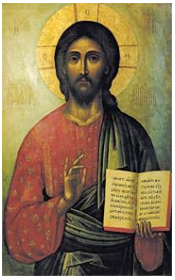
Third to Last Sunday of the Church Year

First recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the weekly section of the Small Catechism. Then read the Proper and assigned Scripture reading followed by the devotion. Conclude with singing the hymn of the week.



Weekly Catechism section: *Fifth Petition (Luther's Small Catechism))*
Hymn of the Week*: Preserve Your Word, O Savior (TLH #264)*

Monday - Introit (Psalm 31:9, 15, 17, 1-2, 5, 24)

Read Psalm 31.

Our *Introit*, taken from Psalm 31, calls on God in the day of trouble. When we see the last day approaching, we must consider how much trouble we would be in without God's mercy. So we begin today by singing, "Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am in trouble; deliver me from the hand of my enemies." Our enemies are any wills or desires that would turn us away from trusting in our Savior. The thought of falling away should he horrifying. This is not to say that we should always be fretting about whether we are truly saved. But we must also avoid carnal security. This is why God teaches us to look to the end of all things. This is terrifying to the old Adam, but it is a comfort to us, God's children.

We continue praying, going back to the beginning of the Psalm, "In you, O Lord, I put my trust; let me never be ashamed." This is our prayer as we look to the appearing of our Lord. We trust in him who died and rose for us, and we pray that our hoping and waiting would not be in vain. But how can we know that our hope isn't in vain? It is because of the other thing we pray for: "Deliver me in your righteousness; bow down your ear to me." He has delivered us in his righteousness. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness, perfectly obedient in our place. It's upon this righteousness that we live in faith. We are therefore eager for our Lord's return, even as we approach it with reverence, because he is coming to deliver us speedily. We may therefore commend ourselves into the Lord's hands, just as he commended his own spirit when he died for our sins on the cross to redeem us. He is our God of truth in whom we hope. He gives us courage to face his day of judgment.

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Tuesday - Old Testament Lesson (Exodus 32:1-20)
Read Exodus 32.

Our Old Testament lesson from Exodus 32. Here we have a foreshadow of our Lord's redemption and judgment. Jesus redeemed us by being our mediator with the Father. He was obedient in our place, fulfilling the promise God gave to Abraham that in his Seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead, and God's wrath will remain on those who do not trust in his mediation and redemption.

Moses foreshadows this. The people of Israel rebell against God, worshipping a golden calf in place of him. God wants to wipe them out completely, but Moses intercedes for them. He reminds God of his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them their inheritance. Now, of course God hadn't forgoten his promise. But he wants to be reminded of his promises, because this is what pleases him. Moses interceded for the people by relying on God's promise. Jesus would intercede for all nations by fulfilling the promise. Moses then went down the mountain and showed God's anger. He threw the tablets down ont he ground, demonstrating that God's Word had been broken. He then brought judgment on the people as he destroyed their idol, ground it into powder, threw it in the water, and made the people drink it. Those who refused to repent were then destroyed. This is what Jesus will do. He will destroy all idols when he brings judgment. His mediation will no longer stand for those who don't believe. So let us make haste while there is time to find him our mighty defender!

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Wednesday - Gradual *(Psalm 74:4, 2)*
Read Psalm 74.

God uses those who hate him to discipline his children and even cut off dead branches and false sons. This is what he did to Jerusalem. While there were some good kings who promoted true worship of God, the people of Judah had been tolerating the high places where idols were mixed in. After many generations of backsliding, God finally gave Jerusalem up to the Babylonians. God used Babylon as his servant to bring judgment against his own people. And yet, God was not on Babylon's side. God uses the devil to chastise his people, like he did with Job, but God is not on the devil's side. The Babylonians blasphemed the Lord of Israel. They mocked him. They destroyed his temple. So while God was using the Babylonians as a tool to discipline

his people, he would not let them get away with their arrogance against him.

This is why the sons of Asaph prayed this prayer to God in Psalm 74. And as we find ourselves in the last days before our Lord comes to judge the living and the dead, we do well to call out to God with these same words: "Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place; they set up their banners for signs." If the Christian church must endure difficult times, we must understand that the greatest offense of all is when God's name is profaned by false doctrine and blasphemy. The greatest reason for lament is when the banner of Christ's cross is replaced with the banner of worldly pomp. This certainly happens in many churches as well as in the religious culture as a whole. The gospel is replaced with a civic loyalty or social gospel rather than the forgiveness of sins and eternal life given for Christ's sake. The simple commandments to love your neighbor in the home, the church, and the world are replaced with political agendas which ignore the structure of marriage, neglect the fear of God, and attack the protection of life. If such movements cause problems for us, then we should take it as God's discipline and chastisement, teaching us not to trust in princes but only in Christ our King. But we should also invoke God to defend his Word from these blasphemers. We are his church, purchased by his own blood. He will certainly hear our prayers and arise for his name's sake.

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Thursday - Epistle (*1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)*
Read 1 Thessalonians 4.

The last three Sundays of the church year bring to mind the end of the world and the last judgment. I recall some years ago shaking hands after church on the first Sunday in Advent, and someone mentioned that the sermon was a lot gentler than the previous few Sundays. Jesus riding in meekness on a donkey is a much more calming message than the abomination of desolation, warnings to stay awake, and the coming judgment. But we must not forget why Christ's meek entry into Jerusalem is so comforting. He comes to suffer and die for our sins. The comfort God gives is a hard comfort. There is no such thing as comfort without judgment. And this is why Jesus came to bear the judgment of God against our sins in his own body. This is how he came to console our sinful hearts. When we recognize this, then we can see the great solace in the last three Sundays of the church year. We can see how the end of the world and the last judgment are very encouraging.

When our Lord warns us of all the abominations that are to come, when he admonishes us to stay awake and alert, ever watchful for his coming, while he is warning us against sin and unbelief, he is also giving us great strength and certainty in his promise of redemption. The last judgment, while terrifying to our sinful nature, which still clings to our dying bodies, is a great comfort to those who find their treasure in Christ rather than in this world.

This is why St. Paul encourages us to talk with one another about what will happen on the last day. "Comfort one another with these words," he says. We should not be ignorant about what God will do for those who have fallen asleep in Christ. We should be certain that the dead in Christ will rise first, and that those believers who are remaining will also be caught up with them. And we will always be with the Lord. We should remind one another that this will happen publicly, that the Lord will appear with the sound of the trumpet and the shout of the archangel. While we admonish one another not to fall into the sins of this world, and we warn one another of the coming judgment, we all the while comfort one another with the hope of the resurrection.

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Friday - Alleluia Verse (Psalm 46:4)

Read Psalm 46.

The end of the church year is a time to reflect on the end of the world and the coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead. It is a gloomy time in many ways, as it focuses on the passing away of all things here on earth. But it is a comforting time for those who look forward to the time when the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God, will be revealed to them. Those who look forward to Christ's coming, who know him as their Savior from sin, take joy in the end of the church year just as they take joy in the entire church year. So we sing our *Alleluia verse* from Psalm 46: "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High." The next verses of this Psalm describe how God is in the midst of his holy city even while the kingdoms of the earth rage against it. God utters his voice, and the earth melts. This is our Mighty Fortress, our God of Jacob, our refuge and strength.

We should take great confidence, joy, and gladness from these words. The river is the living water of Christ who baptized us into his own death and resurrection. They make his church, the City of God, glad. In this baptismal bath we are holy, and God builds his tabernacle among us and

in us. As Jesus says, the Kingdom of Heaven does not come by observation, but it is within you (Luke 17:20-21). This means that it is yours only through faith in the Word. As Paul says in 1 Romans 14:17, "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." The mere performance of the act of baptism, the mere showing up to the preaching of the Word, or the mere bodily eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood is not the kingdom of heaven. No, the power of this Word and Sacraments is the power of faith, which receives the very righteousness of Christ, peace with God, and joy in the Spirit. And so the kingdom of God consists of those who are made glad by his river of life, the pure fountain of his Word, which melts the hardened heart. These are those with whom God dwells, having confidence that Christ, with his blood and righteousness, has tabernacled among us and will draw us to himself. With such confidence, we look forward to the judgment.

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Saturday - Gospel (Matthew 24:15-28)
Read Matthew 24.

False christs and false prophets will rise and... deceive, if possible, even the elect. One of the members here at Trinity recently reminded me that if someone tells you, "I believe in Jesus," a good response might be, "And which Jesus is it that you believe in?" There are many false christs who claim to take the spot of our Lord. Besides those crooks and weirdos who claim to be the Messiah, the most common kinds of false christs come from those who paint a different picture of Jesus. They talk about a so called historical Jesus, one who didn't really rise from the dead and was put to death for trying to start some socio-political movement. Or they might portray a charming Jesus with a Brad Pittesque five-o'clock-shadow, dimples, and perfect cheekbones and jaw line, who only rebukes the people you don't like but would never say anything negative about you and your sins. Everyone seems to have his own personal Jesus whom he creates in his own image. Folks don't think they need to rely on the things Jesus gave them to rely on -- things like his Word, his Baptism, or his body and blood in the bread and the wine. No, they experience their Jesus in their own way as he boosts their self-esteem and self-importance in one way or another.

These are signs of the end. False prophets gather, trying to get as many people to join their clubs, using whatever entertainment to pander the masses. And thinking their faith is being revived, even some of the elect are led into such shallow, feel-good teachings. But Christ warns us of

this. Where the corpse is there the eagles will gather. Just as the Roman Soldiers divided the garments of Jesus and cast lots, just as they divided the spoil of Jerusalem, desecrating and destroying the temple in 70 A.D., so do false prophets gather around the children of God, seeking to divide them. But, dear friends, we stand together upon the confession our Lord has taught us. We cling to the Word that Jesus died to give us. This Word rebukes us, admonishes us, and comforts us. It reveals to us our Savior who died for our sins. So while we see the signs of the end, this is the Jesus whom we confess as we partake of his Sacrament (1 Cor 11:26).

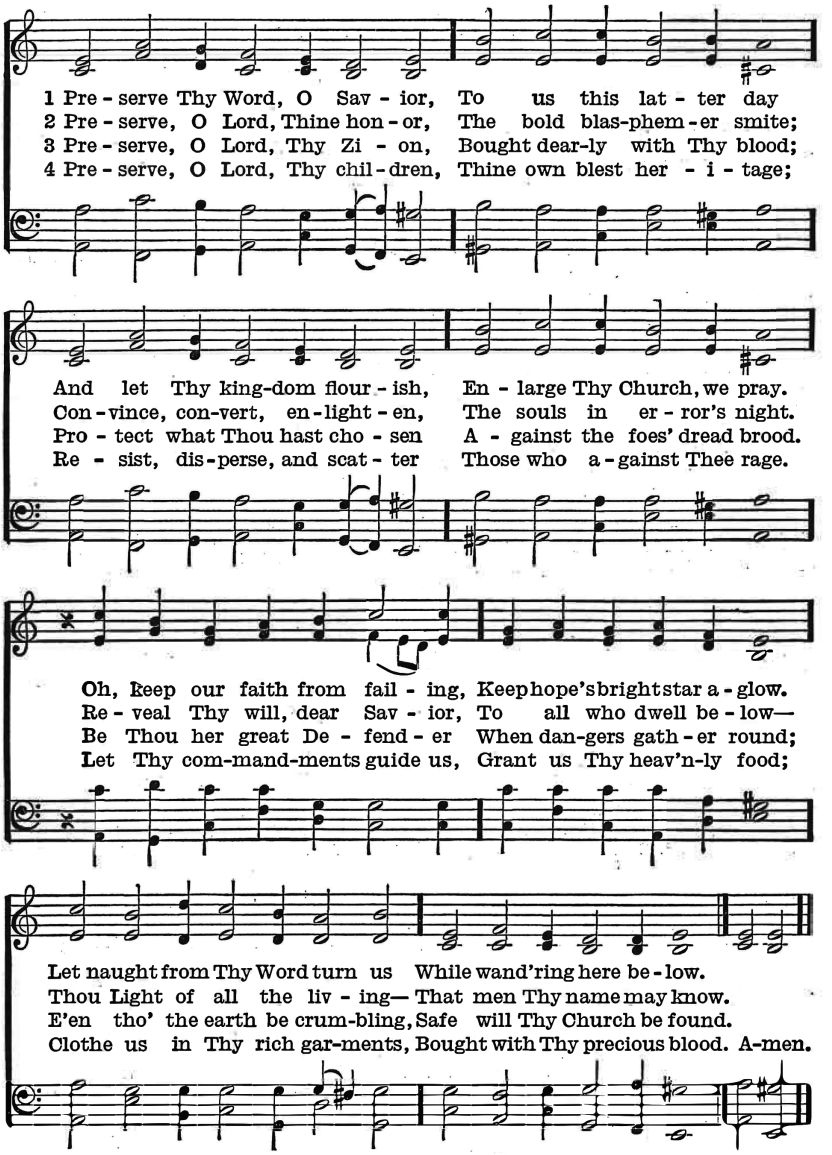
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264 Preserve Thy Word, O Savior

Jude 20, 21
Erhalt uns deine Lehre
Andreas Gryphius, 1676, ab.
Tr., William J. Schaefer, 1938

7. 6. 7. 6. D.

Herzlich tut mich
Hans L. Hassler, 1601



Preserve Thy Word, O Savior

5 Preserve Thy Word and preaching,
The truth that makes us whole,
The mirror of Thy glory,
The power that saves the soul.
Oh, may this living water,
This dew of heavenly grace,
Sustain us while here living
Until we see Thy face!

6 Preserve in wave and tempest
Thy storm-tossed little flock;
Assailed by wind and weather,
May it endure each shock.
Take Thou the helm, O Pilot,
And set the course aright;
Thus we shall reach the harbor
In Thine eternal light.