

The Daily Press

Ben Laning

July 8—Read Nehemiah 12

In this chapter, we have the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem. The ruins had been there for 150 years, and now they were finally being restored. The people had shown they were committed to the work. Many of them had committed to living in the run-down city, and they had many trials along the way, but now it was time for the dedication. They were consciously receiving what God had given them and committing themselves to use it for his glory.

Rev. Haak preached about what this dedication means for us. First, it's a word of encouragement that God will bless his people when we're committed in our lives to do his will. Second, the returned captives can teach us how we must worship God. They sang loudly in praise to God, and we must do the same. Third, it reminds us that we must dedicate ourselves. We must receive what God has given us as his children, and we must dedicate ourselves to receive it and use it to the glory of his name.

Sing or pray Psalter #386.

July 9—Read Nehemiah 13

What does it mean to keep the sabbath day holy? Rev. Barnhill examined this question in light of this passage and Lord's Day 38. The basic principle we must follow is that we don't make Sunday look like the other days. It must not be common and ordinary. Sometimes it's hard for us to rest on Sunday because of the busyness of life. We have all those appointments to make, all those assessments to study for, or all that housework to do. Just doing a little bit here and

there doesn't matter, does it? Checking the game score or the email isn't breaking the sabbath day, right? Instead of looking at the sabbath day negatively like this, we need to look at it positively. Sin is an exhausting burden that we carry, and we need Sunday to recover from the week we have had and prepare for another ahead. We must long for the Sabbath like a child longs for his birthday. Nehemiah insisted that the people keep the sabbath day holy, and we must do that ourselves. What would the prophet find us doing if he came to our homes this coming Sunday?

Sing or pray Psalter #390.

July 10—Read Psalm 126

“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him,” read the last two verses of Psalm 126. This psalm is similar to Psalm 137, because both refer to the return from captivity. Rev. Huizinga says these were probably the last two psalms ever written, and the two verses here may be the last words inspired by God as a psalm. We can apply the truth of these verses all throughout the life of a Christian. Just as the farmer must make many difficult decisions and live in faith and hope, so does the child of God. It takes faith to believe that a life of obedience has meaning and significance. Faithfulness in this life results in many tears, but the promise is that our joy will come forth from those tears. The promised joy is ultimately heaven, but it's also experienced in this life. The sacrifices that God's people make in this life bring us joy the world can never achieve. Let us learn to appreciate the work others do in the church, and may that work be ours as well.

Sing or pray Psalter #357.

July 11—Read Malachi 1

Malachi here is rebuking the people for their corrupt worship of God. They weren't offering their best to God, and they were weary in their worship. The people respond to Malachi by denying they had done anything wrong. Their actions attack God himself. We read that the priests despise God's name, and God asks where his honor is.

Rev. Eriks preaches that the world around us today is saturated with taking God's name in vain, and we must not become hardened to it. We must not be silent when we hear God's name misused. How difficult is it for us to speak up when someone uses this kind of language in front of us? This is a humbling command for me, because I know how much I fall short. It's stunning how prevalent and accepted it is to take God's name in vain in everyday life and in our entertainment. What about the shows we watch on television? How often do they use God's name in vain? How bad does it get before we stop telling ourselves it's okay because "we just don't listen to that part"? How often do we even notice?

Sing or pray Psalter #265.

July 12—Read Malachi 2

God rebukes the priests in this chapter for putting away their wives and marrying heathen women. Rev. Rodney Kleyn preached a sermon on this chapter entitled "The Sin that Destroys Families." We are called to love one another, especially in our marriages and families. God hates anything that destroys the love we have in these relationships. Today we see how adultery, which is any sexual action or thought outside marriage, has destroyed the family unit. Adultery can destroy single life, marriage, or future marriage. There's hardly a marriage bed around that's undefiled. It's not just outward actions that matter, but also that lust that can consume us

inwardly. The Bible addresses modesty, because God knows how easily men are enticed. Sexual sins destroy the beautiful marriage bond God created. The passage says that divorce is betrayal, and those involved are traitors. It's treason against the children; parents who divorce show they don't care about the church of tomorrow. The children are forced to make all sorts of horrible decisions, always having to choose between their parents. We must flee sexual sins and keep our marriages holy, that God might be glorified in our relationships.

Sing or pray Psalter #125.

July 13—Read Malachi 3

Rev. Bruinsma explained the meaning of Malachi 3:1 in one of his sermons. At first glance, I just assumed the verse was talking about John the Baptist, but that's only partially true. The verse reads, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." The first messenger here is indeed John the Baptist. He prepared the way before Christ. However, the second messenger refers to Christ himself. Jesus was the messenger who taught us about himself and everything he'd come to do for his people. The verse says that he "shall suddenly come to his temple." That's God's dwelling place, in his church. When we read the accounts of Jesus' ministry, we find that his work was often done in the temple. Now that he has died for us and fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, the temple is in our hearts. It's there that he dwells with us and teaches us to look forward to the messenger's second coming.

Sing or pray Psalter #349.

July 14—Read Malachi 4

Malachi 4:2 reads, “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.” Rev. Overway demonstrated in one of his sermons how God created the sun to be a picture of his Son Jesus Christ. An obvious connection is that the sun brings light to the world, just as Jesus did. Christ brought his people out of darkness into light by his death on the cross (1 Pet. 2:9). Just as the sun rises each morning, so Christ rose again on the third day. All life on earth starts with the sun, just as there is no life outside of Christ. The sun also has healing benefits. There are many studies that have been published about how it’s good to be outside in the sunshine. This pictures the healing that Christ’s death brought us. In fact, they’ve found that lack of sunshine is linked to depression. Our bodies need the sun, and our souls need the Son of God. What an amazing picture God has given us of his Son Jesus Christ!

Sing or pray Psalter #328.

July 15—Read Luke 1

“Jesus’ Holy Conception and Virgin Birth” was a sermon preached by Rev. Van Overloop on Luke 1. He brought out that Mary knew her Bible, as seen in nearly every verse in her song. Whereas Zacharias declared it couldn’t be, Mary believed the angel, but just wanted to know how it would take place. Faith is called forth when there are things we don’t understand. Mary, like us, couldn’t fully understand God becoming a man, but she believed. In Jeremiah 32:27, God says to the prophet, “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?” Through God all things are possible, even the incarnation. Jesus’ birth rooted out sin at its very start, and his holiness is applied to us from conception. The power that caused the virgin to conceive is always being exercised in us. It’s by that power that we believe. It’s natural that many don’t believe in creation, and it’s a miracle that we do. As we think on the

wonder of the virgin birth, may we confess with Paul in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

Sing or pray Psalter #121.

July 16—Read John 1

Rev. Joshua Engelsma listed four things we know about Jesus’ human nature in a sermon on John 1. First, Christ has a real human nature. The Anabaptists say Jesus was just in Mary’s womb like fruit lays in a basket; there was no living connection between the two. However, the truth is that Jesus grew in Mary’s womb just like any other baby would. Second, Christ has a complete human nature. He had a real human body and a real human soul. If you were to see Jesus walking down the street, you wouldn’t think anything of it. His physical appearance didn’t set him apart from anyone else. Third, Christ had a weakened human nature prior to the resurrection. He could get tired, hungry, sick, sad. He could die. The well-known Christmas hymn that goes, “no crying he makes,” therefore, is inaccurate. Baby Jesus ate, pooped, cried, and spit like any other baby. Fourth, Christ took to himself a sinless human nature. He had no original sin, because his conception was by the Holy Spirit. We can’t fully grasp how God came in the flesh, but we believe by the faith he has given us.

Sing or pray Psalter #160.

July 17—Read Matthew 1

“Believing in Jesus Our Savior” was the title of a sermon by Rev. Smidstra on this passage and Lord’s Day 11. Smidstra plainly stated that believing in Jesus is the heart of our faith. He went on to explain that believing in Jesus means believing that he’s our exclusive

Savior. Making Jesus only a potential Savior, as so many nominal Christians do today, destroys Jesus' power. The knowledge that Jesus is a complete Savior is what gives us complete comfort.

We recently had Jehovah's Witnesses stop by our house a few times. As we sat at the kitchen table, they started talking about how God wants everyone to be saved. I spoke up and said that we disagree with them on that, for we believe that God has eternally chosen a particular people. They immediately scoffed at what a "sad" doctrine that was, since God never gave the reprobate a chance. Although there's so much more I should have thought to say, I responded that a God who wants to save everyone but can't is no God at all. Our comfort lies in knowing we sinful human beings have no part in our salvation.

Sing or pray Psalter #266.

July 18—Read Luke 2

We have looked before at how the wicked are nothing but tools in God's hand, but that's clearly seen again in this chapter. In the first verse we read, "there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus." Prof. Cammenga makes it clear that the mention of Caesar is not just for purposes of dating. Instead, it demonstrates how Caesar was the servant of Jesus Christ unwittingly. This last great type of the antichrist simply served God's purpose and nothing more.

There are so many examples throughout the Bible of God using the wicked. God used Balaam to bless his people. He used Nebuchadnezzar to show the world that he alone is God. He used Pharaoh's hard-heartedness to bring Israel out of Egypt. He used the wicked Jews' crucifixion of Christ to bring about the salvation of his people. Can you think of other examples?

This truth is a great comfort for us in the dark days that are ahead. One day soon the real antichrist will come to power. However, although he will awe man with his power, he's not in control. God rules, and all things work according to his plan and for our good.

Sing or pray Psalter #129.

July 19—Read Matthew 2

The last verse of this chapter says that the prophets had prophesied that Jesus would be a Nazarene. Rev. Huizinga states that many would skip over this as an obscure detail, but proper understanding of it changes how we look at the whole New Testament. Some mistakenly explain this phrase to mean Nazarite, but Jesus touched dead bodies and drank wine. Others say it means Branch, but that theory is only based on the fact that the Hebrew word sounds similar. The point of the text is to bring out Jesus' lowliness. Galileans were despised by those in Israel, but the Nazarenes were even looked down on by the Galileans themselves. They were the worst of the worst. What's more, even Jesus' fellow Nazarenes would grow to hate him and reject the word he brought. This is significant because it was part of Jesus' suffering and humiliation. It demonstrates to us the great cost of our salvation. In response to Christ's perfect sacrifice, we must willingly suffer reproach for his sake, wearing it as a badge of honor.

Sing or pray Psalter #196.

July 20—Read Matthew 3

"Baptized by Almighty Jesus" was the title of a sermon by Rev. Noorman on Matthew 3:11, commemorating Pentecost. In this passage, John acknowledges the importance of his baptism. However, he understood it was just a sign pointing toward the heavenly reality brought by Jesus. This reality was seen at Pentecost. Here, the apostles were baptized with the Holy

Spirit. After this the Spirit was poured out in a greater abundance and in a broader scope than it had been before.

Noorman went on to expound the results of baptism, as seen in the baptism form. First, it reveals to us our need for salvation. “[W]e cannot enter into the kingdom of God except we are born again.” Second, it gives us the comfort we need when we are in doubt and distress. Baptism is a confirmation for us that our sins have been washed away in Christ’s blood. Third, it strengthens us to live a new and holy life. We want to show thankfulness to God for the everlasting life that we don’t deserve, but that’s ours through our Savior Jesus Christ.

Sing or pray Psalter #202.

July 21—Read Mark 1

Do you remember the story of the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19)? These wicked men claimed to be able to perform wonders in Jesus’ name, just as Paul did. However, when they commanded a devil to come out of a man, the devil responded, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” Then he attacked the men and sent them packing. We read that this story caused the name of Jesus to be “magnified.” Christ’s authority was clearly established.

Rev. Bruinsma referenced this story in a sermon about Christ’s authority being established in Mark 1. The chapter begins with John the Baptist telling the people that he was only the forerunner of Christ, “the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose” (v. 7). Afterwards, we read that Jesus is baptized, and God says, “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (v. 11). Then Jesus heals a man and says to his unclean spirit, “Hold thy peace, and come out of him” (v. 25). Verse 34 tells us that Jesus cast out many devils and “suffered not the devils to speak.” Jesus clearly established his authority.

Sing or pray Psalter #200.

July 22—Read Luke 3

Some of John's followers were beginning to wonder if he was the Christ that the prophets had foretold. John, however, sets them straight with his words in verse 16. Here he declares, "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

Rev. Spronk used this as his text for a sermon on baptism. He made it clear that the sacraments are important, but the preaching is always central. Baptism is only a sign, and that's why we don't need any more than a sprinkling. We must never fall into the trap of having a magical view of things, of thinking that grace is in the sacraments. That's the evil of Roman Catholicism. They have exalted the sacraments above the preaching and made them into magical ceremonies. The focus must never be on the signs, but on the reality that the signs point to. The wonderful reality is that our sins are forgiven, and we are renewed to live a holy life in consecration to God.

Sing or pray Psalter #111.

July 23—Read Matthew 4

Matthew 4:1–13 recount for us the story of Jesus being tempted by the devil. Here Jesus shows us how to fight against temptation with the word of God. Sometimes God leads us into temptation so we can learn how evil evil is. We must keep growing in our ability to pray and put all our trust in God, so that we don't need to be led into temptation to see how bad sin is.

Prof. Gritters provides us with a few examples of how temptation can come into our lives. A man needs a job to support his family, but it requires him to sin. Wouldn't God want his family to be provided for? A woman is finally pursued by an attractive and successful man who doesn't love the church. Doesn't God want her to stay and be a good influence on him? A child is tempted to lie when questioned about a sin. Is it really that bad just to do it once? The devil works to get us to fall into sin once, because it's much easier the second time. We must always be vigilant, because he never rests in his attempts to ensnare us.

Sing or pray Psalter #143.

July 24—Read Luke 4

In Luke 4:18, Jesus is reading Isaiah 61:1 as he preaches in the synagogue. He reads, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." Rev. Haak preached a sermon on this text, focusing on how we all share in the anointing of Christ and are made prophets, priests, and kings. That's what it means to be a Christian.

Haak explained how we see the offices of prophet, priest, and king in the church. We are made prophets to speak the word of God, and the ministers are specially called to preach that word. We are made priests to present our lives as living sacrifices of praise, and the deacons are called to care for those in need. We are made kings to fight sin and reign with him eternally, and the elders work as kings in their oversight of the flock. This work is for our officebearers, but for all the members of the church as well.

Sing or pray Psalter #131.

July 25—Read Luke 5

As Rev. Daniel Holstege points out, this passage marks the second time Jesus called his disciples. It seems that after the first call, recorded in John 1, the disciples went back to their fishing nets for a while. One piece of supporting evidence is that Jesus appeared to be by himself when he was rejected in Nazareth. Now Jesus would call them again, this time for good.

As he so often did, Jesus used a physical scene to reveal what was happening spiritually. The disciples have been fishing all night without success, but now Jesus commands them to go out and try again. When they obey and bring in so many fish that the boat starts to sink, Peter worships and humbles himself before Jesus. This should be our reaction as well when we see the great works of God. This miracle confirmed to the disciples who Jesus was, and they forsook all and followed him. They didn't think about how much money they could make from all the fish they caught. Instead of focusing on the things of this life, we are all called to go fishing and spread the gospel.

Sing or pray Psalter #177.

July 26—Read John 2

What is a miracle? Prof. Hanks said he was always taught growing up that a miracle is a divine intervention in the natural course of the world. At first glance, that might look like an accurate description, but there's great danger in it. This definition implies and leads someone to say that the creation operates according to natural law. The truth, however, is that there are no such things as laws of nature, as man wants to describe them. That denies God's providence, which is a major factor in the rapid spread of evolutionism in the churches. The deist says God

created everything and lets it run on its own. Our country's founding fathers were almost all deists. It's a dangerous doctrine against which we must be on guard.

Instead, a miracle is a sign, an earthly reality that points to a heavenly truth. It's God suddenly working in a way that isn't ordinary. God is working in and controlling everything that takes place on this earth. God tends to direct events in creation in a certain way, but in a miracle God would suddenly direct an event in a way man didn't expect in order to show his power.

Sing or pray Psalter #430.

July 27—Read John 3

Prof. Engelsma began a sermon on John 3:16 by comparing the different gospel accounts. All of them begin with Christ, but they have different points of view. For example, Luke talks about Christ's origin coming out of history, while John shows his origin in eternity and the being of God. The church's response to the book of John is awe and wonder, whereas the response the other gospels is joy. Another thing that sets John apart is the book's look at the goal of Jesus' birth. Although this is not completely absent from the other gospel accounts, John focuses on the fact that salvation in Christ is for God's people from all nations.

John 3:16 is one of the most well-known and controversial texts in the whole Bible. The reason for the controversy is the heretical explanation of "world" in the text. Many want to take this to mean that God died for everyone. However, Engelsma explains that the origin of the word in the text is Greek and means "cosmos." We might say "universe" instead. God loves the universe he created and sent his Son to restore that creation with the elect humanity out of all nations.

Sing or pray Psalter #168.

July 28—Read John 4

John recounts in this chapter the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. The Jews and the Samaritans hated one another, so much so that the Jews usually went around Samaria when they were travelling to Galilee. Not only was this woman a Samaritan, she was also a horrible sinner. It is much to the woman's surprise, then, that Jesus speaks to her. He uses water to illustrate the reality of salvation. The woman doesn't understand the figure at first, but she questions him, and Jesus brings her to understanding step by step.

Rev. den Hartog lists three things we learn at the end of this story. First, the Samaritan woman became a believer in Jesus Christ, and the consciousness of faith gave her extreme excitement. Second, the water of life Jesus describes is the fountain that breaks forth into praise of God. No cap can be placed on it. Third, the converted woman has a great desire to tell others about the truth she has found. She wants to bring others to the knowledge of Christ.

Sing or pray Psalter #90.

July 29—Read Matthew 8

This chapter includes the story of Jesus calming the storm. The disciples needed to be trained for the work to which God had called them, just as we do. Our training involves growing stronger in faith. God showed the disciples here that their faith was not as strong as they thought. Because of our extreme tendency to pride, we often need trials in our lives to humble us and force us to put all our trust in God.

Rev. Laning points out that it's a temptation for us to question God when we have trials in our lives. In Mark 4:38 the disciples cry out, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" God doesn't promise us that nothing bad will happen to us, but he does promise us that he is with us.

Sometimes it's easy to look at the weaknesses of God's people in the Bible and exalt ourselves above them. How could they be afraid when Jesus was right in the boat with them? Yet God is always with us as well, and we so easily become worried and afraid. Let us remember the words of Romans 8:31: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Sing or pray Psalter #91.

July 30—Read Mark 2

Rev. Smidstra preached about Jesus healing the paralytic in the first twelve verses of this chapter. He began by explaining that each gospel account gives us a slightly different portrayal of Jesus. Mark focuses on the mighty works and miracles of Jesus, which all point to THE miracle of salvation and the forgiveness of sins.

The sick man in this miracle shows us that sin is a debilitating power that paralyzes. When we walk in sin, we will find that we become powerless to resist it. It's utter foolishness to think we can dabble in it a little and then stop. He also pictures the guilt of sin we bear in this life.

Jesus first addresses the man's spiritual disease, saying his sins are forgiven. The Jewish leaders, who demonstrate their arrogance by sitting down when it's standing room only, silently scoff at these "empty" words. They assume anyone can claim to forgive sins. In answer to their silent accusations, Jesus then says the "harder" thing to say by commanding the man to get up and walk. This outward manifestation of Jesus' power served to prove the truth of what he'd said before. It confirmed the promise of salvation.

Sing or pray Psalter #65.

July 31—Read John 5

In this chapter, Jesus heals the man at the Pool of Bethesda. When the wicked Jews get angry with him for working on the sabbath day, Jesus responds, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (v. 17). Rev. Bruinsma used this text as the foundation for a sermon entitled “The Labor of the Lord’s Day.” Sunday is to be a day of labor. Sometimes we convince ourselves that Sunday being a day of rest gives us an excuse to be lazy, but that couldn’t be further from the truth. There’s much work to do on the Lord’s day. It takes a lot of effort to come to God’s house and be focused on the service twice each Sunday. It is a huge temptation for us to let our minds wander, and it can happen so quickly, so we always have to be on guard. Sunday is a day in which we enjoy the communion of the saints, maybe even spending some time visiting those in need. Reading spiritual literature is a good activity. Instead of setting a large list of rules for the sabbath day, we live by the simple principle of centering the day on God.

Sing or pray Psalter #64.

August 1—Read Matthew 12

As usual, the wicked Jews are searching for an occasion to accuse Jesus. First they accuse him of getting his power from the devil. Jesus explains that it doesn’t make any sense that the devil would work against his own demons. He goes on to talk about how a tree is known by its fruit. The Jewish leaders try again, this time asking for a sign. This request is clearly done in unbelief, as Jesus has just been performing great wonders and miracles.

Jesus rebukes them and says the only sign they need is the prophet Jonah. Rev. Decker explains the meaning of this sign. Sinful Jonah preached repentance to the Ninevites, and they believed. Jesus says the Jews have him, who is greater than Jonah, and they still don’t believe.

Jonah was a type of Christ in his work as a prophet and in the three days and nights he spent in the belly of the whale. However, Christ is much greater than Jonah. He's the sinless Son of God who brought the good news of salvation for his people.

Sing or pray Psalter #146.

August 2—Read Mark 3

In Mark 3:13–15, Jesus calls the twelve into a closer relationship with him. Now they would begin preparing to go out and preach. They wouldn't truly become apostles until after Pentecost, but they would continue reporting back to Jesus. Mark 6:7, 12 tells us they were sent out by two and given the power to do miracles and cast out devils. The message they brought was the command to repent.

Rev. Laning points out that the work done by the disciples is also the work the church has been called to do today. Although we choose men to be ministers of the word, they labor as representatives of Christ and his church. In addition, all of us are commanded to be witnesses in our work as prophets, priests, and kings.

Finally, the fact that there were twelve is significant. Revelation 21:12 says that the New Jerusalem has twelve gates with twelve angels and the names of the twelve tribes written on them. Verse 14 follows by saying the wall has twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles. This connection between the tribes and the apostles demonstrates the unity of God's people throughout time.

Sing or pray Psalter #371.

August 3—Read Luke 6

Rev. Griess told a story about his family going to a restaurant and being served hamburgers with spoiled ketchup on them. After the waitress took the meals back, the assistant manager insisted they would still have to pay for them and any new food they wanted instead. The next day, they talked to the head manager, and she sent them gift certificates. This whole exchange made him start thinking about Luke 6:29–30 and what it means to “turn the other cheek.”

In the Old Testament, God gave the Israelites the Law of Retaliation. This law stated that the punishment had to fit the crime. It only applied in legal situations where someone had broken the law, but the Jews of Jesus’ day had started applying it to personal relationships as well. They used it as an excuse to get revenge. Jesus isn’t saying here that we can’t ever defend ourselves, but he’s saying we must never seek revenge. We must show those who hate us that we care about their souls and want them to experience the joy of Christ in their hearts. In order that God’s name be glorified, we must “turn the other cheek.”

Sing or pray Psalter #378.

August 4—Read Matthew 5

Matthew 5:5 reads, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” Rev. Slopsema reminds us that the more we manifest meekness towards each other, the happier our marriages, family life, school life, and church life will be. One who is meek is gentle and mild in his dealings with others. However, he can be harsh when necessary, as Jesus was with the scribes and Pharisees. Meekness is a virtue of putting others before yourself. A meek person will sometimes even give up what’s rightfully his so as not to hurt someone else. Similarly, meekness is the virtue of returning good for evil, not evil for evil. When we are living out of meekness we

don't retaliate when we are wronged. Jesus, of course, is the ultimate example for us in this. How often didn't the crowds misunderstand and press upon him when he needed to be alone? Yet he was always patient with them. His greatest work of meekness was at the cross, for the very people he had ministered to were putting him to death. We must continually pray that God might strengthen us to reflect that meekness in our own lives.

Sing or pray Psalter #366.

August 5—Read Matthew 6

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to ask, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." This petition is addressed in Lord's Day 51. Rev. Lanning explains how our sin is described in four different ways in the Catechism here. First, the word "transgressions" is used. When we transgress against God, we step over the boundaries he's set for us. The moment we step off we die, like if we were to step off a sidewalk into an extremely busy street. Second, we read of our "depravity." This refers to our sinful nature because of Adam's fall. It's a part of who we are. Third, the Catechism speaks of our "debts." This picture helps us understand that sin makes us debtors to God, and the payment for that sin must be death and hell. Finally, the Lord's Day tells us we are "poor." There's nothing we have that can pay for our sins. The only one who could make that payment was Christ our Savior. As we contemplate this wonder, may we be quick to forgive others for the small debts they may owe to us.

Sing or pray Psalter #292.

August 6—Read Matthew 7

This passage fits well with Lord's Day 33. There we read about the six marks of true conversion, as Rev. Rodney Kleyn puts it. These six marks come in three pairs. The first pair is

sorrow and joy. God's people have sorrow and joy that's never felt by the world. Take the story of Mary washing Jesus' feet, for example. The wicked rulers couldn't comprehend her sorrow. The sorrow of the world is always selfish, but ours is focused on God. It's in the forgiveness of sin through his Son's shed blood that we find joy. We rejoice because we have Jesus, we have salvation, and we have the word of God. The second pair is hatred and love. We hate sin and love God and delight in his will. This love of God comes to expression in a love for others. The final pair of marks is fleeing and walking. We must turn and run from sin and walk in the way of obedience, bringing forth fruits worthy of conversion. Seeing these marks in ourselves gives us assurance of our salvation and causes us to seek spiritual growth.

Sing or pray Psalter #320.

August 7—Read Matthew 9

In verses 14–17 of this chapter, Jesus answers John's disciples who ask him why his disciples never fasted. He uses the picture of a marriage, with himself as the bridegroom, to explain this. Fasting back in the Old Testament was associated with sorrow, and Jesus said that his ministry wasn't a time for sorrow. That would be like mourning at a wedding celebration. Jesus, however, went on to explain that the time for fasting would come "when the bridegroom shall be taken." Rev. Eriks interprets this to refer to the time period from Jesus' ascension to his second coming.

This means that fasting, although not commanded, can be an important part of the Christian's life today. We fast today in order to help us look back at the finished work of Christ and look forward to his return. Therefore, fasting means much more than abstaining from food. That abstaining must be done for the purpose of growing closer to God in prayer. Fasting, then,

can be done in other ways as well. We can fast from the internet, television, sports, etc. and feast instead on the truth of God's everlasting promise.

Sing or pray Psalter #318.

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