

THE GOSPEL BALANCES CALLING AND CONDUCT

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Hear this week's theme verse from the Word of God for this seventeenth Sunday after Trinity:

*So I beseech all of you, I the prisoner in (the) Lord, continue to walk worthy of the calling by which you were called...<sup>1</sup>*

To put the bottom line up front: as you remain in Christ, the Gospel enables you to conduct your life in a manner worthy of His calling. It keeps you part of and united to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, what some call the Invisible Church. The first part of the verse is an admonition, inspired by the Holy Spirit, from one who suffered, and died, for his confession of Christ Jesus. The second part tells of that which only the Perfect Man can do - continually conduct His life worthy of His Name: Son of God - Savior. Without attachment to Christ, through His Word and Sacraments, no one has the power to walk about worthily before God. It is so important to grasp those realities with understanding. In that way, the thrust of the Spirit's teaching will go to the heart. It will lead repentant sinners to Christ Jesus, the true worthy Man who was exalted upon the cross.

Hear the Word of the Lord,

*walk worthy of the calling by which you were called, with all lowly thinking and meekness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in sacrificial love...<sup>2</sup>*

The worthy life conduct of the Christian is described first with a word that means having "patience with respect to things." It is not directed at God, but at the things, and

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:1.

people, especially the people of the faith, in this world. Meekness is not cowardice, but considers God to have the answers, and to give the gifts, that we need to bear with one another in the faith. Longsuffering is the lot of the Christian. It is not the glory of the prosperity preachers; it is the glory of the crosses that you bear each day, including those which you bear on account of your Christian family. And that leads to the calling in which you have been called, and now live out under the second Table of the Law. That is, loving your neighbor as yourself, because God has loved you enough to die for you! How have you been doing with that? If not perfectly, turn and believe the Gospel, that Jesus humbly and meekly, with longsuffering, in perfect sacrificial love bore all your sins to the cross and into death to bring you forgiveness.

Hear from the Word again as it leads us from humility, meekness, longsuffering and sacrificial love into the One Holy Christian Church:

*continue to walk worthy of the calling by which you were called...continually making diligence to guard the unity of the Spirit in the bond of the peace...<sup>3</sup>*

There, you are led from yourself and your calling toward your neighbor and into a right understanding that these gifts you exercise are used by God to unite His Church in His confession on earth. In that one body, the Church, teaching and life conduct, “confession and practice are to be one.”<sup>4</sup> That is, for those who are united in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Gospel balances calling and conduct.

Those who are called to be one with God are given the power to conduct themselves

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<sup>2</sup> *Ephesians* 4:1b, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ephesians* 4:1b, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Lenski, R.C.H. p. 509.

as Christian brothers and sisters with those who share the same unity of confession and doctrine. That which is confessed as true is put into life practice in the One Holy Church. (Yes, there are those in congregations who set themselves apart from this one calling, and they continue to create divisions. But they are not, on account of their erring confessions, one with those who are united in the Christian life conduct described earlier – humble mindedness, meekness, longsuffering) Do not mistake the call for unity in the One Holy Church as an admonishment to join and remain united with those who persistently err in their confession of God's Word. That is not what this text is saying.

In reality, the text is calling those who know, by the Spirit, displayed to them and others in their right public confession and life in the Truth, to guard that unity. It is a call to cling to the right doctrines of God, as outlined earlier in this letter to the Ephesians – read it later in the quietness of your home. The admonition to be *continually making diligence to guard the unity of the Spirit in the bond of the peace* is given to keep you and me, and all who would be faithful to the entire Counsel of God firm and safe in the Truth. The word translated , “guard,” may also be translated, “keep.” The keep became a heavily fortified square stone building placed in the center of castle grounds. It was the final place of refuge, of safety for the defenders of the land. In time of war, and siege, when the outer walls of a castle were being breached, the keep was the place of safety, where king and peasant alike could remain alive until help arrived.

How have you been doing in staying in the keep of the Church, that safe, well-guarded place of the Truth? If not well, confess your sins – of unionism, syncretism and

so forth. Then, believe that Jesus' death, and the treasures that flow from it - His healing, forgiving Sacraments - are here for you. Receive them in faith, and the blood-bought unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace will be yours again.

If you are grasping these truths, ties and connections, and others that lie within this simple letter, you are free to give all thanks to God. These divine ties come from His calling you by the Gospel, enlightening you with His gifts, sanctifying you in the one true faith in the One Holy Church. Hear again from the Word for the week:

*continue to walk worthy of the calling by which you were called...in body and in spirit, just as also you were elected in one hope in your calling...*<sup>5</sup>

The human body and spirit, inherited from our father Adam, are often tempted to turn from the certain unity and peace given by God in Christ. When this happens Christians are lured away from the bond of peace that comes from the Holy Spirit (found in the proclamation of the Word) turn to trusting in their own actions to maintain unity in the Church. Christians, in the old Adam that still clings to them, attempt to keep the letter of the Law (found in this week's admonitions), while missing the Spirit of the Living God within it (that which lies under, behind and above these admonitions). No human is immune from such temptation.

Perhaps this is a good time to recall the sixth petition of the Our Father and its meaning.

*"And lead us not into temptation."*

What does this mean?

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<sup>5</sup> *Ephesians* 4:1b, 4.

*Answer: God tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God may so guard and preserve us that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or mislead us into unbelief, despair, and other great and shameful sins, but that, although we may be so tempted, we may finally prevail and gain the victory.<sup>6</sup>*

When you find yourself looking to yourself and your ability to fulfill God's Law to keep unity in the Church, hear that you are being called to repent, to turn, to trust that Christ conquered this temptation for you and gives unity to you through the means He chose, and which the Spirit has bound Himself to work through – Word and Sacraments. Remember the bottom line for the Word stated earlier: as you remain in Christ, the Gospel enables you to conduct your life in a manner worthy of His calling.

These words, *so I beseech all of you... continue to walk worthy of the calling by which you were called...*<sup>7</sup> speak of your need to remain connected to Jesus. His words and actions are declared to draw the truly humble, repentant sinner to Christ. The Church is to understand, in Jesus' words of Law and Gospel, that no one, no matter how great his or her biblical learning may be, has the divine right to conduct his or her life alone before God. Those who have been named, by humans, by history, by the Church, as the greatest of the saints, have, at times in their lives, been totally emptied, humiliated even before God and man.

Those who are the true holy ones of God, His saints, are those who continually turn to Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. We who count on the humiliation of Jesus, at His trial, His mocking, His way of Passion, His crucifixion and bloody death

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<sup>6</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>7</sup> *Ephesians* 4:1.

where He was numbered with sinners, only we who cling to His emptying Himself for us will be able to conduct our lives in the manner worthy of His calling. In Jesus' humiliation and death, you, the true believer, are declared worthy of your calling. That is because the truly worthy One took your sin upon Himself, and bore it into the grave. Then, when He ascended into heaven, Jesus took our flesh and placed it in the place of honor at the right hand of the Father. Only in Christ Jesus, in His bitter suffering and death, will anyone be raised to glory. That is the Gospel! Hear again from the Word:

*continue to walk worthy of the calling by which you were called...one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism...*<sup>8</sup>

The unity you have in Christ is displayed first in the Unity of God. With the Words just read, you have a triad. There is the declaration that there is, in the Church, let alone Creation, one Lord. This One has, in the sentences already read, again revealed Himself as Father, Son and Spirit. The divine unity in the Three Persons is to be reflected in the divine unity of the Church and Christ on earth. In the One Holy Christian and Apostolic Church – the Invisible Church – this unity is real and lasting. In the Visible Church, it is often veiled.

Yet, the unity of the Invisible Church may be glimpsed by Christians where the pure proclamation of the Word and the right administration of the Sacraments are found. Here, where the congregation recognizes and confesses that God has gathered us poor, miserable sinners to forgive us and strengthen us to eternal life, we are free to see the Church Invisible. It is revealed as we confess the one Faith – as we do in the ancient

Creed. It is revealed as Christ's Supper is celebrated and received in the confession of the One Faith.

It is shown as Christians, you, daily return to your Baptism. That is, when you remember that in the *washing of regeneration and renewal*, all your sins have been drowned, and God has given you a New Nature to rise again to live right before Him in purity. The right confession of the one Baptism – Water and Word – and all God's work, reveals to the biblically aware that the Church is found among them. Since the Scripture clearly teaches that Baptism is God's gift, that He baptizes through the means He chose, the Christian is then free to live in that reality, as part of the One Church. No matter when God's gift was administered – a Trinitarian Baptism, with the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even when it is administered by congregations that hold a sinning confession of Baptism – is still a valid Baptism.

Hear again the Word for the week:

*continue to walk worthy of the calling by which you were called...one God and Father of all, the One over all and through all and in all.*<sup>9</sup>

That definition follows the set of three. It is a doxology to the God who is the Father of all believers. It explains His revealed relation to all things. It describes the unity of God in the One Holy Christian Church. In those words, we have the Father as our Father, who rules over all in the Church. We discover the Son, whose death and life is found working through all us sinner/saints. We rejoice in the Spirit who dwells in all

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<sup>8</sup> *Ephesians* 4:1b, 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ephesians* 4:1b, 6.

the faithful through Word and Sacraments.

The Gospel balances calling and conduct. That having been declared in the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of God's peace in the Oneness of God and the Church: you are free to let these words guide you this week, and for the rest of your life:

*So I beseech all of you, I the prisoner in (the) Lord, continue to walk worthy of the calling by which you were called...<sup>10</sup>*

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Trinity XVII (LSB One-year series)

Proverbs 25:6-14; Ephesians 4:1-6; Luke 14:11-11

September 14, 2008

*Pastor Michael A. Merhouse*

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

*So I beseech all of you, I the prisoner in (the) Lord, continue to walk worthy of the calling by which you were called,  
with all lowly thinking and meekness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in sacrificial love, continually making diligence to guard the unity of the Spirit in the bond of the peace;  
in body and in spirit, just as also you were elected in one hope in your calling;  
one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism,  
one God and Father of all, the One over all and through all and in all.<sup>11</sup>*

**NOTES:**

**BOC references.**

VII. [THE CHURCH]

<sup>1</sup> Our churches also teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. <sup>2</sup> For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. <sup>3</sup> It is not necessary that human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere. <sup>4</sup> It

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<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 4:1.

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 4:1-6.

is as Paul says, "One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all," etc. (Eph. 4:5, 6).<sup>12</sup>

### Luther's Works:

#### *Another [Law. Against Theses 56 and 60]*

Whatever makes perfect, justifies. Love makes perfect. Therefore, it justifies. Ephesians 4[:2-3; Col. 3:14] speaks of the bond of love. David was a perfect man in the sight of God [Acts 13:22]. In Ezekiel [3:10; 14:14, 20], "Remember what I have done," etc., indicates a right heart, as Job is blameless and upright [Job 1:1].<sup>13</sup>

#### Volume 34:

In this same way the living creatures go on calves' feet toward the four comers of the world without having to turn. There is no axle, wagon tongue, undercarriage, pin, rack, whipple tree, strap, or trace, but the Spirit drives it all surely from within. Overhead is the firmament, like a saddlecloth, and in it a throne for a saddle. And on the throne sits God, that is, Christ.

The four wheels run alike, for all churches in the four comers of the earth, that is, throughout the world, have one and the same harmonious course, in faith, hope, love, the cross, and all spiritual things; they are not driven from without by doctrines of men, but from within by one Spirit, Romans 8[:2-27], I Corinthians 12[:3-13], Ephesians 4[:4].<sup>14</sup>

#### Volume 37

If we are to practice Christian unity with them and extend Christian love to them, we must also love and be satisfied with, or at least tolerate, their doctrine and behavior. Let anyone do that if he wishes. Not I. For Christian unity consists in the Spirit, when we are of one faith, one mind, one heart, Ephesians 4[:3 ff.]. This, however, we will gladly do: in civil matters we are glad to be one with them, i.e. to maintain outward, temporal peace. But in spiritual matters, as long as we have breath, we intend to shun, condemn, and censure them, as idolaters,<sup>33</sup> corrupters of God's Word, blasphemers, and liars; and meanwhile, to endure from them, as from enemies, their persecution and schism as far and as long as God endures them; and to pray for them, and admonish them to stop. But to acquiesce in, keep silence over, or approve their blaspheming, this we shall not and cannot do.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The Augsburg confession : Translated from the Latin*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>13</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1960. *Vol. 34: Luther's works, vol. 34 : Career of the Reformer IV* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>14</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1960. *Vol. 35: Luther's works, vol. 35 : Word and Sacrament I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia  
33 Luther's manuscript here reads *ketzer*—"heretics"; the printed version, probably revised by Luther himself, reads *götzer*. So also on p. 32. On Luther's use of the two terms, see WA 23, 289.

<sup>15</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1961. *Vol. 37: Luther's works, vol. 37 : Word and Sacrament III* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

If they wish to press us so closely and make so much depend on the expression, or if it be proved that it is incompatible with the text, "This is my body," to say elsewhere, "In the Supper there is Christ's body," then we are ready and willing to retract the expression and say purely and simply, "This is my body," as the words stand. Let them do likewise, and agree on the text. Although no Christian will so constrain us that in all our sermons and discourses, whenever we are speaking about the Supper, we must be limited to saying, "This is my body," provided that in the administration of the Supper we let the text remain as it is and in its place. On other occasions and in other expressions there will surely be no objection to our saying, "Under the bread," or, "in the bread is Christ's body," or, "Christ's body is truly in the Supper," else we should not be permitted to speak about our faith at all. But the fanatics talk drivel to patch up their ragged cloak. They are keenly aware that when it comes to their own lies concerning a single passage and expression, it is a quite different matter, and thus they try to defend rather than renounce their disunity. But this will not do. Of course we grant them also the right to speak elsewhere about the sacrament in whatever terms they find pleasing or fitting. But we want the text of the Supper to be unambiguous, simple, sure, and certain in every word, syllable, and letter. Since they refuse, I make bold to say that the devil, the father of all dissension, is their teacher. For St. Paul says, "God is not a God of dissension" [I Cor. 14:33]. So also all Christians are of one mind, Ephesians 4[:3], and do not cause schism, I Corinthians 1[:10]. Thus you recognize this spirit from the first fruits of their dissension.<sup>16</sup>

#### Volume 39

Thus the essence, life, and nature of Christendom is not a physical assembly, but an assembly of hearts in one faith, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 4[:5], "One baptism, one faith, one Lord." Accordingly, regardless of whether a thousand miles separates them physically, they are still called one assembly in spirit, as long as each one preaches, believes, hopes, loves, and lives like the other. So we sing about the Holy Spirit, "You have brought many tongues together into the unity of faith."<sup>26</sup> This is what spiritual unity really means, on the basis of which men are called a "communion of saints." This unity alone is sufficient to create Christendom, and without it, no unity—be it that of city, time, persons, work, or whatever else it may be—can create Christendom.<sup>17</sup>

#### Volume 41

First, nobody can deny that we, as well as the papists, have received holy baptism and because of that are called Christians. Now baptism is not something new, invented by us in our own day, but it is the same ancient baptism instituted by Christ, in which the apostles and the early church and all Christians have been baptized. If then we have the same baptism as the original, ancient (and, as the creed says, "catholic," that is, "universal")

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<sup>16</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1961. *Vol. 37: Luther's works, vol. 37 : Word and Sacrament III* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia  
26 Luther's rendering of the hymn *Vent Sancte Spiritus* from the eleventh century. Cf. LW 53, 265-267.

<sup>17</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1970. *Vol. 39: Luther's works, vol. 39 : Church and Ministry I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

Christian church, and are baptized in it, then we belong to the same ancient universal church; and they like us, and we like them, are baptized with one baptism; and therefore there is no difference between us as to baptism. But baptism is the first and most important sacrament, without which the others are all nothing, as they must admit. This is why the papists cannot truthfully call us a different or a new or a heretical church, since we are children of the ancient baptism, together with the apostles themselves and all of Christendom, Ephesians 4 [:5], "one baptism."<sup>18</sup>

## Volume 52

The second item is the single-mindedness of the spirit. It is the nature of the Christian faith to make the hearts one, so that they are of one mind and of one will, as Psalm 68[:6] says in this regard: "God the Lord, Christ, our God makes harmonious inhabitants in the house," and Psalm 133[:1] states: "Ah, how beautiful and joyful it is that brothers dwell with one another in unity." St. Paul speaks of the unity of the spirit in many places: Romans 12[:16], I Corinthians 12[:4-31], and Ephesians 5[4:3], and he says: Be ever diligent to be of one mind, of one will. Such unity is not possible outside of the realm of faith. As the saying goes, "Each one likes his own ways best, and so the country with fools is blessed." Experience teaches us how the religious orders, the estates, and the sects are divided among themselves. Each believes that his order, his estate, his ways, his works, his undertaking is best and the right road to heaven, and looks down upon the others, taking no interest in them. We observe this nowadays among the priests, monks, bishops, and the entire clergy. But those who have a right faith know that the one important thing is faith; on this they all are in accord. Thus there is no disunity among them and no division because of some external order, action, or work. Externals make no difference to them, no matter how varied they may be. Thus in this story the shepherds are of one mind, of one will; they voice one opinion among themselves, they speak one and the same words when they say, "Let us go," etc.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1966. *Vol. 41: Luther's works, vol. 41 : Church and Ministry III* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>19</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1974. *Vol. 52: Luther's works, vol. 52 : Sermons II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia