

St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)

8948 N 1900 Ave Geneseo, IL 61254

309-949-2516

May 2, 2021

Fifth Sunday of Easter

The order of worship is based upon Divine Service Setting Four, Lutheran Service Book p. 203.

Confession and Absolution

Hymn of Invocation: 484 Make Songs of Joy



1 Make songs of joy to Christ, our head; Al - le - lu - ia!
2 Our life was pur - chased by His loss; Al - le - lu - ia!
3 O death, where is your dead - ly sting? Al - le - lu - ia!
4 And where your vic - to - ry, O grave, Al - le - lu - ia!



He lives a - gain who once was dead! Al - le - lu - ia!
He died our death up - on the cross. Al - le - lu - ia!
As - sumed by our tri - um - phant King! Al - le - lu - ia!
When one like Christ has come to save? Al - le - lu - ia!

5 Behold, the tyrants, one and all,
Alleluia!
Before our mighty Savior fall!
Alleluia!

△ 6 For this be praised the Son who rose,
Alleluia!
The Father, and the Holy Ghost!
Alleluia!

Stand

The sign of the cross may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.

- P** In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- C** **Amen.**
- P** Our help is in the name of the Lord,
- C** **who made heaven and earth.**
- P** If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?
- C** **But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.**

P Since we are gathered to hear God's Word, call upon Him in prayer and praise, and receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of this altar, let us first consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

C **Almighty God, have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.**

P Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen.**

Service of the Word

Introit

Psalm 145:1-2, 8, 10, 21; antiphon: John 16:16

A little while, and you will see me no longer;
and again a little while, and you will see me.

**I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.**

Every day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.

**The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**

All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD,
and all your saints shall bless you!

**My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.**

**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.**

A little while, and you will see me no longer;
and again a little while, and you will see me.

Kyrie



C Lord, have mer - cy; Christ, have mer - cy; Lord, have mer - cy.

Gloria in Excelsis



C 1 To God on high be glo - ry And peace to all the earth;
2 To You, O sole - be - got - ten, The Fa - ther's Son, we pray;
3 For You a - lone are ho - ly; You on - ly are the Lord.



Good-will from God in heav - en Pro - claimed at Je - sus' birth!
O Lamb of God, our Sav - ior, You take our sins a - way.
For - ev - er and for - ev - er, Be wor - shiped and a - dored;



We praise and bless You, Fa - ther; Your ho - ly name, we sing—
Have mer - cy on us, Je - sus; Re - ceive our heart - felt cry,
You with the Ho - ly Spir - it A - lone are Lord Most High,



Our thanks for Your great glo - ry, Lord God, our heav'n - ly King.
Where You in pow'r are seat - ed At God's right hand on high—
In God the Fa - ther's glo - ry. "A - men!" our glad re - ply.

Salutation and Collect of the Day

P The Lord be with you.

C And also with you.

P Let us pray.

O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

Sit

First Reading

Acts 8:26-40, on back of bulletin

P This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Gradual

adapt. from Matthew 28:7; Hebrews 2:7; Psalm 8:6

Christ has risen from the dead.

[God the Father] has crowned him with glory and honor.

**He has given him dominion over the works of his hands;
he has put all things under his feet.**

Epistle

1 John 4:1-11, on back of bulletin

P This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Stand

Alleluia and Verse



C Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.



C These things are writ - ten that you may be - lieve that



Je - sus is the Christ, the Son of God.



C Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Holy Gospel

John 15:1-8, on back of bulletin

P The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 15th chapter.

C Glory to You, O Lord.

After the reading:

P This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to You, O Christ.

Nicene Creed

C I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth
and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of His Father before all worlds,

**God of God, Light of Light,
 very God of very God,
 begotten, not made,
 being of one substance with the Father,
 by whom all things were made;
 who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven
 and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary
 and was made man;
 and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
 He suffered and was buried.
 And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures
 and ascended into heaven
 and sits at the right hand of the Father.
 And He will come again with glory to judge both the living
 and the dead,
 whose kingdom will have no end.
 And I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the Lord and giver of life,
 who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
 who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and
 glorified,
 who spoke by the prophets.
 And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,
 I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,
 and I look for the resurrection of the dead
 and the life \dagger of the world to come. Amen.**



Flow - ing from His pierc - ed side. Al - le - lu - ia!
 Christ the vic - tim, Christ the priest. Al - le - lu - ia!
 Through the wave that drowns the foe. Al - le - lu - ia!
 Eat we man - na from a - bove. Al - le - lu - ia!

5 Mighty Victim from the sky,
 Hell's fierce pow'rs beneath You lie;
 You have conquered in the fight,
 You have brought us life and light.
 Alleluia!

6 Now no more can death appall,
 Now no more the grave enthrall;
 You have opened paradise,
 And Your saints in You shall rise.
 Alleluia!

7 Easter triumph, Easter joy!
 This alone can sin destroy;
 From sin's pow'r, Lord, set us free,
 Newborn souls in You to be.
 Alleluia!

△ 8 Father, who the crown shall give,
 Savior, by whose death we live,
 Spirit, guide through all our days:
 Three in One, Your name we praise.
 Alleluia!

Sit
Hymn of the Day: 633 At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing



1 At the Lamb's high feast we sing Praise to
 2 Praise we Him, whose love di - vine Gives His
 3 Where the pas - chal blood is poured, Death's dread
 4 Praise we Christ, whose blood was shed, Pas - chal



our vic - to - rious King, Who has washed us in the tide
 sa - cred blood for wine, Gives His bod - y for the feast—
 an - gel sheathes the sword; Is - rael's hosts tri - um-phant go
 vic - tim, pas - chal bread; With sin - cer - i - ty and love

Sermon

Prayer of the Church

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

After each petition:

P Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

The prayers conclude:

P ...one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

Service of the Sacrament

Preface

P The Lord be with you.

C And also with you.

P Lift up your hearts.

C We lift them to the Lord.

P Let us give thanks unto the Lord, our God.

C It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

P It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, for the countless blessings You so freely bestow on us and all creation. Above all, we give thanks for Your boundless love shown to us when You sent Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into our flesh and laid on Him our sin, giving Him into death that we might not die eternally. Because He is now risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity, all who believe in Him will overcome sin and death and will rise again to new life. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

Sanctus



C Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord God of Sab - a - oth a - dored;



Heav'n and earth with full ac-claim shout the glo-ry of Your name.



Sing ho - san-na in the high-est, sing ho-san - na to the Lord;



Tru - ly blest is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

Prayer of Thanksgiving

P Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of all creation, for You have had mercy on us and given Your only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. By His death, He has redeemed us from bondage to sin and death, and by His resurrection, He has delivered us into new life in Him.

Grant us to keep the Feast in sincerity and truth, faithfully eating His body given into death and drinking His life's blood poured out for our salvation until we pass through death to the promised land of life eternal.

Hear us as we pray in His name and as He has taught us:

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.

The Words of Institution

P Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My † body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My † blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Pax Domini

P The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C Amen.

Agnus Dei



C 1 O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,
2 O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,
You take the sin of the world a - way;
You take the sin of the world a - way;
O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,
Have mer - cy on us, Je - sus Christ,
Have mer - cy on us, Lord, we pray.
And grant us peace, O Lord, we pray.

Distribution

After the Communion has been received by all communicants:

P The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting. Depart † in peace.

C Amen.

Nunc Dimittis



C 1 O Lord, now let Your ser - vant De -
2 All glo - ry to the Fa - ther, All
part in heav'n - ly peace, For I have seen the
glo - ry to the Son, All glo - ry to the
glo - ry Of Your re - deem - ing grace:
Spir - it, For - ev - er Three in One;



A light to lead the Gen - tiles Un -
For as in the be - gin - ning, Is
to Your ho - ly hill, The glo - ry of Your
now, shall ev - er be, God's tri - une name re -
peo - ple, Your cho - sen Is - ra - el.
sound - ing Through all e - ter - ni - ty.

Post-Communion Collect

P Let us pray.

We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

Benedicamus

P Let us bless the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Benediction

P The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look upon you with favor and † give you peace.

C Amen.

The service concludes on the next page with the Hymn to Depart.

Hymn to Depart: 487 Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain



1 Come, you faith-ful, raise the strain Of tri - um-phant glad - ness!
 2 'Tis the spring of souls to - day: Christ has burst His pris - on
 3 Now the queen of sea - sons, bright With the day of splen - dor,
 4 For to - day a - mong His own Christ ap - peared, be - stow - ing
 5 Al - le - lu - ia! Now we cry To our King im - mor - tal,



God has brought His Is - ra - el In - to joy from sad - ness,
 And from three days' sleep in death As a sun has ris - en;
 With the roy - al feast of feasts Comes its joy to ren - der;
 His deep peace, which ev - er - more Pass - es hu - man know - ing.
 Who, tri - um - phant, burst the bars Of the tomb's dark por - tal.



Loosed from Pha-raoh's bit - ter yoke Ja - cob's sons and daugh - ters,
 All the win - ter of our sins, Long and dark, is fly - ing
 Comes to glad - den faith-ful hearts Which with true af - fec - tion
 Nei - ther could the gates of death Nor the tomb's dark por - tal
 Come, you faith - ful, raise the strain Of tri - um - phant glad - ness!



Led them with un-moist - ened foot Through the Red Sea wa - ters.
 From His light, to whom is giv'n Laud and praise un - dy - ing.
 Wel - come in un - wea - ried strain Je - sus' res - ur - rec - tion!
 Nor the watch - ers nor the seal Hold Him as a mor - tal.
 God has brought His Is - ra - el In - to joy from sad - ness!

Today we receive the gift of Holy Communion. Communion is an expression of faith and agreement. If you're our guest this morning, we don't want to place you in a position of agreement with our beliefs before you've had opportunity to study them. Therefore, if you're not a member of a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod congregation, we invite you to speak with our pastor about this special opportunity, and request that you not partake of Communion today. Thank you.

Acknowledgements

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ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH-LCMS

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HEARING ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

Rev. Timothy Nerud

Pastor

309-949-2516 (Office)

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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.

THIS WEEK AT ST. JOHN'S

Today	8:45 am	SS/Adult w/Youth Bible Study
	10:00 am	Divine Worship/Communion
Wednesday	5:00 pm	Confirmation
Thursday		NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER
	6:00 pm	Elders' meeting
	7:00 pm	Men's Bible Study
Next Sunday	8:45 am	SS/Adult w/Youth Bible Study
	10:00 am	Divine Worship

JOHN 15:2 – “Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” God is interested in the fruit that we bear in good works, and He even prunes us so that we may bring forth more fruit. Trusting in our Lord's work for us, we are grafted by grace into His vine. We desire to be more like Him and grow into His image. That's growth in fruit bearing, and it always comes with some pruning.

PLEASE CHECK the attendance sheet for you and your family members, marking each one attending the worship service. Thank you for your help.

Minutes of the April voters meeting are available by the mailboxes.

Central Illinois District annual Scholarship Sunday is today, May 2nd. The cost of education at one of our synodical colleges is about \$37,000 per year, and about \$40,000 at one of our seminaries. Annual unmet needs after grants, loans, scholarships, parents' contributions, etc., average about \$10,000 for undergraduates and about \$25,000 for seminarians. Please include these needs in your prayers and make a generous gift to support the unmet needs of our 13

college students and 11 seminarians as they prepare to serve the Lord as His called servants. You may use a “Will They Always Be There?” envelope provided by your church, or mail your gift directly to: Central Illinois District – LCMS, 1850 N. Grand Avenue West, Springfield, IL 62702-1626.

Don’t forget to pray for, thank, and encourage those called church workers who are presently serving you, as well as those who are studying to serve the Lord and you. If you are considering or know someone who would be a good candidate to study for a called vocation in the church, please speak to your pastor about them and send their names and contact information along with your check to the district office. Thank you for your faithfulness.

LWML INGATHERING—The congregation is invited to help LWML gather items for ‘Personal Care Kits’ which will be sent to Lutheran World Relief. Items can be brought to the church anytime during the month of May. A box will be available for your donations. Items we are collecting: light-weight bath-size towels (between 20”x40” & 52”x27”) dark colors recommended, 2 or 3 bath size bars of soap in original wrapping, adult-size toothbrush in original wrapper, sturdy comb, and nail clippers. Your help is greatly appreciated. Monetary gifts are also acceptable and will be used to purchase item.

ANDREW HILL ASSIGNED TO VICARAGE—Our seminarian, Andrew Hill, will serve his year of vicarage at Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Imperial NE. Please continue to pray for his family as they move to this new assignment. Also pray for a safe delivery of their third child due around July 13th.

PRAYER MINISTRY

Remember God’s work through missionaries on home service as you pray:

MISSION—*Pray for God’s hand to guide and bless the details and logistical arrangements that are a necessary part of missionary home service, such as transportation and housing.*

ST. JOHN’S—Mr. & Mrs. Kyle Wickwire—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 in righteousness of life. Specifically, we pray for Kyle, Ashton, Makenna, and Elsie ask your blessing on them.

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:

Drew Schillinger	Jim Rahn	Paula Chapa
Arlyn Helke	Lois Esterlein	Lynne Johnson
Derek Helke	Lillian Hock	Jim Dahl
Betty Firch	John Erdman	Carolyn Werner
Linda Aper	Marilyn Woods	

Andrew Hill, Sarah, John, Daniel (2019/2020 Seminary Student)

Don Eggers (son of a friend of Marilyn Woods)

Mike Miller (friend of Bob & Sherry Wechsler)

Jodi Martins (daughter of Gary & Darla Johns)

Jon & Anita Clausing (missionaries in Kenya)

Marilyn Potts (wife of Cal Potts, former St John Laborer For Christ)

Pam Bennett (friend of Dan/Roselyn Maeltzer)

Karen Wright (wife of Pastor Gary Wright)

Virginia Miller (mother of Jamie Werling)

Kelly Wechsler (cousin of Bob Wechsler)

Joseph Baamonde (Friend of Paula Mooney)

Clinton Kane Family (son of Sandy Kane)

Jim Neumann (father-in-law of Brad Gehn’s son)

Harley Hepner (cousin of Sarah Hock)

Delores Gonion (mother of Michele Barry)

Glenn McAdam (friend of Bob & Sherry Wechsler)

Lonnie Anderson (employee of Brad Gehn)

Laurie Sanford (sister of Jan Dahl)

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

Mandy & Richard Davila (daughter & son-in-law of Dale & Linda Aper)

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

Ken Willeford (husband of Alicia Willeford)

Karl Flynn (son of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Flynn)

Zachary & Tiffany Gardner (nephew & wife of Bob & Lois Esterlein)

Casey Powers Jr. (step son of Lisa Powers)

LUTHERANS FOR LIFE

“Death is the one thing no Christian has to do on his or her own. Jesus has already been through suffering and death before us. He knows the way through death and the way back to life, too. Our friends and family cannot go with us—but Jesus can. He will never let go of our hands. And He will bring us back to life with Him because He has promised, and He will never lie.” *Dr. Kari Vo, Lutheran Hour Ministries – A Life Quote from Lutherans For Life • lutherans-forlife.org*

THE GREAT CENTRAL IL CAMPOUT: May 28-31—Pitch your tent with others from across Central Illinois for a weekend of swimming, fishing, canoe rides, disc golf, squishy-ball, campfire devotions, Christian fellowship, and delicious pulled pork sandwiches at the Sunday Hog Roast. *Contact the camp office today to reserve a spot in the campground, a cabin, or a hotel room in the CGC.*

Sunday Schedule:

10:30am ~ Matins at the Outdoor Chapel

11:15 ~ Dedication of Dining Hall

11:30-2:00 ~ **Hog Roast** (Adults, \$8; Children, \$5)

1-4pm ~ Beach open (weather permitting)

HELP NEEDED! - Camp CILCA is seeking to fill the position of *Assistant Cook*: \$14/hr, part-time. For more information contact the camp office today!

Camp CILCA needs one more *full-time male counselor for the summer*. If you know a well-catechized, college-age man, encourage him to contact the camp office and talk to Pastor Theilen.

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 2, 2021

Sermon Text: John 15:1-8 (Gospel Reading)

Other Texts: Acts 8:26-40 (First Reading); 1 John 4:1-11 (Epistle)

“Life in the Living One”

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

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”ⁱ

Here Jesus once again speaks one of His great “I AM” statements, thus declaring Himself to be none other than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who said to Moses from the burning bush, “I AM WHO I AM.”ⁱⁱ The very name implies that God is *the living One*. And now He, the living One, has come in human flesh to be our Savior, to give us life. Therefore to have the life that lasts forever in heaven, we must, here on earth, be connected to He who is the living One, who gives both physical life and, even more, spiritual life.

To have life by being connected to Jesus, to abide in Him and to have Him abide in you, happens in only one way, *through faith*. But this is no mere faith that recognizes that there is some sort of higher power out there. Nor is it a faith that thinks of Jesus as one way, even the best way, to that higher power.

No, this is the faith that only comes from true conversion. It is being terrified of your sins and God’s holiness, your trembling conscience recognizing your own “goodness” as nothing but filth before Him. Then, in the fullness of the recognition of your lost state, you hear this incredible truth: your salvation is not found in any work which you have done, but in the work of God who, in His grace, sent His Son into the world to suffer and die for your sins. You hear how He gives you this forgiveness and salvation freely by simply believing it is true, and so you grasp that promise with all your might. *That* is the faith that connects you to Christ, for you trust in Him alone. That is the faith that gives life now and forever. Truly any other faith is a deception.

But where does such faith come from? How is that faith made and sustained in us? Consider the words just said, “then...you hear this incredible truth” about God’s Son saving you. And so Jesus said to His disciples, “Already you are clean because of *the word* that I have spoken to you.”ⁱⁱⁱ And again, “If you abide in me, and *my words* abide in you.”^{iv}

There simply is no Christ and no Holy Spirit, and therefore, no forgiveness and new life which lasts forever, where Christ’s Word is not present. Thus faith does not despise hearing the Word of God, does not find all sorts of things that are more important than being in the Word. On the contrary, a living faith knows that the Word is its lifeline, the very instrument that the Holy Spirit uses to keep it alive and healthy, so that it is not lost before we enter heaven’s glory.

But how does the Word do this? Truly, while it is miraculous, as the Holy Spirit works the miracle of giving life through it, it is neither magic, nor is it automatic. It does not work by our

just happening to hear the Word being read in our vicinity even as we're focused on other things, our worries, our joys, our busy schedule, or the inside of our eyelids. No. The Word is the Holy Spirit's instrument, but we must hear it, meditate upon it, believe it, and live according to it. *Faith* does such. Anything less is having ears that do not hear and so resisting the Holy Spirit.

Thus faith says, "I believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary, who was crucified and died for me, who rose again, and who ascended to heaven and is even now seated at the right hand of the Father. I believe this *because* this is what the holy prophets and apostles have written by the Spirit's inspiration in the Scriptures. Written so that I may believe in Jesus, be forgiven, have eternal life, and begin to live that life even now."

Truly, if you remain faithful to this Christ revealed in the Word, are ready to stake everything on it, to forsake all things, your job, your family, even your life, rather than to accept different teachings or works not commanded by God, then Christ abides in you and you in Him. Then you are firmly attached to Christ the vine, His word and your heart becoming one. And then, and only then, can you bear fruit. For the one not connected to Christ by faith through the Word can bear no fruit whatsoever that is pleasing to God.

No matter how great, noble, or self-sacrificing such works may be to our eyes, no matter how deserving of praise and thanks they may be here on earth, they do not reach heaven as incense, but only stink to hell. Not because of the work itself, but because of *the heart* from which the work comes. For only that heart that is enlivened through faith in Christ begins to obey God's commandments *out of true fear and love of God and true love for others*, and only a believer has the sin that still clings to the work covered by Christ's holiness. The unbeliever does not have the new heart, nor Christ's covering, and so their works are simply worthless, nonexistent before God, and become damning if they think God owes them for such works.

But by God's grace we have been called by the Holy Spirit through the life-giving Word, washed and cleansed in the living waters of Holy Baptism, fed with the heavenly food of the body and blood of Christ given in the Sacrament, and so we are believers! We have been connected to Christ our vine through God-given faith. And so being made alive in Christ, we now bear God-pleasing fruit, not because of us, but because we abide in Christ and He in us. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."^v As a branch that is connected to the vine receives the life-giving sap and so bears then fruit, so too with us, the love of Christ fills us, and overflows out of us, bringing forth fruits well-pleasing to God our Father.

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

Prayer is a fruit of faith. It has been well-said that prayer is part of a Christian's respiration, we breathe in God's Spirit-filled, life-giving Word, and then breathe out our prayers which come forth from our own spirit, empowered and guided by God's Word. So we pray first and foremost seeking after His kingdom and righteousness. This means that an important part of our prayers is that we and our fellow believers would have greater faith and bear more fruit.

For this to happen, a most necessary prayer is that we would take the purity of God's Word extremely seriously. For we see that any and all false teaching, no matter how seemingly minor, is *deadly*. For our faith which connects us to Christ is kept alive by the Word, but false teaching would undermine that Word, thereby leaving us dried up in the end.

And so we "test the spirits."^{vi} That is, we determine what kind of spirit is speaking through the mouth of the teacher, the Holy Spirit as Christ's Word is proclaimed in its truth and purity, or an evil spirit who is luring us away from Christ with things that our itching ears would like to hear.^{vii} Things that sound more exciting than Law and Gospel, sin and grace, that promise happiness and success in this life, that lower, even change, the demands of God's Law, that would have us place our trust in anything other than the crucified and risen Son of God. Such things we flee as if the devil himself were speaking them, for truly that is the case.^{viii}

And so being firmly anchored to Christ because our faith is fed by the pure milk of God's Word,^{ix} we are changed, transformed by Christ and His Spirit, growing as children of the heavenly Father. Sexual immorality, anger, grudges, envy, drunkenness, these and all other works of the sinful nature will no longer ensnare us. Not only do we recognize that following our sinful nature will separate us from Christ leaving us to be eternally burned, we also see that such things are *not* freedom, but really just slavery to sin and Satan. They are ugly, twisted perversions of God's creation. They are like a machine that is not being used correctly, so it is not running smoothly, clanking and smoking, until finally it breaks down, *permanently*.

But not so with us! Christ abides in us along with His Father and Their Holy Spirit. We are temples of the living One, the Triune God, and we desire to honor Him with our bodies, our souls, our tongues, yes, our very lives. We have the mind of Christ, and so we judge things accordingly, avoiding that which is spiritually harmful. Remembering that "Bad company ruins good morals,"^x we will pick as our friends, and especially our spouse, only those who will encourage us in our faith, not those who would lead us from Christ and His Word. And we will work to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."^{xi} For such is God's will for us. And finally, we will recognize that the hardships and suffering which God allows into our lives is not His anger at us, but is actually His loving pruning, as He snips us so that we will rely on Christ all the more, and thus bear even more fruit.

God grant that we hear His Word in faith and so bear much fruit now, even as we look forward to life with Him in our heavenly home. Amen!

ⁱ John 15:5. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

ⁱⁱ See Exodus 3:14.

ⁱⁱⁱ John 15:3, *emphasis mine*.

^{iv} John 15:7a, *emphasis mine*.

^v Galatians 2:20.

^{vi} See 1 John 4:1.

^{vii} 2 Timothy 4:3.

^{viii} Not that the person is bodily possessed, but that all false teachings come from Satan.

^{ix} 1 Peter 2:2.

^x 1 Corinthians 15:33.

^{xi} Galatians 5:22-23.