

Grace, mercy and peace, be unto you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior

Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fellow witnesses: Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! In the certain hope and joy of those words, let us turn in the folders in our pews to the Third Chief Part of Martin Luther's Small Catechism dealing with prayer, the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father. We will recite together the Fifth Petition.

The Fifth Petition is: *And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

What does this mean? *We pray in this petition that our heavenly Father would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.*

Hearing and reciting these words, we realize that because of our sin we are not worthy of being here today. We understand that we are not worthy of standing before the presence of God. We realize that we deserve nothing but temporal death and eternal damnation. That is the Law. But we also realize that our heavenly father is abounding in steadfast love toward us, His richness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life. Because of what His beloved Son, Jesus Christ has done for us, by His once and for all perfect sacrifice on the cross, our sins are forgiven. Jesus, the Spotless Lamb of God, has shed His blood that we would be restored to a once and for all perfect relationship with our heavenly Father; that we would be gathered here today. Everything that we receive from our heavenly Father is out of His great love for us, found in His Son Jesus Christ. Every prayer that our heavenly Father answers, whether the answer is yes or no or wait has been answered because of Jesus. Every blessing that we receive is from God our Father, according to His great mercy, because He loves His Son Jesus, and He loves us His beloved children. He wants a close and personal relationship with us. This is the Gospel. This is the joy of the resurrection.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. Today we continue to rejoice, give thanks and sing that Jesus, our Good Shepherd, has died, has risen and will come again to bring us to be where He is in heaven, that there will be no more pain, no more sorrow, only rejoicing. On this Good Shepherd Sunday, it is good for us to remind ourselves that “the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.” Because Jesus has laid down His life for His sheep and taken it back up again, we have life everlasting. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, guards us, cares for us, and leads us to the ever green pastures. He speaks to us with a compassionate and caring voice and we eagerly listen. He leads us beside still waters, He restores our soul and we gladly follow. He offers us food to eat and water to drink, and like good sheep, we are joyfully fed from His loving hand. He prepares a table for us, our cup runs over; we are grateful for His abundant goodness and mercy toward us. We know that because of Jesus and what He has done for us and continues to do for us we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. The Good Shepherd’s rod and staff they comfort us all the days of our life. Jesus is with us always and forever. This is the reality for us of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

Fellow witnesses, beloved sheep, we have pondered the compassion and mercy of our heavenly Father, we have seen His love for us in the death and resurrection of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd of our body and souls. But something is missing. As with every family, if there is a father and a son there needs to be a mother, there has to be a mother; the same is true in our relationship with God.

In the family, a mother nurtures without expecting recognition. A mother loves unconditionally without being shown love in return. A mother encourages and is compassionate and understanding without appreciation. This is how it is with the mother of God, which the Creed affectionately calls, the One Holy Christian and Apostolic Church. It is through the church, visibly seen on earth here at Immanuel and Trinity congregations, and in every place where the Word of God is taught in all of its truth and purity and where the Sacraments are distributed according to

God's Command and with His promise. It is through His means of grace that the Holy Trinity calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole world to Himself, calling all people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is through the Church that all people are kept with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. It is in the Christian Church, that God daily and richly forgives all our sins and the sins of all believers. It is in the Church that we are defended from all evil and delivered from temptation. It is in the Church that we are strengthened and built up in the joy of the resurrection. The Church, by God's very design, takes on the image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The Church, in her calling and gathering and enlightening and sanctifying the sheep makes known to the world the love of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

In our Gospel reading the hireling is arrogant, he thinks only of his own comfort and self-interest. This is not the way of God our heavenly Father and His Holy Church. The Church's purpose is to struggle against pride and arrogance and self-interest, always looking to our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Church's purpose is seek after those who are alone and gather them in to the Good Shepherd's flock, keeping Jesus' command of making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Ghost. The Church's purpose is to make known the love and ever real presence of Jesus to those who don't think anybody cares, teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded, trusting that He is with us always and forever. The Church humbles itself before God in willing service toward its neighbor.

Like Jesus the Good Shepherd, the Christian Church is to point all people to the compassion and mercy of our heavenly Father, who willingly and gladly provides for the needs of the poor and the hungry and the homeless and the sick and the dying that they would not be in want. The Church, through her pastors, is to forgive the sins of the repentant sinner, assuring them of God's grace and mercy, leading them through the valley of the shadow of death, that they would fear no evil, that they would have true peace, that they would be confident that they will dwell in the house of the

Lord forever. The One Holy Christian and Apostolic Church is the perfect mother, whose example every mother should follow.

God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost works together through the Church to call people to Himself, that they would know the steadfast love of the Lord, that they would be confident in His tender mercies, that we would know the goodness of the Lord. We have the Good Shepherd that we would fear love and trust in God above all things. In our sin we have gone astray, but Jesus, the Good Shepherd of the sheep, has established His Church to preach and teach His Holy Word and distribute His Blessed Sacraments, that it would be possible for us to return to the loving arms of Jesus, the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls.

One hundred sheep and one has gone astray; the Church, like a loving mother, seeks to save the one that was lost. And like a mother hiding her children under her skirt or in her loving arms, the Church places that lost sheep on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd and the sheep is safe, it has nothing to fear.

Today on this Mother's Day, we thank God for the perfect mother, the One Holy Christian and Apostolic Church, and for all mothers and women who bring up children in the way they should go, in the way of Jesus; fearing, loving and trusting in God above all things. Amen.