



*How It All Began.
Where It's All Going.*

*The author would like to extend his
most heartfelt gratitude to the
Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Kloha
for his friendship and theological tutelage,
much of which is evident on these pages.*

*Soli Deo Gloria.
October 2012
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Day 1

Creation...How did it all get here?

Read Genesis 1:1-31

Have you ever been to a beautiful ocean-side beach and seen the vastness of the water, the innumerable grains of sand, the fish and the birds, and sea plants? Have you ever looked down from the top of a hill overlooking an autumnal verdant valley with trees of every color imaginable? Have you ever wondered where it all came from? How it all got here?

Some people say that all life on Earth started billions of years ago as a simple single-celled organism that just happened to form "under the right conditions." Supposedly over a very long period of time this single cell grew into all that we see on this Earth that is alive - including you and me.

I find this idea ridiculous. Look around you. The complexities of the natural world boggle the mind. Birds know their way home year after year. Salmon return from the ocean to the very same river from which they were born in order to spawn. Trees and plants of all kinds convert sunlight into sugar which serves as their food. Random? No! These complexities must have been designed. They must have been created by "someone."

God's Word tells us who this "someone" is. His name is Yahweh - you probably call Him God. He is the one who created all that is. As you read through the first chapter of Genesis, did you notice how He did it? He created simply with the words of His mouth. He spoke and something that had never before existed came into being!

This same God who created all things created you and loves you very much. He wants you to know Him and trust Him. In fact, He loves you and all people so much that He was willing to allow His Son Jesus Christ (who is fully God and fully man) to die on a Roman Cross about 2,000 years ago so that sinners like you and me can spend eternity with Him in perfection.

*P*rayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for creating me and all things. Enable me today to live as your creation and serve you with all that I am. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 2

Where do we come from?

Read Genesis 2:1-25

The first person ever to walk on the face of the Earth was named Adam. The Hebrew name Adam is very similar to one of the Hebrew words for dirt "ADAMA". This is most appropriate for Adam was formed from the dirt, from the dust of the Earth. Yahweh then breathed life into Adam and he became a living being created in the image of his creator.

Adam had an immortal soul and an immortal body. Because sin had not yet entered the world, neither had death entered it. Life was perfect. However, Yahweh knew that Adam needed a helper. So Yahweh caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and took part of him - a rib. This rib he formed into Eve - the first woman. The two, husband and wife, now could live together in the perfect Garden that Yahweh had created for them.

Adam and Eve had it all! God had provided them with food, water, something to do (be fruitful and multiply and exercise dominion over all the Earth). He had even given them a perfect relationship with Him and pronounced them "very good." This is a perfect example of the Love that Yahweh has for us. He desires to provide for us the answer to our greatest need - a restored relationship with Him.

In tomorrow's devotion we will learn how the perfect relationship that Adam and Eve had with Yahweh was destroyed. But today we can rest in the arms of our Creator knowing that He has acted and healed the brokenness of our relationship with Him through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Prayer

My Creator, thank you for giving me all things that are good. Most importantly thank you for restoring my relationship with You through Your Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Day 3

What happened to God's perfect creation?

Read Genesis 3:1-24

No matter what a person's belief system, be they Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Atheist, I think one thing about which we can all agree is that this world is not perfect. In fact, it is far from it! A brief sampling of the nightly news should be enough to convince anyone of that. Murders, theft, hatred, homelessness, starvation, people being taken advantage of by other people . . . no, not perfect at all! So, what happened?

Sin is what happened. Specifically Adam and Eve's desire to be like Yahweh Himself. They desired to be equal with God. They wanted to have it their way. Satan helped them along down this road. Satan, who the Bible says is the father of all lies, came to Eve one day while she was in the garden. He asked a seemingly innocent question, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" Eve responded with, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Did you notice Eve's answer? Compare it to what Yahweh actually said. She has added to His command. Yahweh never said that it could not be touched! Already, Yahweh's commands are being skewed. Ultimately this encounter with Satan led Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit and then to give some to Adam who also ate.

When they ate, immediately the perfect relationship that they enjoyed with Yahweh was destroyed. The image of Yahweh with which they were created was destroyed. Yahweh became the enemy of man. All of Yahweh's creation was put under a curse -the effects of which we still suffer today - sin, sickness, death, pain, sorrow. All of this is because our first parents desired to be equal with Yahweh. They wanted to call the shots, instead of following their Creator. Yahweh loves us too much to leave things this way. He promised Adam and Eve that a deliverer would come. Today, we know that He has come. He is Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died to take away the sin of the world.

Prayer

Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for giving your only Son to die and rise to secure for me, a sinner, complete forgiveness and eternal life with you in perfection forever. In Christ's name, Amen.

Day 4

An eternity-changing promise

Read Genesis 3:14-24

Adam and Eve found themselves in a frightening position. They had been Judged by their Creator and separated from Him, kicked out of the garden that He created for them and barred from reentrance by a pair of flaming swords! If that is not enough, they now knew they were naked and were ashamed, had to work for their food and would experience pain, sorrow, sickness and physical death.

You could say that today's reading from Genesis might be called "fire and brimstone." Yet amidst all of this sin and divine judgment there is a ray of hope. Did you notice it? It's in verse 15. Yahweh promises that a son of man will overcome Satan, though this son would be wounded temporarily in the process. This is the wonderful promise of Yahweh to send Jesus Christ, son of man and son of God to free all of Creation from sin and its consequences.

Today, though Creation still struggles under the effects of sin, we know that Yahweh has kept His promise in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. We also know that one day - on the last day - Jesus will return in all of His glory and make all things right. All who are Yahweh's children through God-given faith in His Son will live bodily in the renewed, perfect creation forever. Creation will be restored!

Prayer

Almighty Creator, thank you for keeping your promise and redeeming me and all sinners. Please keep all of your Church faithful to You until the last day.

In the Name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

Day 5

So, who were the “Chosen People” anyway?

Read Genesis 17

The first few pages of scripture record the entrance of sin into the world through Adam and Eve and Yahweh’s curse on that sin. The next few thousand or so pages of the Word of God are the narrative of a loving God chasing after and redeeming fallen humanity. He preserved a remnant of people on Earth who knew Him and proclaimed Him. These people would be a chosen people, set apart from all others as worshippers of Yahweh.

The chosen people would be the only ones on Earth who would be in a right relationship with the true God. This chosen people began with the patriarch Abram. When Yahweh called Abram, He was beginning the process of setting apart for Himself a lineage of people who would be chosen for some very specific and monumental tasks.

These people would be known throughout the Old Testament as the Israelites or the Jews. All others who were not part of the chosen people would be referred to as Gentiles or “the nations.” It would be the descendants of Abram who would confront Pharaoh and all of his host. These descendants would receive the Torah (teachings) of Yahweh and preserve them.

From Abram would come the mighty prophets and kings of Israel. Most importantly, from this line of Abram, Isaac, and Jacob would be born in Bethlehem a Son. This Son would be born to a virgin and would be both fully God and fully man. He would be named Jesus and would save His people from their sins. His life, death, and resurrection would then bring about the formation of a new “chosen people” - The Church.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for preserving Your Word so that by the power of Your Holy Spirit salvation may be proclaimed to all people in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Day 6

God, we want to be like everyone else!

Read 1 Samuel 8:1–22

The first group of Chosen People, the Israelites, was certainly not perfect in carrying out the tasks for which they were chosen. Routinely, the chosen people of Yahweh would chase after false gods, would argue with Yahweh, in short, they would repeat the sin of Adam and Eve. They would repeatedly want to be Yahweh, to be in control, to be the ones who determine the future.

One particularly poignant episode of this arrogance can be found in 1 Samuel. As you have read, Samuel had grown old and could no longer carry out his responsibilities so he appointed his two sons to be judges over Israel. Unfortunately, they quickly became corrupt and the people cried out for a solution. What did they want?

They wanted a king. They wanted to be just like all of the other nations on Earth (remember what that term “nations” meant in the OT? If not, reread yesterday’s devotion). The people of Israel were willing to do away with what set them apart. They did not want to be different, they wanted to fit in. They wanted to blend in and do things the way everyone else was. Forget the fact that it was Yahweh Himself who gave them their form of government. Forget the fact that it was Yahweh Himself who would rule them and carry on a relationship with them.

Yahweh even warns them that their kings will not be all that they are hoping for. No human king could ever be as beneficent, loving, and merciful as Yahweh Himself. Would they listen? No! They wanted to be like the rest of the world and do things their own way, not the way that Yahweh desired. They wanted to take something Holy and make it common.

Is it possible that even today we who have been baptized in Christ still behave this way? Do we want to tell Yahweh how His church will be run or what kinds of tools will be used to make it grow? Do we seek to make the Christian Church on Earth no different in the way that we conduct our daily affairs than any capitalist business in the world today?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, may we not behave like everyone else. Rather may we live as those set apart for You by Your grace. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Day 7

The Savior has come!

A relationship is restored. Creation is reborn.

Read Matthew 1:18-25 and Romans 5

Finally, after thousands of years, wilderness wanderings, captivities, and many other ups and downs in the relationship between Yahweh and His chosen people, the time has come for the promised deliverer to arrive on Earth and accomplish what He was sent to do. His name is Jesus. He was born of a virgin in the town of Bethlehem. In this little child dwells the fullness of Yahweh Himself. He is God incarnate!

With His birth Yahweh has begun setting things right. Just as through one man, Adam, creation was subjected to brokenness and the human race went from being His very good creatures to His enemies, so also through this one man, Jesus, are all things made new. Through God-given faith in Jesus, Yahweh and mankind are reconciled! Yahweh's working through Holy Baptism changes us and creates in us a new person.

However, we are not yet all that we are going to be. The old person still lives within us as well. Until the time that Jesus returns, all of creation, including you and me, still suffer the effects of sin. We still get sick, we still hurt, and we still die.

But this Jesus who rose from the dead also promises resurrection from the dead to all who are His children. When Jesus returns all of the dead will rise from their graves. He will give all who have died in Christ a new, glorified body like His. Those who died apart from Christ will go into everlasting condemnation. At His return He will also renew all of Creation. He will set it back to the perfection that it was before sin so destroyed it. No longer will death, pain, sorrow, or sickness reign. No longer will creation be broken. It will be restored and we will live in that restored creation forever in perfect fellowship with Yahweh Himself!

*P*rayer

Lord God, in Your Son alone do I have eternal life and the promise of resurrected life in the world to come. Grant that by Your Holy Spirit I may live a life of joy, peace, and service to You until that great day. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Day 8

The Church - God's New Testament "Chosen People"

Read Acts 2:1-47

Earlier in this devotion we learned that Yahweh chose the Israelites to be unique among all the nations of the Earth. He picked them to have a relationship with Him and to be the ones who would receive His revelations. In fact, it was from these people that Jesus, the Savior of the world, would descend. Now fast forward to 21st century America. Are the Israelites still God's chosen? Must one be in the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be saved?

No! God still has a chosen people, a royal priesthood, but it is no longer the ancient Israelites (cf 1 Peter 2:9, Romans 11:1-20). God's chosen people; His new Israel is you, the baptized, the children of God in Christ. We are unique among the nations. We alone know the true God and through Jesus Christ are in a right relationship with Him. The book of Acts details the birth of the chosen people of the New Testament era - the Church. It is this Church that Yahweh has called to be holy to Him.

We are to be unique among all people. This New Israel is not composed only of those who have a certain ancestry. No, anyone can become incorporated into this group. You see, membership has nothing at all to do with the one seeking membership. In fact, it is Yahweh Himself who calls us through His Word and Sacraments to turn from disbelief in the promises of Christ to belief. He enables us to live lives that are different from the unbelievers around us, thus bringing glory to Him and serving as a witness to the Love that is found in the Creator.

*P*rayer

Gracious God, thank you for including me in your chosen nation through Jesus Christ. Enable me to tell others about your love for them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 9

What's so different about the Church?

Read 1 Peter 2:1-25

Whether it is a Boy Scout group, a quilting club, a baseball team, or a political organization all of these groups hold one thing in common. They all had a founder, one person around whom other individuals would gather because they saw some benefit to joining together for a particular cause. All groups, except for the Church, also have something else in common. They were formed by the will of man.

The Church is different, however. It has pleased our God to form for Himself a body of believers from all times and locations. He has called us to Himself through His Word and sacraments. He has made us a royal priesthood and a holy nation. It is because of His divine mercy that we get to come together as brothers and sisters in Christ and seek to carry out His agenda in His power. Sure, the Church is shaped in its outward appearance by the cultures in which her congregations exist. But make no mistake; Yahweh's Church is not of this world!

Another key difference between God's Church and any other organization is the role that works play in it. Most people have heard (and probably agree with) the cliché "there is no such thing as a free lunch." In other words, one can only expect to get out of an organization what one puts into it. This is not so with the Church of God. In fact, the relationship people have with the Church begins with God coming to them while they are lost in sin. God rescues us from this lost state and redeems us by the blood of His Son.

Every time His Church gathers around the Word and sacraments there is free forgiveness for everyone! It matters not if you helped form the congregation as a charter member and have given half your money and all your time to its care or you were just baptized yesterday. All receive the same forgiveness and are equally important parts of this body of Christ that is the Church. That kind of thinking is completely foreign to a works-oriented culture.

*P*ayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for making me part of your body, the Church. Enable me to use the gifts that you have given me in your service. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Day 10

God, how does your Church grow?

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-23

What must a congregation do to grow? Many in the Church at large today have fallen for the idea that we simply need good marketing, entertaining worship, and a bevy of services to offer to the world so that they will want to come and consume what we have to offer. Western Christianity is especially overrun with the idea that we must cater to the consumer mindset. That is, after all, how most of our daily lives work. "The customer is always right!"

In the context of the Church, unbelievers become the customer. So, if something that we believe, or the way that we do something is not to the customer's liking then we must change it so that we can be attractive and the customer will choose us and our Savior.

The problem with this is that Jesus Christ Himself was not attractive, we are told so in the book of Isaiah. The Christ's message is certainly not an attractive one either...the idea that we are all conceived guilty of sin and an enemy of God? What is attractive about that? How about the fact that without a Savior I will die in my sin and spend eternity in hell experiencing God's wrath? No, that is too judgmental. Ultimately the Church fails anytime that we believe that the growth of God's church is dependent on us. We fail when we believe that we must convince others to choose Jesus.

No, Jesus speaks clearly in John 15:16 that He is the one who chooses us. He in fact calls us and creates faith in our hearts through His Word and His sacraments. These are the only tools by which God has chosen to grow His church. As Paul says, he planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth! Our calling as Christians is to share the Word of God with all people. We do this not only by speaking, but by living out God's very Word in our daily lives.

Prayer

God of all grace, use me as your instrument so that by your working your kingdom may grow. In Christ's name, Amen.

Day 11

What is God's will?

Read: Hebrews 1:1-4

As God's children we pray. We ask Yahweh for counsel, strength, guidance, wisdom, but how does He answer us? The Old Testament is full of grand examples of Yahweh speaking to His people with an audible voice, or through divinely elected prophets. Visions are recorded as well when some of God's people had the opportunity to learn from Him directly. Yahweh even sent a human hand to write His message on a king's wall (see Daniel 5)! Should we seek out these kinds of revelations from God? Ought we to be on the look out for the "writing on the wall?" Or does God speak to us now through our feelings? How do we know what to do?

As Lutheran Christians we understand that Yahweh has chosen to limit the manner in which He communicates with us. Specifically, He has chosen to communicate with us through His Word (proclaimed by prophets, written on walls, heard in voices, etc.) and through His Sacraments. The author of Hebrews reminds us that even though Yahweh used some of the more "exotic" methods of communicating in the past, in these last days (that is, the time period that began when Jesus ascended in Heaven and ends at His second coming) He has finally spoken to us through His Son. He is the answer! He is the solution to our problems. Look to His cross and to His Word (the Bible) and employ your God-given reason (in subjection to God's Word, of course). In so doing, Yahweh will direct your paths.

Yahweh never guarantees that we will always be certain of the road to take nor that following His will is easy. In fact, following the way of the Lord can lead to our suffering, our discomfort, and may not be easy at all. But through it all we can be assured that God's Word to us through His Son is that we are forgiven of our sins, made members of His family through Holy Baptism, and are promised eternal life in the new heavens and earth on the day of Christ's return.

Prayer

Father, thank you for speaking to us through your Son. Thank you for sending the message that all who are in Him are forgiven and are your beloved children. In His name, Amen.

Day 12

Glory or Cross?

Read: Matthew 5:43-48 and 10:24-39

There are many today who view Christianity like winning the lottery. They believe that through faith in Christ their life on Earth will be perfect. If only they believe hard enough God will provide them with nothing but success, wealth, and happiness.

Unfortunately, this misunderstanding is not limited just to individual Christians. Entire congregations can fall into this trap as well when things don't go as we expect. If we don't receive only success, wealth, and happiness we begin to wonder what is going on. If we have to suffer, fail, and struggle we may even wonder if God is still there. If He is, does He still love us? This myth ultimately leads us down the path of believing that if we are doing God's will we shall be blessed with success and if we are suffering, then we must be outside of His will.

Nothing could be further from the truth! Prosperity or lack thereof says nothing about whether we are walking in the will of God. Did you notice what Jesus said about the rain falling on both good and evil? How about His proclamation that a servant is not greater than the master?

Indeed, just as Christ suffered during His earthly life, so will we and all who follow Him suffer. This side of the resurrection evil people will prosper and righteous ones will fail and vice-versa. Some days will contain great joy and others great trial. Through it all, Christ is with us as our redeemer and Lord! This is the key to understanding the Christian life. As His baptized children we are part of the kingdom. No matter if today is a good day or a tough one, by virtue of God given faith in Christ we have Yahweh's favor now!

*P*raye*r*

Lord God, thank you for claiming me as your own in the waters of Holy Baptism. Enable me to trust you and your promises to me no matter what may be going on in my daily life. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Day 13

What's the mission?

Read: Matthew 28: 1-20

Going into the store, Dana was on a mission. She was there to get a dozen eggs, one gallon of milk, and a loaf of bread. She was trying to economize and so she made her list and was determined to stick to it. When she entered the store, she learned that the milk and eggs were on the opposite end of the store as was the bread. No problem, she would simply traverse the distance and be done in no time. The problem was that along the way she noticed some yummy potato chips that she had to have. The next aisle held her favorite chocolate (it was even on sale), and by the end of her trip, she had spend 10 times what she hoped and was lugging out four full grocery bags!

What happened? She lost her focus on the mission. She had set out to accomplish one thing, but had gotten distracted along the way. Some could even argue that she had changed her mission. Originally she was there to buy what she needed. As she traversed the store, her mission became to buy what she wanted.

How does this apply to the Christian life and the church? Quite simply, we have been given a mission by God Himself (no, not like the Blues Brothers of days gone by!) Rather, Jesus has commanded His Church to be about specific things: baptizing and teaching, discipling and loving. In all that we do, God can use us to accomplish these tasks as we bring the Word of God and His sacraments to a lost and dying world. Unlike Dana who only had will power to depend on, we, the Body of Christ, can depend on Him who has promised to be with us to the very end of the age!

*P*rayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have promised to be with us to the very end of the age. Keep us in the one true faith until that glorious day and enable us to share it with those around us. In Your name we pray, Amen.

Day 14

Whose vision?

Read: Colossians 1:15-29

Much of modern day leadership training focuses on a process called strategic planning. A key part of this approach is the development of a vision statement. Usually, a vision statement is defined as statement that describes a preferred future. This may sound simple when it comes to the Church of God. Easy-peasee as my children might say. Of course, we want the Church to get bigger, wealthier, and to have more members. At the very least, we want the Church to be "better" in the future than it is today.

One of the problems that I have noticed having been part of a fair number of discussions of visions statements, is that word "we." All too often, a discussion of the future revolves around what we want it to look like. Perhaps a better question to begin with is, "What does God know the future looks like for the Church?"

Notice that in today's reading Paul tells us that the Head of the Church is Christ. It is therefore His vision towards which we work. Moreover, Paul gives us a picture of what His Church, at least in part, looks like..."fully mature in Christ." That is what we are working for, to preach and teach and live the Word of God so that all may not only know the Savior of the World, but that they may also grow to full maturity in Him.

This does not happen overnight. Neither does it happen by diluting what the Word of God teaches and replacing it with things that are easier to hear. May God grant His Church the vision to see the gifts He has provided and then to use them in working towards His vision!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, open my eyes that I may see you and your vision for your church. In Your name, Amen.

Day 15

Just 30 Minutes 3 times a week!

Read: Psalm 119:105

As I have driven around this and other communities, I have often taken note of the number of people who are outside jogging and walking on the sidewalks. The fitness center down the road from my house is often packed with cars. It seems that many people are concerned about their health and are exercising to maintain or improve it. I applaud such an effort and would probably benefit from more exercise myself. However, I wonder if these same people who spend money each month on membership fees and spend significant amounts of time each month investing in their bodies take the same care of their soul.

As Christians, we cannot deny that there appear to be definite benefits to exercise and caring for our physical bodies in general. But we must never lose sight of the fact that someday, unless the Lord returns first, all of our physical bodies will breakdown and will die - returning to the dust from which they were originally created. We, however, will not cease to exist when this happens. Our souls will go on living; they are immortal. We must not allow them to atrophy for lack of spiritual training. Paul reminds us of this when he writes "for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" 1 Tim. 4:8 (ESV).

Please don't misunderstand. God is concerned about our physical selves as well as our spiritual selves, but I believe that we hear enough reminders from our doctors, TV ads, etc to care for our physical bodies; do we hear many that remind us to care for our souls?

One of my favorite types of exercise is weight lifting. I have learned that there are many approaches to this discipline, but only a few that actually produce results and do no harm. The same is true for spiritual training. There are many who are more than willing to give their opinion about what God has to say. Don't take their word for it; go to the source. Read and study the Word of God. It is one of the means that God uses to create and nourish Christian faith. When Jesus returns and calls all who believe in Him as their Lord and Savior from their graves and reunites their souls with a new, perfect body, it will not matter if we could run a four minute mile or bench 350 lbs. What will matter is that we lived this life in God-given faith that our sins are forgiven by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God nourishes this faith through His Word. If you are willing to spend 30 minutes a day working out to benefit your physical body are you also willing to spend that same amount of time studying the Word?

Prayer

O Lord, you have created me as a body and soul knit together. Please enable me to care for me soul that I cannot see as well as my body that I can. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 16

Unity?

Read: Ephesians 4

Of what does our unity consist as children of God? Some in this world argue that we must all have the same style of worship. Others argue that we must have the same church name or be legally considered one entity. Yet still others argue that the church's unity comes from a common purpose.

The apostle Paul speaks clearly in today's text about what real unity is. It is being part of Christ! Did you notice that Paul tells us there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism? All people with God-given faith in Christ are part of Him! Christ is not divided. By virtue of our inclusion in Christ, believers are part of one another.

This is a radical concept and its implications are tremendous.

Once I am part of Christ, no longer can I live my life as if I am only concerned about me. Once I am part of Christ, the lives of those around who are also in Christ become of paramount importance. When they hurt, I hurt. When they rejoice, I rejoice. When they have a need that I am able to meet, I meet it. Of course, we will never experience perfect unity this side of the resurrection. Paul asserts as much in verse 13. There will be disagreements among the people of God. Some of these are areas in which we can agree to disagree and some are not.

Unfortunately, God's Church on earth certainly has many divisions within it created by our ever-present sinful flesh. These divisions, however, do not negate the fact that true unity is found in Christ and that it is to this kind of life all Christians are called.

Prayer

Lord Christ, enable me to live out the unity with others that I have in you. In Your name, Amen.

Day 17

The Trinity...still at work today!

Read: Acts 17:16-34

I love listening to the news. To me, it is interesting to learn about what's going on in other places, be they close to my home or many thousands of miles away. However, one need not listen very long until you start to wonder if anyone is still in control of the world! Routinely, we hear about famines, hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, tornados, mass killings, war... you name it. It seems like things are way out of control. No matter how hard we try, mankind just can't seem to keep things running smoothly.

What are we to do? The apostle Paul tells us clearly that though it may seem like things are out of control, in fact, they are not. The direction of nations, the weather, even our very breath is under someone's control. Yahweh's control! It is the power and mercy of the Holy Trinity that keeps this universe running. By His grace we wake in the morning and sleep at night. By His grace the crops grow, are harvested and end up on our dinner tables. By His grace hearts beat, lungs breathe, and blood flows.

In fact, because of the blood of Christ which flowed during His crucifixion, you and I and all who are part of Him through God-given faith are promised that even though death may one day overtake us, we will be granted new life. Specifically, we will be granted a resurrected life. Yes, because of the death of the Son of God, the power of God that sustains all things now will one day make all things new and right and perfect again.

Once that day comes, we will never again ask, "who's in control?" For in that day, we will see and we will know, first hand, that Yahweh, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit reigns now and forevermore.

Prayer

Great Triune God, you have always been in control. Grant me the grace to see your hand in all things and to accept your good and perfect will. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Day 18

Where's the guarantee?

Read: Matthew 6:19-34

According to the National Safety Council (www.nsc.org), an American in 2008 had a 1 in 6 chance of dying from heart disease, a 1 in 98 chance of dying in a car accident, and a 1 in 652,046 chance of dying from "fireworks discharge." Whether it's the cause of our ultimate demise or something as simply as depositing money in a vending machine believing what we paid for will indeed come out of the machine, we all experience risk everyday of our lives. The life of the people in the Church is no exception. Pastors serve a congregation at the Call of God trusting that they will be adequately provided for by those they serve.

Congregations take on debt to build trusting that together they will be able to make the payments. Individual congregational members work their trusting that their employer will treat them appropriately. However, there are no guarantees that any of the above things will work out how we hope they will. There is, however a wonderful guarantee that we can "hang our hats on." This is the promise of forgiveness and life eternal with Yahweh. This promise is certain because it was made by Yahweh Himself and sealed with the blood of Christ.

As we face the uncertainties of this life, we can be certain that He walks with us through the ups and downs. While we certainly are not called on to be reckless with our lives or the decisions we make, we also are not called on to be paralyzed by fear, waiting for a divine guarantee of success in all of our endeavors. No, let the Church of God live out her life walking by faith and not by sight. May God grant her the wisdom to know the difference between testing Him and trusting Him!

Prayer

Gracious Heavenly Father, we are your people created by the Word of your mouth and recreated through your action in the waters of Holy Baptism. Enable us to live today trusting you and your promises to me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 19

Enjoyable stewardship?

Read: 1Timothy Chapter 6

When you hear the word "stewardship," what do you think of? If you are like many people I know, you probably think something like, "Oh great, here comes another boring talk about money and how much I have to give to the church!" The truth is, how much you HAVE to give has nothing to do with real stewardship. As far as stewardship being boring...not a chance if it is correctly understood.

To begin with, stewardship is simply another way of saying management. The idea is that all the things of life, including life itself, are gifts of Yahweh to be used, enjoyed, and shared. Did you notice that word enjoyed? Paul uses it too. So often, when we hear about how we are to manage the gifts of God, we think that He could not possibly be glorified if we enjoy something for ourselves. What bologna! Our Father in Heaven created us and from the beginning has given us good gifts for our enjoyment. Unfortunately, since sin entered the world we often forget that He wants us to share our gifts with other people. This all ties to the love we have for each other and that unity, or connectedness, that Yahweh creates when He joins us to Christ and all believers in our baptism.

This is key. Simply because God has given you a lot of money or free time or abilities, doesn't mean it is all for you! Often God gives to one person in order that the needs of others may be met. Of course, the greatest gift Yahweh has given to us is the forgiveness of sins leading to eternal life through His Son Jesus. Thanks be to God for His graciousness!

*P*rayer

Lord God, thank you for life and the things needed to sustain it. Enable me to enjoy your wonderful gifts and to share them with those around me. In the name of Christ, my Savior, Amen.

Day 20

Where can I find peace?

Read: Matthew 11:28-30

Our world is full of strife, anger, malice, revenge...in short, there is not much peace. Our own homes are not immune to this either. Whether it is fighting between husband and wife or the seemingly ever-present bickering between brothers and sisters, peace seems elusive. Even if we live and work by ourselves we are not guaranteed peace; for often our own bodies are at war with themselves in the various autoimmune diseases that exist or they are fighting off some invading virus or bacteria. One can easily begin to wonder if there will ever be true peace...real rest.

In this world, the answer is yes! Of course, during this life, all of the above things distract us from the true peace that we have, but it is still ours. This peace is peace with God the Father. Though Adam and Eve's original sin made them and all of us who bear the name human the very enemies (Romans 5:10) of God (Not a position that anyone wants to be in!), He has made us at peace with Him through the shed blood of His Son Jesus Christ. It is a promise that has been fulfilled.

We have that peace, the utter forgiveness of our sins and restoration to a right standing before God, because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What is even more incredible is that we are given all of God's gifts by His grace. We do not, and in fact we cannot, earn them. He bestows them upon us **because of who He is and in spite of who we are**. Even the faith through which we receive His gifts is itself a gift from Him and not a work that we do. We are truly blessed in Christ!

Now, because of the peace that we have with God the Father through Jesus Christ, we endeavor to live at peace with one another by the power of the Holy Spirit. That means we "cut each other some slack!" We realize the enormous debt we have been forgiven and so we willingly forgive the debts of those around us when they sin against us. This attitude of forgiveness is extended to all with whom we come in to contact, whether it is our spouse, our children, the cashier who overcharged us, the driver who rode our tail the past three miles, or the waiter who just can't get our order right. We forgive because we are forgiven and are at peace with our Triune God.

Until the day when our Lord returns and ushers in the new creation where peace is found at every turn, may we be part of His advance team proclaiming and living the peace that is ours because of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Prayer

You, O Lord, are my peace. Lead me in your way that I may live in your peace. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Day 21

The Big Picture

Read: Revelation 21

Yahweh created all things in perfection. Mankind's sin destroyed that perfection and brought God's curse upon all of Creation. However, with that curse also came a promise. Yahweh promised to make all things right again. In the cross of Christ, we see Yahweh reconciling the world to Himself. We see the penalty of sin as well as the love of the Creator for His people. Today, we live and wait for the return of Jesus Christ. On that day there will be resurrection for those who died in Christ.

Revelation 21 gives us a glimpse into the joyous future that awaits the saints of God...all who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb! Until that day, however, God has left His Church on earth to teach His Law and Gospel. We, the people of God, are here to point others to the Savior of the world. We are also here to love one another and to build each other up as we eagerly await that day.

It is so easy to become distracted from our mission. We can start to think we are the most important part of God's Church or we have a corner on the Truth. We can become discouraged because the congregation that we belong to isn't growing like we want it to, or our pastor is not a good preacher, or things aren't going my way.

Fellow redeemed, do not be discouraged! God is in control. His Word is more powerful than our failures. His forgiveness is greater than our sin. In the end there is peace, joy, and perfection for all who are in Christ! Don't get lost in the pixels and miss the big picture!

Prayer

Lord, please keep me and all of your redeemed in the one true faith unto life everlasting until that day when we see you face to face. In Your name, Amen.

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