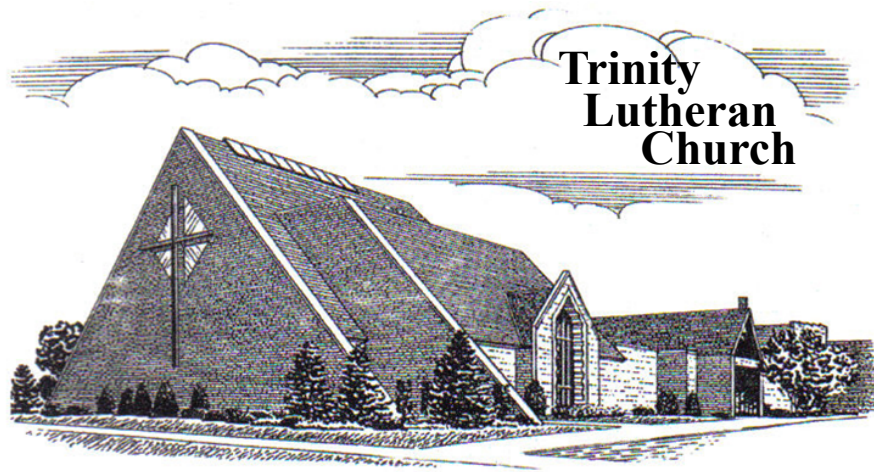


Proper 18



Aug 31-Sept. 6, 2026

Weekly Outline

Invocation

L: In the way of your testimonies I delight.

C: I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.

L: Let us pray:

O Lord, take away from me all coldness, all wanderings of the thoughts, and fix my soul upon thee and thy love, O merciful Lord and Saviour, in this hour of prayer.

C: Amen.

Scripture

Aug 31: Ezekiel 33:7-9

Sept. 2: Romans 13:1-10

Sept. 4: Matthew 18:1-20

Devotion

Closing Prayer

L: Ever blessed Trinity, to thy mercy I commit this day, my body and soul, together with all my ways and undertakings. I beseech thee to be gracious unto me; enlarge my heart and open my lips, that I may praise and magnify thy name which alone is holy. And as thou hast made me for the praise of thy holy name, grant that I may yield my life a sacrifice to thy honor in humble love and fear.

C: Amen.

Monday

Many people have said to me, "It's not easy being a pastor." Others have said, "You've got a great job. Where else can a person only work one day a week?" That has always been said with a chuckle and a grin as a friendly joke. But to be honest, Sundays are the hardest days because of what the pastor has to say. For example, Jesus says in our Gospel reading for this week, "If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire." Who wants to preach on that?

Perhaps because no one would want to preach on such a text, pastors have been specifically commanded by God to do exactly that. God says to the prophet Ezekiel in our Old Testament reading, "So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give warning from me." God goes on to describe how Ezekiel is to warn the wicked of God's coming judgment. In Lutheran theology, we call that the Law, that is, the preaching of God's judgment against the sinner. Not only was that the task of the prophet, but it is the task of pastors as well. To give warning from God against sin. That may be the hardest thing that pastors do. Not even the pastor wants to hear the Law, let alone preach it!

However, the best work also takes place on Sundays. God not only commands pastors to preach the Law, but also the Gospel. In fact, the Law is proclaimed for the sake of the Gospel, that having been brought to repentance through the Law, we would then hear through the Gospel, "But you are forgiven for the sake of Jesus." Law and Gospel is the work of Sunday. It is the greatest work, not only for the pastor, but for the whole church, because it is God's work, the divine means by which He works salvation in our souls. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Wednesday

We live in a world that is addicted to debt. Total credit card debt in the US is 1.26 trillion dollars. Total mortgage debt is 13.1 trillion dollars. And the US government debt is 40 trillion dollars. But fiscal debt is not the only kind of debt a person can incur. We also build up sin debt, and that total debt is massive.

Sin creates a debt we owe to God, but it also creates a debt we owe to one another. That's why we might say things like this after we wrong a person: "I'll have to make it up to him." We all understand that after sinning against another person, we owe them something. That's why Paul writes in Romans 13:8, "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' " Instead of building debts as we sin against each other, we should live toward one another in love. That is what we truly owe another person. Love.

Love is something that sounds easy, but it is the most difficult way of life. If we loved perfectly, we would have no need for God's Law, which tells us to stop sinning against one another. But love is difficult for another reason. It overlooks the debt of sin. That is what God has done for us in Christ. He showed love to the least deserving (you and me) by sending his Son to forgive our sins through his death on the cross. If we are to live in love, we must also overlook the sins of others for Christ's sake and do good for them instead, even though they are undeserving. Love is not easy. But for those in Christ, it is a gift given from the great love God has shown to us in his Son. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Friday

Everyone wants to be great in the eyes of someone. Even if we aren't chasing the adulation of adoring crowds (and we shouldn't be) each one of us wants to be important to someone. Fathers and mothers want to be important to their children. Husbands and wives want to be important to each other. We want to be important in the body of Christ, not in the sense of demanding the recognition of others, but in the sense that we matter. That if we were kept away for some reason, someone would miss us. The question is, what makes us great?

The disciples were arguing about this with one another. Unable to settle the matter themselves, they go to Jesus and ask, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" We read, "And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.' " While we may think of children as very important today, they weren't in the ancient world. They were just above slaves on the social hierarchy. Jesus answers the disciples' question about importance by pointing to the least important person and saying, "You must become like one of these."

Not only is that true in the kingdom of heaven, but it is true to life today. How do fathers and mothers become important to their children? How do husbands and wives become important to each other? How do we become important in the body of Christ? Not by standing on a pedestal and demanding recognition, but by forgetting ourselves in humility, just like a child. For when we forget ourselves, we become servants to one another and imitators of Christ, who became great when he gave himself in love for the sins of the world. If you would be great, you must become like a child, or rather, you must become like the Son. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Prayer

You may pray one or more of the following after dinner or before bed:

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have graciously kept me this day; and I pray you that you would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.



Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray thee, Lord, my soul to keep; if I should die before I wake, I pray thee, Lord, my soul to take; and this I ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.



Visit, O Lord, our home, and drive from it all the snares of the enemy; let your holy angels dwell in it to preserve us in peace, and may your blessing be upon us evermore; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

A Parent's Blessing

You may place your hand on the head of your child before kissing them goodnight and say:

My loved one, rest securely,
for God this night will surely
from peril guard your head.
Sweet slumbers may he send you
and bid his hosts attend you
and through the night watch o'er your bed. Amen.

Memory Verse

