

242. Trinity – I

Lord, let us experience the living power of Your Word. Amen.

John 3:1–15 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Because we have lost God’s image, as human beings we are by nature completely disqualified from blessed communion with the Holy One in heaven. We do not love Him, we have no joy in Him. How then can we be blessed with Him? Even if God could take us into His heaven in our natural condition, we couldn’t remain there and be happy. We *must* get back the love we lost, our mind must become like God’s, so that we have pleasure and joy in Him, if we are to be saved.

To fall and die, we can do that by ourselves, and Satan is happy to help us with it. But to raise ourselves and to live again, that we cannot do by ourselves at all, and the devil works against it with all his might. *Only* the Lord can send life from the dead. Love that is extinguished in our heart can only be rekindled from heaven. But, what grace! The whole Trinity is at work in this. All that God does, He does so that we shall have eternal life. *The Father* sent His only-begotten Son to us in love, *the Son* entered into humanity in love and has gained victory on earth again, and *the Holy Spirit* creates faith in us, so that we receive it in our hearts. Christ’s life and work in His humiliation is finished, but not gone. He is here with His perfect life, His innocent death, and His victorious resurrection, with all His saving work: annihilation of our sin and death, with the life that He brought us, the life He won for us, eternal life which is *love*. The highest importance of the means of grace is that the Father and the Son come to us in them with the Holy Spirit. In *Baptism* the Triune God, the God of our salvation, comes to us and *gives us new birth*. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ,” says Paul [*Gal 3:27*], and again: “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life... Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:4,11). It has pleased the Lord to use water connected with the Word for this miracle of grace. The same Lord Christ, who once came and lay in swaddling clothes in the manger to *win* life for us, comes in His Means of Grace to our hearts and *gives* us life. Therefore He says in this Gospel: “Unless one is *born of water and the Spirit*, he cannot enter the kingdom of God,” and therefore Peter says: “*Baptism also now saves us*” (1 Peter 3:21). By the Means of Grace the Spirit *extends* to us the treasure of grace, and by them He

works *faith*, by which we receive His grace. Just as God willed that those who looked at the bronze serpent should live, so He wills that we should live by *faith*. The Lord Jesus, who was lifted up on the cross, died for us, was buried and raised again, is there before the eyes of our soul, and the Spirit enlightens our eyes, so that we can believe in Him. And through faith which holds to the crucified and risen Savior in the Church's Means of Grace then His life of love comes into our hearts so that He remains in us and we in Him.

The new birth is a miracle that goes beyond the hidden depths of the soul, but new life breaks forth, is known by the renewed self, and shows itself to others. — Do you love God from your heart? Does Jesus live in you with His love? Do you long for Him, are you happy in Him, and do you gladly submit your will to His? Do you pray to love Him with your whole heart, and are you concerned that you do not love Him as you ought? Then you are truly reborn and are a “partaker in the divine nature.” — Let nothing be so important to you as having life in God. If you have that, then you are saved; if not, you are lost. “*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” Those are Jesus' own words.

O God, give us Your Holy Spirit, so that we may truly believe and have the heavenly life of Jesus' love in our hearts. Enter into us, good Holy Spirit, and drive away darkness and death. Triune God, let us live in You now and forever. Amen.

O little flock, He speaks to you
Who long for peace, unheeded;
And empty form is not for you;
New life is sorely needed.
For what is born of flesh is flesh,
Sees not God's kingdom, only death;
New birth is by His Spirit giv'n,
And sent from heav'n,
A rich new life with all forgiv'n.

If then God's kingdom you would see,
Rebirth you must be owning
Of water and the Spirit free,
Old Adam surely drowning.
The Spirit moves, unseen by all,
And sends forth His most holy call;
His way we do not understand,
His hidden hand,
But to God's Word we do attend.

It makes my soul so strong and glad
That God to me has given
Regeneration's precious flood,
The Spirit's gifts from heaven.
From Satan's grasp He rescued me,
Adopted me His child to be,
Baptized I have God's precious dow'r:
The Spirit's pow'r,
That I in faith may stand each hour.

*Landstad: Hos dig, O Jesus, seent om Nat L 447:3.4.6 tr. DeGarmeaux; tune: Allein zu dir (ELH 415);
alternate hymn: Come, Thou almighty King ELH 12*

243. Trinity – II

Lord, teach us to believe and to adore Your Wisdom. Amen.

Romans 11:33–36 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?” “Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?” For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Do not be discouraged, dear Christians, if it seems dark for Christendom. The cause is *the Lord’s*, and *the Lord* shall bring His cause to victory. His wisdom is unsearchable. We understand only as much of His way, as He finds good to reveal to us; but in many things it is of service to us that He hides from us what He does. We are too lowly to give Him advice and too small to comprehend God’s wisdom. But He has revealed to us enough so that we can believe in Him and commend ourselves into His hands.

It is hard to see the unbelieving Jews walking in blindness and the multitude of the Gentiles sitting in the darkness of ungodliness, to see Christ rejected by the leaders among Christian people, and the rest of us lacking both in faith and love. Whoever has a heart must really “feel a great concern and an incessant pain within.” — But will all this grief embarrass our God so that He does not know what to do? Will Caiaphas and Pilate, who in blindness and wickedness completely destroyed God’s Son, be able to hinder Him in His saving work of grace? Rather didn’t they have to fulfill His will? Or shall the Jews with their unbelief be able to stop the spreading of Christ’s kingdom, even on earth? Actually they propel the Gospel out over all nations, and their rejection becomes the world’s reconciliation! Can the unbelief, rejection of God, and free-thinking of our time be unknown to God? He took it into account in His own way in His plan for the completion of the kingdom. Just let people build their tower of Babel *against* the Lord. He looks at it and they must build it *for* Him. There in the plain of Shinar they built long ago, to keep themselves together, even contrary to the word of the Lord, but *the Lord*, contrary to their thinking, used it to scatter them abroad. Our age gathers materials from the depths of earth and the height of heaven, from repositories and work places of philosophizing in order to build a tower that would gather all people into one great natural temple, so that Christ’s Church might become empty. It seems as if “nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them” (Gen 11:6). Be still, the Most High has His own thoughts about this. “*Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things*” (Rom 11:36). Take note of this “of,” this “through,” and this “to,” dear Christian! These small words are infinitely glorious and powerful against unbelief. — When the gardener cuts away the whole top of the apple tree and a big part of the stem, he knows what he’s doing. But the child who sees it thinks he is destroying it. The Church is the Lord’s. Be still before Him, wait for Him, serve Him, and walk before Him, and little by little you will be able to see His wisdom, and with the fruit and joy of holiness offer Him worship and praise. But if He hides it all from your eyes again, you shall still *believe*, so that you can say: “To Him be glory forever!”

O God, let Your Spirit enlighten us, so that we understand that You have enclosed all under sin, so that You might have mercy on all [*Rom. 11:32*]. Show us enough of the plan of Your love and righteousness that we may confidently believe in You and gladly serve You. Amen.

What shall I say? Weak are my words
And humble my opinion!
How great Thy wisdom, Lord of lords,
Thy might and Thy dominion!

Arise, ye nations of the earth
And lift your voice to heaven,
Praise God in songs of joy and mirth,
Who all these things hath given.

*Brorson: Op al den Ting L 451:12-15 HCH 361:7-8 tr. A. M. Andersen;
tune: Jeg ved et evigt Himmerig (LHy 523); alternate hymn: Father, who the light this day ELH 14*

244. Trinity – Monday

*Holy, merciful God, give us the Light of the Spirit
that we may know You in faith, fear You, and become holy like You. Amen.*

Isaiah 6:1–7 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. Then I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.”

Holy is the Lord in His heavenly dwelling, high uplifted over all the earth and its misery, — He is pure light and perfect love, in eternal harmony with Himself. *Holy* is the Lord in His revelation through the Son. Perfectly spotless is He, and there is perfect unity in the will of the divine Persons even during Jesus’ incarnation and His suffering. *Holy* is the Lord in the work of the Spirit, when He takes residence in our hearts, gives us new birth, and sanctifies us. “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!* — the whole earth is full of His glory!” The seraphim see this and sing before His throne.

How then shall ungodly sinners stand before Him? Isaiah, who was a holy man, cries out when he sees the glory of the Lord: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips!” And he must be cleansed with a coal from the altar: a symbol of the grace of the Holy Spirit who cleanses us through Christ’s sacrifice. The Spirit must demonstrate to the prophet that his sins are taken away. Only then does he become confident before the face of the holy God and fit to serve Him. If the seraphim, these sinless exalted heavenly spirits, hide their faces and their feet before the Lord and cry “*Holy, holy, holy!*” to one another so that the doorposts of the threshold shake, how then shall we dare to appear before Him? How shall we cleanse ourselves and cover ourselves before the eyes of the Holy One? Don’t you feel how impossible it is for us to stand in our own righteousness? And don’t you feel how impossible it is for us to stand before God in our natural condition without being born anew? O how necessary it is that we hold on to our heavenly High Priest and take shelter under the wings of His holiness! And how necessary it is to be born of the Spirit to a new holy life in God, and thus in daily renewal to be cleansed unto perfect holiness! Praise to You, Lord Jesus! You came to us both with blood and water, and You give us the Spirit who dresses us with the robe of righteousness! You are my holiness, under Your protection I dare stand with confidence, and You do not let me go before You have completely taken away all my sin! I shall be perfectly holy, and see the Lord of glory, and live!

O God, give to all of us who here pray to You such grace by Your Holy Spirit for Jesus’ sake. Give us living fear of God and faith and holiness in our inmost heart. Amen.

Thee, God, we praise, Thy name we bless,
Thee, Lord, of all we do confess;
The whole creation worships Thee,
The Father of eternity.

To Thee aloud all angels cry,
The heav'ns and all the pow'rs on high,
The cherubs and the seraphs join,
And thus they hymn Thy praise divine:

O holy, holy, holy Lord,
Thou, God of hosts, by all adored;
Earth and the heav'ns are full of Thee,
Thy light, Thy pow'r, Thy majesty.

Niceta: Te Deum L 10:1-3 ELH 44:1-3 tr. C. Døving; tune: Old Hundredth

245. Trinity – Tuesday

Lord, teach us to know Your power and glory. Amen.

Matthew 28:18–20 Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

Christ is almighty God from eternity, but here He speaks about His power as our High Priest, Prophet, and King. He has gotten salvation for the whole world and has redeemed them by His death. Then the Father seated Him at His right hand and “gave Him dominion and glory and a kingdom” (Dan 7:14). So everything is at His disposal to command in His works, with Word and Sacraments to extend His Church, all angels and spirits in heaven, and all people and powers on earth. This we shall bear in mind to strengthen our faith. Have we really pondered this glorious truth: “All authority is given to Me in heaven and on earth”? “All authority” and all wisdom and love and righteousness stand in service to Christendom. What shall harm it then? He who rules over *everything* precisely for the advancement of the Church is with His people always, unceasingly, every hour, until the end of the world. Therefore He has commanded His disciples to go forth and conquer the whole world for Him. 1) They are to make *all people* His disciples, Christianize all nations. A royal command, and behold, it is done! This command of the Lord contains all the mission duty of the Church. Satan has continually raged against it: through persecution, through secularizing the church, and through all kinds of sects that fight against Christianizing “the nations.” All in vain! *Christ* said: “Go and make disciples of all nations,” and no one can overturn it. 2) “Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you.” He commands in the name of the whole Holy Trinity, over all God’s power and revelation in word and deed. To be baptized in *the name of the Father* is to be united with Jesus’ Father as His child. To be baptized in *the name of the Son* is to be taken into His kingdom and to receive a part in His redeeming work. To be baptized in *the name of the Holy Spirit* is to receive the Holy Spirit in the heart and to become His dwelling place. — “Baptize them” and “teach them.” These two things spread Christ’s kingdom. “Teach them to observe *everything, whatever* I have commanded you.” Haven’t the Apostles done this? We can be perfectly certain that they have communicated to the Church “all doctrine and all knowledge,” and when we teach what they have taught, we dare boldly proclaim it as the full and complete doctrine of Jesus Christ. But we must never forget *to observe all these things!* Among the Christianized “nations” there are *few* true disciples. The wheat is there,

but the tares are most numerous. “Christ has many confessors, but few followers.” Let this grieve us, and let us fulfill Christ’s command, by taking our mutual sins upon us, repenting of them as He commands, and, like Paul, Daniel, Nehemiah, Moses, and all the saints, consider ourselves one with our people.

Our text shows clearly that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three Persons, but one God, just as the Church teaches. God has revealed Himself as the Triune God, because He *is* Triune God. And faith *must* hold Him to be such. We cannot dispense with the Father; what then would become of our adoption as children and our inheritance and our praying “Our Father”? We cannot dispense with the Son, our Savior and Lord and our only way to the Father. But just as little can we dispense with the Spirit, for who then shall lead our hearts to Jesus and teach us to cry: “Abba, Father!”? Blessed be the Triune God, the God of our salvation, the God of our strength and our song! Amen.

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,
Vouchsafe within our souls to rest;
Come with Thy grace and heavenly aid,
And fill the hearts which Thou hast made.

Make Thou to us the Father known;
Teach us th’ eternal Son to own,
And Thee, whose name we ever bless,
Of both the Spirit to confess.

Praise we the Father and the Son
And Holy Spirit, Three in One,
And may the Son on us bestow
The gifts that from the Spirit flow.

Rhabanus Maurus: L 209:1.6.7 ELH 10:1.6.7 tr. E. Caswall; tune: Komm, Gott Schöpfer

246. Trinity – Wednesday

Lord, draw our thoughts heavenward. Amen.

1 Peter 1:3–6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.

All believers are regenerate children of God and have an eternal inheritance waiting. We are strangers on earth and eager for heaven. “Human life, you are a journey. You are not the true life! But only few know you, you charming, alluring thing! Most believe in you instead of unmasking you. They consider you as their life, and you rob them of life. Woe is me if I do not see life where eternity rules! Flee away then, you fleeting life, and we will flee from you before you flee from us! Those who love you are led astray, and those who believe in you are deceived, but those who hate you are rich, and those who escape you are saved. So let us not serve the passing pleasures of this life, for if we do, we rejoice that the day of despair is coming. Let us not fill ourselves here only to be hungry forever, nor drink here and be thirsty forever! Pilgrims are eager to go home. During the journey they have worry and work. In their homeland they have rest. Arise, let us run so

¹ “Abba” is the familiar form for “Father” in Aramaic. Jesus Himself uses this word when addressing His heavenly Father (Mark 14:36), and Saint Paul says that we have received the Spirit of adoption to use this same familiar term with our heavenly Father (Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6).

that we may come home! May our love, our desire, and our heart's joy be directed upward! Where our Father is in heaven, there is our homeland. In our school this proverb is always fitting: "*Vita—via!*" (Life is a journey.) May our spirit be filled with heavenly thoughts and images!

Let us not become dependent on this world's gilded dirt, the dust that our pilgrim feet trod! Let us with all our powers sing: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:2). "For I have a desire to depart and be with Christ" (Philippians 1:23). Let us tread all sluggishness under our feet, do away with all lukewarmness, and together strive to be pleasing to *Him*, in whose presence we walk, and with untarnished conscience to leave our exile for the eternal blessed homeland of our heavenly Father, from the visible to the invisible, from sorrow to joy, from what passes away to what stands forever, from the earthly to the heavenly, from belonging to death to the land of the living, where we shall see the King, our Lord Jesus Christ, face to face in His glory" (Columba²).

The inheritance is safely *guarded* in heaven, and by faith we are faithfully *guarded* through all dangers. Take note of the Holy Spirit's words in our Bible passage concerning this double "preservation." Do you doubt that *the inheritance* is securely guarded? But *we* are guarded by *God's power* through faith. Shall our hope then not be certain and unmovable? The One who holds us tight is *God*, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit as a pledge. A little while the test shall endure. The more eager we are, the sooner the goal shall be near us!

"My Jesus, I pray You, kindle Your light in my lamp, that its brightness, the Most Holy Place, may be revealed to me, which You, the great High Priest of eternal good, have entered! O may I see You there without ceasing, behold You, rejoice in You, wait for You! Let us love You alone and with our whole heart, desire You alone, think on You alone day and night! Enter our whole heart with Your love. Let our whole being be Your possession; spirit, soul, and body be Your dwelling, so that we know of nothing to love but You, O eternal Love! Yes, according to the measure of grace also let the word be fulfilled in us that not even many waters can extinguish love nor the floods drown it." Amen.

Yea, were ev'ry tree endowed with speech,
And every leaflet singing,
They never with praise His worth could reach,
Though earth with their praise were ringing.
Who fully could praise the Light of life
Who light to our souls is bringing?

As birds in the morning sing God's praise,
His fatherly love we cherish,
For giving to us this day of grace,
For life that shall never perish.
His Church He hath kept these many years,
And hungering souls did nourish.

With joy we depart for our fatherland,
Where God our Father is dwelling,
Where ready for us His mansions stand,
Where heaven with praise is swelling;
And there we shall walk in endless light,
With blest ones His praise forth telling.

² Columba (c. 521–597) was an Irish missionary who founded several churches and monasteries in Ireland as well as the Scottish Hebrides island of Iona and neighboring islands.

247. Trinity – Thursday

Speak Your Word to us, Lord Jesus, and cleanse us to bear much fruit. Amen.

John 15:1–6 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”

We are all branches on Adam’s tree and all corrupt by Adam’s fall. The poison of sin has permeated the whole human race even to the smallest twigs. So we must all be condemned to eternal death. Yet one Branch grows on the tree without the poison entering it. God’s only-begotten Son becomes Man, of Adam’s race, but conceived by the Holy Spirit, and without sin. By death He is cut off, but then becomes a new tree, the second Adam, the true Noah, founder of a new race, which like Himself is of the old and yet is new. “He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. ... When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days” (Isa 53:8,10). By a new miracle of the Holy Spirit we are engrafted into Christ and made partakers of His life. We are *by nature* children of Adam, born in sin and guilty of death. But we are *not by nature* branches of Christ; this we become only by His Spirit. He calls us by His Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, through them creates faith in our soul and causes our hearts to cling to Jesus. The life-giving Vine stands among us, and we who are baptized have all become His branches. But many declare themselves free of the Lord again, and these become dry branches, which are suitable only for the fire.

Life and salvation rest completely on enduring *communion of our hearts with Jesus* in faith. No one can bear fruit for God from himself, but only from the juice of the Vine. If from the heart we believe in Him, His love streams over us from Him, and shows itself in our life as obedience to God and mercy toward our neighbor. “He who abides in Me, and I in him,” Jesus says: “bears much fruit.” Not all bear an *equal* amount, but each branch in Jesus bears *much* fruit. Without Him, nothing; in Him, much. Nor does anyone have the *joy* of love in God without feeding on this life from Jesus and continually being nourished from His fullness. The branches must *constantly* get juice and power from the Vine, if they are to live. If they are not nourished by Him and cleansed by the Vinedresser, they must die. We must all examine ourselves carefully to see if Jesus’ love rules in our soul. May our whole heart reach out for this heavenly life!

Lord Jesus, let me be a living branch in You and be cleansed daily to bear more and more fruit. Let me never wither or dry up or be cast into the fire. My soul yearns for this: Lord Jesus, You in me and I in You! Amen.

Jesus, I long for Thy blessed communion,
Yearning for Thee fills my heart and my mind;
Draw me from all that would hinder our union,
May I to Thee, my beginning, be joined;
Show me more clearly my hopeless condition;
Show me the depth of corruption in me,
So that my nature may die in contrition,
And that my spirit may live unto Thee.

Mightily strengthen my spirit within me,
That I may learn what Thy Spirit can do;
O take Thou captive each passion and win me,
Lead Thou and guide me my whole journey through!
All that I am and possess I surrender,
If Thou alone in my spirit mayst dwell,
Everything yield Thee, O Savior most tender,
Thou, only Thou, canst my sadness dispel.

*German: Jesus, I long for Thy blessed communion L 210:1-2 LHy 461:1-2 tr. G. A. T. Rygh;
tune: Aand over Aander; alternate hymn: From eternity, O God ELH 220:6*

248. Trinity – Friday

Lord, our God, explain the Scriptures to us.

Numbers 21:5–9 And the people spoke against God and against Moses: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.” So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

“**A**nd as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (Joh 3:14-15). The bronze serpent was just like the poisonous serpents, except *without poison*. It hung there dead and was a cure from death. In the same way “*He* who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2Co 5:21). Bengel³ writes: “Just as that serpent was a serpent without poison, with a cure from the poisonous serpents, so the Son of Man is the Man without sin, but with a cure against that old serpent.” Another writer, Besser⁴, says: “Jesus hangs on the cross, not in sinful flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh, bearing in His body our sins. And for the serpent-bite of sin which mortally wounded our nature a cure is found, in that sin is punished on the flesh of the Son of Man, for it is condemned.” In the words of Augustine⁵: “A serpent is gazed on that the serpent may have no power.” What does this mean? Death is nailed fast, so that it shall no longer prevail over anyone. Or, as Chrysostom⁶ puts it: “There a serpent bit them and a serpent healed them. Here death destroyed us and a Death saved us.”

Should those unfortunate ones fatally bitten in the wilderness have to run here and there and do many things in order to get the grace of life? How will they be able to do it? No, they only have to look on the bronze serpent, nothing else. God Himself said: “*Everyone*

³ Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) was a German Lutheran pastor, skilled in Greek. He published a New Testament commentary called *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*.

⁴ Wilhelm Friedrich Besser (1816-84), educated in Halle and Berlin, served as Lutheran pastor in Pomerania and Silesia. He wrote *Bibelstunden*.

⁵ Augustine (354-430) was bishop of Hippo in North Africa. He was converted to Christianity by Ambrose, bishop of Milan. Augustine’s writings include his *Confessions* and *City of God*. (Homilies on the Gospel of John, Tractate 12:11, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 7, p. 85.)

⁶ Chrysostom (c. 345-407) was Patriarch of Constantinople and became famous for his preaching. His name means Golden-Mouth. (Homily 27:2 on John 3:12-13, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 14, p.94.)

who is bitten, when he looks at it, *shall live*... And so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.” Every single one had the promise of looking at the bronze serpent, yes, the command and order to do it, and never did it fail: whoever looked lived. So God has commanded us all to believe and look, so that *everyone* who believes in the crucified Jesus shall have eternal life. Nothing other than believing in Him, nothing else at all is required of you, nothing else saves you. Every single sinner has the promise of believing, yes, the command from God to believe. For all people, for you who are bitten by the devil, whoever you are, and wherever you are—for all of you Christ was crucified, and it *shall come to pass* that *everyone* who believes in Him shall live. God has said it, and it does not fail. Incessantly the medicine of life flows forth from Him through the Word and Sacraments, and faith in the heart receives it. But this life of Jesus which is given to us by His death and heals us from death, what is it other than love, since He died for us and conquered death? And by this we once again possess the very life of God, in which we were created, but which we lost through the devil’s envy and serpent-bite!

Praise to You, Lord Jesus! You let Yourself hang on the cross for us and, in the image of the bronze serpent, You were the Son of Man lifted up on the accursed tree! Give us grace to believe in You, to receive life from You in our souls, and eternally to live in You. Amen.

With sigh and roar the wind does blow;
We note its sound and moving.
Its resting-place we do not know,
Nor where it may be moving;
And so it is with ev’ry soul
In whom the Spirit’s life does glow;
Anew we live and note it sure
That true and pure
The Spirit’s light arises there.

But Jesus our deliv’rance brings
Upon the cross uplifted,
And who to Him in trouble sings,
With eyes of faith uplifted,
Receives the healing that gives life
Against the serpent’s fiery bite;
Baptized into the Savior’s death,
The Spirit’s breath
Gives faith and hope against all death.

*Landstad: Hos dig, O Jesus L 447:5-6 tr. DeGarmeaux; tune: Allein zu dir (ELH 415);
alternate hymn: Jesus, Refuge of the weary ELH 240:1*

249. Trinity – Saturday

O God, give us Your Spirit, and create a new heart in us. Amen.

Ezekiel 36:25–27 “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

The heart of the children of the world clings to created things: they love and trust themselves, or other people, or riches and power. And if they do not have temporal treasures or goods, *they work for them* and are unhappy because they do not get them. “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their

belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things” [Phi 3:18-19]. But the Lord has cleansed His faithful from *all* “filthy idols.” From *all* of them! If there is anything you still love more than the Lord or rely on instead of the Lord, then your heart is not right with Him. The Spirit’s life, the living stream of love, sweeps idols away. Aren’t the faithful happy with God’s gifts: marriage, children, country, home, etc.? Yes, they love them and enjoy them as God’s gifts, but the heart belongs above all to the Lord, “and besides Him they have no pleasure in anything on earth.”

“The heart of stone” the Lord speaks of here, does not feel God’s admonition and does not submit in obedience to His command. Some are *completely* without feeling for the Spirit’s working, so that they live with a feeling of complete security and hurry to assure their eternal condemnation. Others are *sometimes* restless, and still others walk with the constant burden of their conscience, but they love darkness more than light, harden themselves against God’s call, and become more and more like stone.

It is completely different with the children of God. Their conscience is alive and tender, they feel God’s wrath and God’s love, they are driven to seek the Lord and rejoice in the Lord, they are sorry for doing things against Him, and cannot be at peace without being assured of His grace. They submit to His will, patiently endure His discipline, and diligently walk in His good pleasure, contrary to their own self-will and the desires of their flesh. The Lord’s pure and heavenly image is imprinted in them more and more. God’s Spirit leads them more and more to follow Jesus’ perfect example. In their dealings among *people* this new heart shows itself in gentleness, mercy, peaceableness, meekness, and all kinds of goodness toward friend and foe.

Lord, let us all experience this miracle of the new creation, and let the new mind awaken in us to the full measure of Christ’s maturity. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me! Help me to walk in Your ordinances and keep Your commands. Amen.

Our hearts let new-created be,
Our walk make pure and holy.
Help us offense and sin to flee,
And ever serve God solely,
So that our faith in Christ, our Lord,
May prove itself in deed and word
Before the world about us.

Thy gracious heav’nly dew let fall,
The fainting Church to quicken;
Thy soothing ointment pour on all
Whose souls are sad and stricken;
Sustain us, Lord, in evil days,
And let our lives in all our ways,
Abound in love and mercy.

Ringwaldt: O Holy Ghost, Thou gift divine L 431:3-4 ELH 26:3-4 tr. O. H. Smeby; tune: Herr, wie du willst