into hell, and truly rose again on the
third day. Afterward, He ascended into heaven to sit at the right
hand of the Father. There He forever reigns and has dominion
over all creatures. He sanctifies those who believe in Him, by
sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts to rule, comfort, and
make them alive. He defends them against the devil and the
power of sin.**

The same Christ will openly come again to judge the living and the dead, and so forth, according to the Apostles' Creed.

Sermon

Office Hymn 852 O God of Mercy, God of Might

1 O God of mer - cy, God of might, In love and
2 And Thou, who cam'st on earth to die That our lost
3 Teach us the les - son Thou hast taught: To feel for
4 All are re - deemed, both far and wide, Since Thou, O

pit - y in - fi - nite, Teach us, as ev - er
world might live there - by, O hear us; for to
those Thy blood hath bought, That ev - 'ry word and
Lord, for all hast died. Grant us the will and

in Thy sight, To live our lives in Thee.
Thee we cry, In hope, O Lord, to Thee.
deed and thought May work a work for Thee.
grace pro - vide To love them all in Thee!

5 In sickness, sorrow, want, or care,
May we each other's burdens share;
May we, where help is needed, there
Give help as unto Thee!

6 And may Thy Holy Spirit move
All those who live to live in love
Till Thou shalt greet in heav'n above
All those who live in Thee.

Presentation of the Offering

Prayer of the Church

After each petition:

- P** Lord, in Your mercy,
C hear our prayer.

Collect of the Day

- P** O Lord, let Your merciful ears be open to the prayers of Your humble servants and grant that what they ask may be in accord with Your gracious will; through Jesus Christ, Your

Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

Collect for the Word

- P** Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and take them to heart that, by the patience and comfort of Your holy Word, 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.

C Amen.

Morning Prayer

- C** I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Blessing

- P** Let us bless the Lord.
C Thanks be to God.
P The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.
C Amen.



Hymn to Depart 718 Jesus, Lead Thou On



1 Je - sus, lead Thou on Till our rest is won; And al-though the
 2 If the way be drear, If the foe be near, Let not faith - less
 3 When we seek re - lief From a long-felt grief, When temp - ta - tions
 4 Je - sus, lead Thou on Till our rest is won. Heav'n-ly lead - er,



way be cheer - less, We will fol - low calm and fear - less.
 fears o'er - take us; Let not faith and hope for - sake us;
 come al - lur - ing, Make us pa - tient and en - dur - ing.
 still di - rect us, Still sup - port, con - sole, pro - tect us,



Guide us by Thy hand To our fa - ther - land.
 For through man - y a woe To our home we go.
 Show us that bright shore Where we weep no more.
 Till we safe - ly stand In our fa - ther - land.

Silent Prayer

Acknowledgements

Prayer and Preaching from Lutheran Service Book.

Hymn 797, Text: Johann Daniel Herrnschmidt, 1675–1723; tr. Alfred E. R. Brauer, 1866–1949, alt.

Tune: New-vermehrte Christliche Seelenharpf, 1665, Ansbach

Text and tune: Public domain

Hymn 852, Text: Godfrey Thring, 1823–1903, alt.

Tune: Samuel Howard, 1710–82

Text and tune: Public domain

Hymn 718, Text: Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, 1700–60; tr. Jane L. Borthwick, 1813–97, alt.

Tune: Adam Drese, 1620–1701

Text and tune: Public domain

Confessional reading from *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, 2nd Ed.*, Paul McCain, Ed. CPH, 2006.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV[®] Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version[®]), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Created by Lutheran Service Builder © 2018 Concordia Publishing House.

ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH-LCMS

churchoffice@stjohnsgeneseo.org

Website: www.stjohnsgeneseo.org

https://www.facebook.com/St.Johns.Geneseo

**HEARING ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE
HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBLE**

Rev. Timothy Nerud

Pastor

815-989-2025 (Office)

612-940-8138 (Cell)

WE PRAY: Heavenly Father, from whose heart flows justice and mercy, cleanse our hearts of all evil and let them bring forth the virtues of the Holy Spirit that our lives may grace the kingdom of Christ, our Lord; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who with You and the Holy Spirit are one God with dominion over us forever. Amen

WELCOME TO ALL!

We are anxious to share with you the Christ-centered ministry at St. John's. Our Liturgy follows closely the pattern of Word and Lord's Supper handed down from the ancient Church. It is our hope that you will make the Church's life of prayer your own. If you have difficulty following our order of service, please ask someone sitting near you for assistance. We pray that you will receive rich spiritual blessings from your presence here. May the peace and power of our risen Christ be yours always.

IF YOU DESIRE, a visit or call from Pastor Nerud, please contact the church office (309-949-2516).

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES AT ST JOHN'S

Today	8:45 am	SS, Adult/Youth Bible Study
	10:00 am	Divine Worship –Outdoor Service
	11:30 am	Elders' meeting
Tuesday	6:00 pm	Council meeting
Next Sunday	8:45 am	SS, Adult/Youth Bible Study
	10:00 am	Divine Worship/Holy Communion
	11:30 am	Youth

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."
Psalms 122:1

JAMES 2:2 – “For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in ...”

God shows no partiality: rich and poor alike are called into the kingdom. And both rich and poor alike have something to contribute to the kingdom in accordance with the callings God has given them in their lives. This is why both the Old and New Testaments talk about proportional giving — that is, giving a proportion of our income to the Lord's work. This makes it possible for rich and poor alike to have the honor of supporting God's work.

ALTAR FLOWERS have been given in memory of the 103rd birthday of Celone Loenser. May her faithful walk with Jesus be an example to us all.

ATTENDANCE BOOK—We ask everyone attending this morning to sign the red attendance book found at the end of each pew, then pass it back.

PHONE NUMBER CHANGE—The church phone number is changed. Please make a note of this change. **The new church number is: 815-989-2025.** This will connect you to either the church office or Pastor's office.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE NEEDED—We are look for 2-3 people to serve on this committee. Please contact Dave Schmedt if you are willing to help. Anyone willing to serve on a Board may also contact Dave.

As stated in our By-Laws, we will be seeking people to fill the following positions. Everyone is asked to consider where they might serve:

Chairman	Financial Treasurer	Elder
Trustee	Evangelism	Stewardship (2)
SS Superintendent		

LWML is collecting all sizes of diapers and monetary gifts for school supplies needed by Concordia Lutheran Academy as an Ingathering project for the upcoming LWML Fall Rally. Help us to fill the table next to the office to overflowing. Items need to be here no later than September 15th.

CHRISTIAN LIVING—Mark 7: 24-37: In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus healed a man who was deaf and could not speak in an understandable manner. Those who witnessed this miracle were amazed and couldn't stop talking about what Jesus had done. Jesus is still working miracles in our lives. We have the Good News of what Jesus means to us to share with those who do not yet believe in Him. May God work in us through His Word so that it may be said of us that we just will not stop talking about the blessings found in the relationship with Christ.

LIFE THOUGHTS—In both the Old Testament and Gospel readings we see the ultimate miracle, sons raised from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24, Luke 7:11-17). Yet they present but a tiny picture of what will happen because God raised His Son from the dead! All the dead in Christ will be raised to eternal life. Death is a defeated enemy! *Prayer: Lord, may Your defeat of death give us courage as we confront a culture of death. Amen.*

DOLLAR FOR MISSIONS: The current Dollar for Missions project is for replacement of furnaces at Immanuel Lutheran Student Center, Macomb, which is expected to cost some \$25,000. The Student Center was built 55 years ago. Equipment replacement like this is important so the Gospel can continue to be proclaimed and students can go on being reached there for years into the future. For more information visit <https://www.cidlcms.org/ministry-dfm-current-project.html>. **(Thank you to those at St. John's who consistently support the work of Missions on the District and Synodical level. You are a blessing!)**

ALTAR FLOWERS—The **2023 Flower Chart is now on the bulletin board next to the restrooms.** Cost for weekly flowers are \$30 for two arrangements. We greatly appreciate those who help with providing flowers for Sunday worship services. **Please sign up for a Sunday.**

PRAYER MINISTRY

Rejoice in God's goodness in Christ as you pray:

MISSION—*Rejoice that Jesus is true man, that He can sympathize with our weaknesses.*

ST JOHN'S—Mrs. Betty Firsch—We offer before You our common request for the well-being of Your church throughout the world that it may be so guided and governed by Your good Spirit that all who profess themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth and hold the faith in unity of spirit in the bond of peace, and the righteousness of life. Specifically, we pray for Betty asking Your blessings upon her.

ST. JOHN'S FAMILY—O Lord, You are the great Physician of soul and body. We pray that You would show mercy to Your servants:

Elizabeth Bjork	Paula Chapa	Joyce DeFauw
Betty Firsch	Arlyn Helke	Jessica Johnson
Lynne Johnson	Linda Lundquist	Aaron Raschke
Drew Schillinger	Carolyn Wildermuth	Marilyn Woods
Dawn Daebelliehn		

Brandon & Shaeli Streeks & family (Adopted Seminarian)

Jon/Anita Clausing (missionaries in Kenya)

Don Eggers (son of friend of Marilyn Woods)

Jodi Martins (daughter of Gary & Darla Johns)

Shandel Loenser

Paul Werner (brother of Dan Werner)

Ron Powell (friend of Brad Gehn)

Justin Rittenhouse (grandson of John/Nancy Wickwire)

Marty Cavato (cousin of Mary Jo Gehn)

Todd Erbst (former member of St. John's)

Ellen Bauer (grandmother of Joel Werling)

Don Lutz (husband of an LWML friend of Liz Neumann)

Carol Eggers (friend of Marilyn Woods)

Gary Kilstom (friend of Brad Gehn)

Kenneth Cullison (son of Kevin and Stacie Rahn)

MILITARY—We pray for those serving in our military and their families:

Mandy Davila (daughter of Linda Aper)

Luke/Nicole Thompson (son/daughter-in-law of John/Kindra Thompson)

Karl Flynn (son of Mr/Mrs Paul Flynn)

Casey Powers Jr. (step son of Lisa Powers)

Brittany Loenser (daughter of Gabe Loenser)

Rylie Hallendorff (grand-daughter of Carolyn & Dan Werner)

LUTHERANS FOR LIFE

“Let us never forget and continue to trust in God as our only resource when we face difficult life issues. Continue to pray for our country as some leaders continue to pursue making laws that jeopardize precious lives and challenge God's plan for life. Let us put our trust in God, not man.” *Virginia Flo, Director of Volunteer Relations, Lutherans For Life – A Life Quote from Lutherans For Life*
• lutheransforlife.org

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 8, 2024

Text: James 2:1-10, 14-18 (Epistle)

Other Texts: Isaiah 35:4-7a (Old Testament); Mark 7:31-37 (Gospel)

“Faith and Works”

Grace, mercy and peace be yours from God our Father through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”ⁱ These words of St. James as well as their whole surrounding context have caused quite a stir throughout the centuries within the Church of Christ. For there is a tension between St. Paul who writes, “We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law,”ⁱⁱ and James who writes, “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”ⁱⁱⁱ As some of us may be aware, even the blessed Reformer, Dr. Martin Luther, had a very hard time with the book of James, questioning whether it should even be included in the canon of the Bible. While he definitely softened his “epistle of straw” statement over the years, he always believed that James did not have the true apostolic spirit; that he tried to bring forth holy lives by the Law when it can be done only by the Gospel.

It is necessary to consider the historical context of Luther’s opinion, most significantly how the papal party was using James’ letter to support their legalism and their soul-destroying heresy of salvation by faith *and* works. Yet, if we are to be faithful first and foremost to God and His Word (which is a requirement of Confessional Lutheranism!), then we must ultimately say that Luther’s stance on the book of James *was wrong*.

Fortunately, by God’s grace, in his overall teaching, preaching, and writing, Luther did faithfully promote what the book of James *actually* teaches. Unfortunately, there are some Lutherans past and present who follow Luther’s error on James and thereby claim to be *better* Lutherans, when in reality they are antinomians, that is, those who oppose the holy law of God and sanctification in the life of believers.

These errorists declare us to be utterly sinful (of itself true), but then go on saying that there’s really no reason to fight against sin and grow in good works since you really can’t or, at best, the Holy Spirit will just work in you without any conscious thinking, almost by magic. And if you actually consciously try, then you are *rejecting* salvation by faith for one of works! (Interestingly, Luther actually opposed the antinomians, directly writing against them!^{iv})

On the flip side though, there are those Lutherans, both past and present, who are of a strong pietistic bend. They are so heavy on “faith without works is dead,” that they themselves become legalists. For while they officially teach that one is saved by faith alone without works, in practicality they replace the biblical definition of saving faith, “trust in God’s grace Christ crucified alone for the forgiveness of sins,” with something more like “a converted heart and regenerated life that is actively serving the Lord God in holy works.”

While that sound pious, see how trust in Christ’s work and sacrifice is replaced with trust in one’s own works and changed lives. To be blunt, there’s very little difference between such

“Lutheranism” and Roman Catholicism, except that the Pope of Rome is replaced by the pope of one’s own heart! For make no mistake, pietistic Lutherans, like all legalists, judge between works not so much on the basis of God’s Law, but on what *I* do, which is then truly holy, and what I don’t do which, clearly, is not so necessary. No wonder such people are often hypocritical judges, since if you’re not doing what *I* think is necessary, you’re just not a *real* Christian! Truly, it is to such hypocrites as these that Jesus says, “Judge not, that you be not judged.”^v

So how then are we to understand James without thinking that he contradicts Paul (or vice-versa), especially since we know that the Holy Spirit cannot contradict Himself! Before going further, let us be absolutely clear about a fundamental truth. If faith without works, that is, *without good and holy works of love and mercy in accordance with God’s Law*, if *that* faith is dead, then obviously any “faith” that continues in conscious, willful, impenitent sin and evil works is nothing less than an abomination before the Holy God. People living according to the sinful nature, who are following the thoughts and ways of the sinful world, should not boast of their faith as they cannot even claim to be a Christian. The only thing that can be said to someone with such a “faith” is, “Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”^{vi}

With that said, we must, grow in our knowledge of Scripture so we can *believe rightly*. And that, dear Christians, is exactly what James is helping us do. He is further defining *the faith in Christ that alone saves*. He asks, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?”^{vii} In other words, is *that kind of faith*, which does not have works of love and mercy in accordance with the Law, actually saving faith? And clearly the answer given by James, as well as Paul and all of Scripture, is a resounding “No!”

It is not that faith *plus* works saves. It is, however, the faith that saves *also produces good works*, being active in love as St. Paul says.^{viii} Therefore, James is not so much contrasting faith and works, but a dead faith which merely gives some sort of intellectual acknowledgment of God, that which even the demons have,^{ix} and a living faith in the risen, that is, very alive, Lord Jesus that is so filled with thanksgiving towards God and love for Him and His salvation that it simply must love others whom God created and for whom Christ died. The one forgiven all sins through faith in Christ is also, *through that same faith*, being made into an increasingly healthy and good tree by His Spirit. *That saving faith* produces healthy and good fruit because a Christian’s soul, their heart, mind, and will, are renewed in the image of Christ. If we have true faith, saving faith, then we truly desire to do the good works that the Law demands.

Fellow redeemed, do not let Satan confuse you. Christ Jesus alone is our redeemer, reconciler, mediator, justifier, and savior. He has done all that is necessary to save us, nothing at all is lacking! You do not, in any way, need to complete Jesus’ perfect life and sacrifice for you! To think you do is a satanic lie that robs Christ of His glory and your conscience of the certainty of salvation. He said, “It is finished!” *not* “I did my work, now you do yours!”

Yet, while in no way necessary for salvation, our works are good, proper and, yes, even necessary *in their own place*. Just because our works do not serve the purpose of saving us does not mean that they do not have their own holy and righteous purposes, which they surely do!

First, and this should be obvious, they are the obedience commanded and required by God, what we creatures owe our creator. As mentioned earlier, our works are a thank offering to the goodness of God, an important and necessary aspect of our spiritual worship as we offer ourselves as living sacrifices that are acceptable to our God and Savior.^x Second, others are served, their lives improved, their sorrows softened, by our works of love, charity, and mercy.

Third, through our holy lives and good works our Heavenly Father is glorified through us. As the Lord Jesus says, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”^{xi}

Fourth, and related to what I just said, our good works are a witness of our faith to others, as James said, “I will show you my faith by my works.”^{xii} Believers are built up, inspired, encouraged and, potentially, even corrected by our good works. And unbelievers are given a genuine example of Christianity, not by softening doctrine, not because we condone their sin in any way, but because we love sinners with the same love that Christ has for us (and for them!).

Fifth, while good works are neither necessary to be saved nor to keep faith alive, for that would mean works are still necessary to save us, that in no way denies their value to our faith. Quite evidently, to choose not to do good works is harmful to faith, for those are sins of omission, that is, choosing to omit the good that God commands us to do.^{xiii} But even more, God in His grace trains, exercises, and enhances our faith both through the cross He puts on us and by our doing the good works He has prepared for us to do from eternity.^{xiv}

Sixth, while the greatest confidence of our faith is grounded in Holy Baptism where the Holy Spirit birthed us from above through water and the Word,^{xv} still we know that saving faith is a living faith and a living faith does good works. So as we serve the Lord by serving others, as we benefit them with our works of love, we are also being assured that our faith is not false and dead, but true and living. As St. Peter writes, “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.”^{xvi}

Finally (*and this is amazing indeed*), God so desires our good works that He actually promises to reward them. Of course, He does not have to; we were created to do good works, anything less is our fault. Yet, as a loving Father, purely out of grace, He permits them to earn blessings of both body and soul for both this life on earth and the life to come in eternity.^{xvii}

Dear Christians, it has been well-said, “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is never alone.” Faith without good works is no faith at all. But equally true, good works without faith in Christ are no good works at all, for one must already be a good tree through faith to produce the fruit of *good* works.^{xviii} These two things, believing in Christ alone for our salvation *and* diligently growing in the good works that saving faith produces, must be proclaimed for as long as we live here on earth. Those who will not turn from sin, improve their lives and grow in good works must know that they do not, *cannot*, have saving faith. But equally true, those who do these things are thereby *giving external evidence of their internal saving faith in Christ Jesus*.

God grant us a faith in Christ, proven to be alive by the abundance of good works it brings forth!
Amen!

ⁱ James 2:17. Scripture quotes are from *The Holy Bible English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

ⁱⁱ Romans 3:28.

ⁱⁱⁱ James 2:24.

^{iv} These are his Antinomian Theses found in *Luther's Works Volume 73*, Concordia Publishing House.

^v Matthew 7:1.

^{vi} Galatians 5:21. Note all of vv. 18-24. See also 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (but see also the glorious promise of forgiveness and new life through baptism promised in v. 11!).

^{vii} James 2:14.

^{viii} Galatians 5:6.

^{ix} James 2:19.

^x Romans 12:1.

^{xi} Matthew 5:16.

^{xii} James 2:18b.

^{xiii} That is in contrast to *sins of commission* which are committing evil in thought, desire, word or deed.

^{xiv} See Ephesians 2:10.

^{xv} John 3:5; Ephesians 5:26.

^{xvi} 2 Peter 1:10. See also Matthew 25:31-40.

^{xvii} Jeremiah 17:10; Matthew 16:27; Mark 10:29-30; Romans 2:6; etc.

^{xviii} Hebrews 11:6.

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 18B)
8 September 2024

Presentation of the Offering

Dear Lord Jesus, accept this token of our love; Direct its use from heaven above. And by Your Spirit each heart move To give good gifts to You. Amen.

Prayer of the Church—Responsive Form

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Father, by Your Spirit continue opening ever-wider our sin-deafened ears to hear Your Word with greater knowledge and stronger faith, that our tongues would be released more and more to proclaim with zeal how Your Son has done all things well for this life and the next. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, You have commanded Your Church to take the Word of life to the ends of the earth. Strengthen and support all who travel to foreign lands on behalf of the Church's mission. Give them wisdom and courage as they tell others about Christ. Grant missionaries, pastors, church workers, and all Your people opportunities to share the Gospel and bless our hearers with ears that hear and hearts and minds that are receptive to Your gifts. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, help parents to raise up their children to know You as their help and hope, that they may not put their trust in anyone or anything of this world where there is no salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we place our hope in You and ask Your blessing on Joseph and all rulers, that their plans would be ordered for the welfare of those they govern and that You would execute Your justice for the oppressed. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, graciously behold the sick and those in any need, especially Ellen, Elizabeth, Marty, Paula, Kenneth, Dawn, Joyce, Carol, Don, Todd, Betty, Arlyn, Jessica, Lynne, Gary, Shandel, Linda, Don, Jodi, Ron, Aaron, Justin, Drew, Paul, Carolyn, and Marilyn. Grant them the patient endurance of faith and healing according to Your will. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, remember Betty Firch. Bless her in body and soul with all things needful for this life and eternity. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, create and sustain in us a lively faith in Christ Jesus and so lead us by Your Spirit to firmly resist temptation and sin and actively grow in all good works. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Collect of the Day

O Lord, let Your merciful ears be open to the prayers of Your humble servants and grant that what they ask may be in accord with Your gracious will; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.