

First Sunday in Lent

3-5-2017

Multiple rich connections to the catechisms jump out of today's gospel. Read the catechisms' reflections on the sixth and seventh petitions of the Lord's Prayer: "Save us from the time of trial. And deliver us from evil" (*ELW*, p. 1164; *Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 453–456). The temptations recorded in Matthew also point to the Fourth Petition and the first two commandments: "Give us today our daily bread"; "You shall have no other gods"; "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God." As you work through the law of the connections, proclaim also the gospel of salvation, deliverance, providence, willingness to hear our prayer, and revelation of who God is in Jesus our Lord.

Second Sunday in Lent

3-12-2017

A review of the Large Catechism's Concerning Baptism section opens up sacramental themes in today's gospel. "'The one who believes and is baptized will be saved.' This is the simplest way to put it: the power, effect, benefit, fruit and purpose of baptism is that it saves. For no one is baptized in order to become a prince, but, as the words say, 'to be saved.' To be saved, as everyone well knows, is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil, to enter into Christ's kingdom, and to live with him forever" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, p. 459).

Third Sunday in Lent

3-19-2017

Jesus does the will of God. God's will is mysterious and sometimes provokes surprising developments, like what happened to the woman at the well when Jesus arrived. God's will moves us like the woman witnessing to her neighbors about Jesus. How does this come about? "Whenever God breaks and hinders every evil scheme and will . . . that would not allow us to hallow God's name and would prevent the coming of his kingdom, and instead whenever God strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in his word and faith until the end of our lives. This is God's good and gracious will" (*ELW*, p. 1163).

Fourth Sunday in Lent

3-26-2017

Today's gospel provides an opportunity to talk about blindness in its many forms. For example, the debate about the sabbath (John 9:13-16) could open the theme of how we turn God's commands into weapons instead of receiving them as gifts (Third Commandment). Blindness manifests itself when people "know" why bad things have happened to others. Another path connects the last three petitions of the Lord's Prayer: we are all sinners even though some are blind to that reality, or worse, blind to God's gracious forgiveness.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

4-2-2017

The raising of Lazarus in today's gospel connects to the Third Article of the Creed. "[B]ecause holiness has begun and is growing daily, we await the time when our flesh will be put to death, will be buried with all its uncleanness, and will come forth gloriously and arise to complete and perfect holiness in a new, eternal life. . . . In that life there will be only perfectly pure and holy

people, full of integrity and righteousness, completely freed from sin, death, and all misfortune, living in new, immortal, and glorified bodies” (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, p. 438).

Sunday of the Passion / Palm Sunday

4-9-2017

Luther’s explanation to the Second Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism states that Jesus Christ “has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, . . . with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death” (*ELW*, p. 1162). This image of an innocent, suffering Savior connects with all the readings today. Consider especially Isaiah 50:9a; Philippians 2:5-8; and Matthew’s entire passion narrative, especially 26:27-28, 27:3-4, 27:19, and 27:54.

Maundy Thursday

4-13-2017

If you choose to explore the command and promise of sharing the Lord’s supper, read through The Sacrament of the Altar in the Large Catechism as background (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 467–475). Proclaim the good news that God commands us to come to this meal and promises to be present in it. “Here stand the gracious and lovely words, ‘This is my body, given FOR YOU,’ ‘This is my blood, shed FOR YOU for the forgiveness of sins.’ These words . . . are not preached to wood or stone but to you and me; otherwise he might just as well have kept quiet and not instituted a sacrament” (p. 473).

Good Friday

4-14-2017

Explore the Second Article of the Creed in both catechisms, but particularly the end of the Large Catechism’s discussion. “Let this be the summary of this article, that the little word ‘LORD’ simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness and keeps us there. The remaining parts of this article simply serve to clarify and express how and by what means this redemption was accomplished—that is, how much it cost Christ and what he paid and risked in order to win us and bring us under his dominion” (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, p. 434).

Resurrection of Our Lord, Vigil of Easter

4-15-2017

Baptism—dying and rising—is a major theme and focus for this night of nights. There is a clear and compelling connection to the Small Catechism’s questions and answers about Holy Baptism: “What then is the significance of such a baptism with water? It signifies that the old person in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily sorrow for sin and through repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (*ELW*, p. 1165). Luther also quotes from Romans 6 in this section; this same portion of Romans 6 is the New Testament reading for tonight’s Vigil.

Resurrection of Our Lord, Easter Day

4-16-2017

The Large Catechism's explanation of the Second Article of Creed provides resources for today's proclamation: Christ "became a human creature . . . suffered, died, and was buried so that he might make satisfaction for me And he did all this so that he might become my LORD. . . . Afterward he rose again from the dead, swallowed up and devoured death" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, p. 434–435). And, "the entire gospel that we preach depends on the proper understanding of this article. Upon it all our salvation and blessedness are based, and it is so rich and broad that we can never learn it fully" (p. 435).

Second Sunday of Easter

4-23-2017

Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Reflect this week on Luther's explanation to the Third Article of the Creed in the Large Catechism: "the Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the following: the community of saints or Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. That is, he first leads us into his holy community, placing us in the church's lap, where he preaches to us and brings us to Christ" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 435–436).

Third Sunday of Easter

4-30-2017

The Large Catechism's explanation of "The Sacrament of the Altar" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 467–475) opens our eyes to the spiritual challenges of Luther's time and ours. His thoughts invite us to ponder what questions hinder people from sharing the meal as the disciples did. In their confusion, doubt, and grief, the breaking of the bread opened the disciples' eyes to the presence of their Lord and inspired their witness (Luke 24:30-35). Luther's explanation may cause us to wonder about what has changed and not changed regarding God's gift of holy communion.

Fourth Sunday of Easter

5-7-2017

We have a good shepherd but other shepherds and other things want to distract us and take God's place at the center of our life. Luther's explanation of the First Commandment and its appendix in the Large Catechism (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 386–392) help us explore our misplaced loyalties. "'See to it that you let me alone be your God, and never search for another.' In other words: 'Whatever good thing you lack, look to me for it and seek it from me, and whenever your suffer misfortune and distress, crawl to me and cling to me. I, I myself, will give you what you need and help you out of every danger'" (p. 387).

Fifth Sunday of Easter

5-14-2017

Today's second reading invites exploration of God's call to be a gathered and sent church. The Large Catechism's explanation of the Third Article of the Creed (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 435–439) encourages reflection about the image of "living stones" (1 Pet. 2:5) and the gathered community of believers. "The Creed calls the holy Christian church a *communio sanctorum*, 'a communion of saints.' . . . The word *ecclesia* properly means nothing but an assembly in German. . . . in good German it ought to be called 'a Christian community or assembly,' or best and most clearly of all, 'a holy Christian people'" (pp. 436–437).

Sixth Sunday of Easter

5-21-2017

Today's gospel seems naturally to pull us toward Luther's discussion of the Holy Spirit in the Third Article of the Creed. Yet the language about commandments (John 14: 15, 21) also makes a case for reviewing Luther's Preface to the Large Catechism and especially his explanations of the Ten Commandments (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 379–431). "We think we can learn in an hour what God himself cannot finish teaching" (p. 382). A brief review all ten commandments could conclude with Jesus' commandment to love God and neighbor. Who can guide us as we discern what it means to keep the commandments? The Advocate.

Ascension of Our Lord

5-25-2017

We cannot say that Christ's followers today are "continually in the temple blessing God" (Luke 24:53). Yet our days of rest are hallowed by having our minds "opened . . . to understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45) and discovering the word's demands and promises. Luther's explanation of the Third Commandment in the Large Catechism reminds us "At whatever time God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or pondered, there the person, the day, and the work is hallowed, not on account of the external work but on account of the Word that makes us all saints" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, p. 399).

Seventh Sunday of Easter

5-28-2017

The Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer in the Large Catechism connects to today's second reading from 1 Peter by drawing on the imagery of the "fiery ordeal" being experienced by believers (1 Peter 4:12) and the devil as a roaring and prowling lion (1 Peter 5:8). "This, then, is what 'leading us not into temptation' means: when God gives us power and strength to resist, even though the attack is not removed or ended. For no one can escape temptations and allurements as long as we live in the flesh and have the devil prowling around us. We cannot help but suffer attacks, and even be mired in them, but we pray here that we may not fall into them and be drowned by them" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, p. 434). Jesus' prayer, "Holy Father, protect them in your name" (John 17:11) connects here, too.

Day of Pentecost

6-4-2017

This is Holy Spirit day *par excellence*. Delve into Luther's explanations of the Third Article of the Creed in both catechisms (*ELW*, p. 1162; *Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 435–440). The Small Catechism subtitles this article: "On Being Made Holy." Its explanation is most evocative, speaking with clarity and power. Notice how it points to what God does through the Holy Spirit: calls, enlightens, makes holy, forgives sins, raises to eternal life. The word *catechize* means "to repeat." Find ways to repeat the article's meaning several times in today's worship. It is countercultural and full of promises.

The Holy Trinity

6-11-2017

God always exceeds our comprehension. Today's first reading (Genesis 1:1—2:4a) and psalm (8) emphasize God is our creator; you may want to focus on the theme of our creating God this week. Savor the Small and Large Catechisms' explanations of the First Article of the Creed. Holy Trinity Sunday also invites consideration of all three articles of the Apostles' Creed. Invite worshipers to recite all three articles and their explanations from the Small Catechism during the service (*ELW*, p. 1162). Studying the section on the Creed in the Large Catechism (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 431–440) will help you find powerful ways to celebrate unity in our concept of the Trinity. "One God and one faith, but three persons, and therefore also three articles or confessions" (p. 432).

Lectionary 11

6-18-2017

Read the catechisms' reflections on the second and third petitions of the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as in heaven" (*ELW*, p. 1163; *Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 446–449). This quote opens up the optional verses in today's gospel: "For where God's Word is preached, accepted, or believed, and bears fruit, there the holy and precious cross will also not be far behind. And let no one think we will have peace; rather, we must sacrifice all we have on earth—possessions, honor, house and farm, spouse and children, body and life" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 448–449). The coming of God's reign is not ours to bring, yet God invites us into this mission for God's world. Jesus empowers us to follow him, "teaching . . . proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness" (Matt. 9:35).

Lectionary 12

6-25-2017

Luther's explanation of the Fourth Commandment in the Large Catechism suggests a way to interpret today's gospel, especially Matthew 10:34-39 (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 400–410; see especially pp. 405–408). The gospel reading (Matthew 10:24-39) and the First Commandment both clarify that our parents and our family are to be honored, not made into idols. The same is true of our government. Christ calls us to distinguish between honor and worship. When hard things are happening in the world, in our family, or in our government, we can also remember petitions six and seven of the Lord's Prayer: "Save us from the time of trial. And deliver us from evil" (*ELW*, p. 1164). The promises of God are greater than the threats of this broken world.

Lectionary 13

7-2-2017

Christians confess their sins. Today's second reading (Rom. 6:12-23) exhorts us to not let sin have dominion over us, but to live in God's grace. One way God's people have fought the power of sin is to name their sin. Sin loses its power as we remember our baptism and cling to the promise that God breaks our chains of slavery to sin. Read through the Small Catechism's section "How people are to be taught to confess" (*ELW*, p. 1165) and the Large Catechism's section "A brief exhortation to confession" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 476–480). Luther writes that confession consists of two parts: "The first is our work and act, when I lament my sin and desire comfort and restoration for my soul. The second is a work that God

does, when he absolves me of my sins through the Word placed on the lips of another person” (p. 478).

Lectionary 14

7-9-2017

“Then you are to go to sleep quickly and cheerfully” (“The Evening Blessing,” Luther’s Small Catechism, *ELW*, p. 1167). In a world full of complexity and anxieties, the Evening Blessing in the Small Catechism invites us to trust in God. Jesus promises that if we come to him, he will give us rest (Matt. 11:28). One way we come to Jesus is in prayer. Both the morning and evening blessings connect to today’s gospel could serve your proclamation and worship (*ELW*, pp. 1166–1167).

Lectionary 15

7-16-2017

Today’s Spirit-filled second reading from Romans, and the parable of the sower in the gospel connect beautifully with Luther’s explanation of the Third Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism. This article bursts with the good news that God is with us and for us: “I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith” (*ELW*, p. 1162). In a time perhaps overly focused on personal spirituality, Luther’s Large Catechism points out how the Holy Spirit works through community (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 435–439).

Lectionary 16

7-23-2017

A quick tour through the ten commandments during the sermon would pair nicely with the parable of the wheat and the weeds in today’s gospel (Matt. 13:24-30, 26-43), allowing worshipers to consider what “weeds” are growing in their personal lives and in the community’s common life. God is not so focused on removing the weeds in the fields of our lives that we are destroyed. We are thankful our gracious God is willing to wait. The burning away of all that is not of God from our lives and world provokes both grieving and rejoicing as the weeds are removed and we discover the growing fruit of God’s Spirit.

Lectionary 17

7-30-2017

Luther’s explanation to the Second Article of the Creed in the Large Catechism concentrates on the words, “in Jesus Christ, our LORD” (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, p. 434). These words are echoed in the last verse of today’s second reading: “. . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39). God is at work in every part of our lives: “he has redeemed and released me from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all misfortune. Before this I had no lord or king, but was captive under the power of the devil. I was condemned to death and entangled in sin and blindness. . . . There was no counsel, no help, no comfort for us until this only and eternal Son of God, in his unfathomable goodness, had mercy on us” (p. 434).

Lectionary 18

8-6-2017

We still look to heaven in gratefulness for our daily bread, like Jesus does in today's gospel (Matt. 14:13-21). We give thanks for God's gift of food. Luther's table blessing before meals in the Small Catechism quotes from Psalm 145 (today's psalm): "The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season" (*ELW*, p. 1167). How might you lift up giving thanks for our daily bread in worship and for people's faith practice? How many people know these table blessings in your congregation? Print the table blessings on card stock to hand out today and encourage people to practice them before and after meals. "Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these your gifts, which we receive from your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen" (p. 1167).

Lectionary 19

8-13-2017

Who or what will you trust? The First Commandment and its explanations connect to all of today's readings. From the Small Catechism: "We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things" (*ELW*, p. 1160). And from the Large: "A 'god' is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart. As I have often said, it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true one. Conversely, where your trust is false and wrong, there you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, p. 386).

Lectionary 20

8-20-2017

In today's gospel, Jesus teaches that the state of our heart matters (Matt. 15:18-19). Our hearts are factories for idols. If only our battle against sin was as simple as controlling what we eat! Luther's "Preface" to the Large Catechism can open new angles for resisting sin and deepen awareness that God's promises are stronger than our broken hearts (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 379-386). Like the Canaanite woman in the second part of today's gospel, we all pray, "Lord, help me" (Matt. 15:25).

Lectionary 21

8-27-2017

Today's gospel invites reflection on confession and forgiveness, sometimes called the office of the keys. The Large Catechism's section "A brief exhortation to confession" shows the beauty of Luther's thought (*Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, 2000, pp. 476-480). It will also make you struggle at times! The explanation to the Third Article of the Creed also discusses forgiveness of sin: "in this Christian community we have the forgiveness of sins, which takes place through the holy sacraments and absolution as well through all the comforting words of the entire gospel. . . . Forgiveness is constantly needed, for although God's grace has been acquired by Christ, and holiness has been wrought by the Holy Spirit through God's Word in the unity of the Christian church, yet we are never without sin because we carry our flesh around our neck" (p. 438).