**Lent Vespers 1,**

13 March 2022,

*Concordia Lutheran Mission,*

Terrebonne, Oregon.

**“The Gospel Gives Life Eternal**

**because it Restores in Men the Image of God.”**

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God,

and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

**St. John 17:3.**

**Introduction**.

The Key to eternal life is simply to know the True God and His Mercy in Christ.

Man lost eternal life when he sinned in the beginning. Adam lost the Blessed Knowledge of God by sin and, therefore, being alienated from the Source of Life perished. Subsequently, the sons of Adam are begotten not in the Image of God but in the image of Adam and, therefore, perish. From the fall of Adam the knowledge of who the True God is perishes from the earth, save for its revelation in the Gospel.

Where, however, God reveals Himself, namely, the True God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there also He reveals His Mercy in Christ. In this way God restores the Image of God in men and they enjoy life eternal.

**I. Christ Restores the Blessed Knowledge of God and Saves Men from Sin by His Passion.**

**A. Man lost the Image of God and perished.**

Men frequently wonder what it’s like to be in the inner sanctum with God? We see plainly what it’s like to be in the inner sanctum of God in Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer on the Eve of His Passion. The Apostle St. John writes:

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.[[1]](#footnote-1)1

In the first place, we see again the several Persons within the One Godhead, namely, here the Father and the Son. Finally, we see that within the Godhead, God is concerned with man and his salvation. This revelation begins to give us a glimpse of how God values man and labors to do everything to give him life everlasting. Men wonder what it’s like to know God intimately. Here in Christ’s High Priestly Prayer on the Eve of His Passion we meet the True God, the Holy Trinity, and His active concern for man in the most intimate of settings. Luther writes:

Among all the works of our Lord Christ, we should especially desire to know how He conducted Himself when He prayed and spoke with His dear Father. ... And, truly, it is an extraordinarily fervent and heartfelt prayer, in which He opens and pours forth all the depths of His heart to us and to His Father. ... If we could but see and ponder the man who is praying and the One who is being prayed to, and how great the matter is for which He prays, we would not esteem it as so worthless and insignificant, but mark and feel the super-abundance of power and comfort ... contained and conveyed in these simple words.[[2]](#footnote-2)2

Adam resided in the presence of the Holy Trinity before the fall into sin. Adam resided there because, unlike all other earthly creatures, Adam was created in the Image of God. The Image of God means knowing *Who* the True God is and enjoying a blessed or happy relationship with Him. In catechism we learned of the Image of God:

**113. What was the image of God?** The image of God consisted in this – A. That man *knew God* and was *perfectly happy* in such knowledge. 263 [Ye] have put on the new man, which is renewed in *knowledge* after the *image of Him that created him*. *Col. 3:10*B. That man was *perfectly holy* and blessed. 264 Put on the new man, which *after God* is created in *righteousness and true holiness*. *Eph. 4:24****.*** ... **114. Does man still bear the image of God?** Man *lost* the image of God when he *fell into sin*. In *believers*, a *beginning* of its renewal is made. Only in *heaven*, however, will this image be *fully* restored. 265 [Adam] begat a son *in his own likeness*, after his image. *Gen. 5:3****.*** ... 266 I will *behold Thy face in righteousness*; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, *with Thy likeness*. Ps. 17:15.[[3]](#footnote-3)3

Adam, however, forfeited the Image of God when he sinned. Through sin against God, Adam lost the happy knowledge of God. Adam no longer warmed to God his Creator but fled from Him in fear and dread. Moses writes:

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.[[4]](#footnote-4)4

Luther writes:

Here Adam, hard pressed in this manner, was in the midst of death and hell.[[5]](#footnote-5)5

From here on out Adam begot children not in the Image of God but in his own fallen image. Moses writes:

And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat *a* *son* in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth.[[6]](#footnote-6)6

No longer does God say over men “let us create man in Our Image after Our Likeness” because Adam has rejected God, cutting himself off from the Source of Life. Consequently, men are begotten not in the Image of God but in the sinful image of Adam. Because of the fall of Adam, men have forfeited the Image of God and life everlasting and gained instead death. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

Wherefore as by one man sin centered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.[[7]](#footnote-7)7

**B. Christ restores the Image of God by His Passion.**

As we’ve already seen, the Lord did not abandon man when man abandoned God. Rather, man’s salvation was taken up immediately by the Counsel of the Holy Trinity. The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

The reason why this Child [Jesus], this Son, is also called **Counselor** [**Isaiah 9:6**] is that He, in counsel with [the other Persons of] the Holy Trinity, helped reach the conclusion of how fallen mankind could be helped again. The unending righteousness of God was offended by the Fall of Adam. Now then, there was only an unending payment required, which neither angel nor man could provide. Therefore there was no counsel either in heaven or upon earth. Thus, the Son of God, the eternal Wisdom, came up with the counsel that He would volunteer Himself s Mediator and Redeemer, that He especially in the fullness of time wanted to take into Himself human nature and within it make payment of us men.[[8]](#footnote-8)8

The happy relationship between God and man had been severed by man’s sin. Christ restored the happy relationship between God and man by Atoning for the sins of men on the Cross. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto them the word of reconciliation.[[9]](#footnote-9)9

Christ restored the happy relationship between God and man and, of course, in the process of Atoning for men’s sins revealed to men who the True God is, namely, the Holy Trinity, one God in Three Person, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because it was revealed that the Son of God made the Atonement. Jesus prays in His High Priestly Prayer on the Eve of His Passion that the Holy Trinity restores the Image of God and, thereby, gives life eternal:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.1[[10]](#footnote-10)0

**II. God Restores the Image of God through the Gospel and, thereby, Gives Life Eternal**.

**A. The Gospel restores the image of God**.

The Gospel reveals to men *Who* the True God is, namely, the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and His Mercy toward sinners in Christ. For example the Church Baptized in the Name of the True God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (**St. Matthew 28:19**), for the Remission of sins (**Acts 2:38**), which forgiveness obviously restores in men the Happy or Blessed Knowledge of God. Now, once again the Gospel, God says over men, “let us make man in our Image, after our likeness”. By the Gospel through faith, God restores in men the Image of god.

**B. The Gospel gives life everlasting by restoring the Image of God**.

Where the Image of God is restored, there men gain life everlasting. Jesus prays in His High Priestly Prayer on the Eve of His Passion:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.1[[11]](#footnote-11)1

In other words, eternal life is as easy as knowing the True God, the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, One God in Three Persons, and His Mercy in Christ. Luther writes of this Saving Knowledge of God:

In these words [**St. John 17:3**] He expresses the form and formation of eternal life. ... For since He has said that He has the power to grant eternal life, someone now might ask, ‘In what does eternal life consist, or how does it happen that we receive it?’ he answers that by saying, “It happens in this way, and by this means or in this manner they shall receive it: that ye know You, who alone are the true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” ... Concerning this knowledge and its power the prophets have spoken gloriously and clearly prophesied, as in Isaiah 53[:11]: “By knowledge of Him shall He (My Servant, the Righteous One) make many just or righteous.” This means: “He will redeem them from sins and snatch them from the devil’s jaws solely through this; that they know Him and who He is.” ... Likewise, Jeremiah 9[:23-24] says: “Let no one boast of his wisdom nor of his might nor of his riches” – in short, let no one boast at all – “but if anyone wants to boast, let him boast in this, that he knows Me and knows who I am: the Lord, who does good and establishes righteousness and justice on earth.”1[[12]](#footnote-12)2

**Conclusion.**

The Key to eternal life is to know the True God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One God in Three Person, the Creator of all men, and His Mercy toward men in Christ and Him Crucified for the sins of all men.

Because the Gospel reveals our Creator and His Work to save men from sin, it restores in men the Image of God and our relation with our Creator, the Source of Life, and yields life everlasting.

**Amen.**

1. 1**St. John 17:1-3**. “Because knowledge of Jesus Christ is necessary for life everlasting, this passage proves that Jesus is the True God. “Now, since we have here such a beautiful and powerful text, let us hold to it firmly and not let it be criticized, obscured, or torn to shreds by any blind trick of reason and so turned to a different interpretation. For here stand the bright, clear words that everyone is able to grasp and understand: Christ gives eternal life to all who believe. But since no one but God alone is able to grant eternal life, it must incontrovertibly follow that Christ is true God by nature. ... And again, since He makes eternal life dependent on a person’s knowing Him as well as the Father, so that without knowledge of him no one man attain eternal life, therefore it is one and the same knowledge by which He and the Father are known. Thus He must also be of one essence and nature with the Father, that is, the very same true God, yet a person distinct from the Father. ... The Arians also went astray here and tried to distort this text to suit their own purposes. They insisted on the word ‘alone’ when He says, ‘You, who alone are the true God,’ as if He had thereby excluded Himself and ascribed divinity to the Father alone. ... However, this is not a proof but the abuse of Scripture, chiseling at one word and flitting over the text so that no one can see the force for the words together in their context. For we also say that it is true and correctly taught that there is no other God than he alone. But they refuse to see the consequence, how Christ makes Himself equal with the Father in every respect and speaks as one who is also the same true God since (as we have said) He places eternal life in the knowledge of himself and of the Father alike, and out of the two makes one and the same knowledge. ... Let this be enough about how the evangelist establishes the article concerning Christ’s divinity. We must now talk a little more about the knowledge wherein eternal life consists -- so that we learn well and thoroughly understand this text as one of the true and noblest chief passages of the New Testament.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 32, 33, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 14, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3*The Small Catechism*, pp. 96, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4**Genesis 3:8**. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 1, p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6**Genesis 5:3**. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7**Romans 5:12**. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard, *Seven Christmas Sermons (1613)*, tr. the Rev. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Decatur: The Johann Gerhard Institute, first edition, November 1996, pp. 75, 76, amplification in brackets original and added. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9**II Corinthians 5:17**. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10**St. John 17:3.** [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11**St. John 17:3**. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 29, 35, 36, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)