Oculi
St. 11:14-28
8 March, Anno Domini 2026

Children of God,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Bible verse that we are working on committing to our hearts as a congregation this month is Galatians 6:7 in which the Apostle Paul writes “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” He then goes on to explain why: “For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” (Gal. 6:8) Dr. Luther uses the first of these verses in the Table of Duties to admonish us as hearers of the Word to cheerfully and generously support the preaching of the Word. This is one of the ways in which we “sow to the Spirit” and give thanks to God for our salvation - we give of our firstfruits to help ensure that the things of the Spirit, the Word and the Sacraments, continue to be available to us and our neighbor. The Word of the Lord before us today helps us understand the importance of sowing to the Spirit.

We have often talked about the vicious war that is being waged all around us and in our own hearts - the battle between God and the powers of darkness, namely, the devil and his demons, the unbelieving world, and our sinful flesh. In many ways it is a hidden battle. Only by immersing ourselves in the Word of God are we able to see it. Apart from the Word of God we are blind to it and are distracted by the wars of men that are being fought with ballots or missiles or over social media.

But people of God, these are distractions. The battle you need to concern yourself with is the one being waged in your own heart. That is the only one that has eternal consequences. That battle began the day you heard the Word of God which proclaimed to you the forgiveness of your sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus. On that day, The Holy Spirit laid siege to the fortress which Satan had laid in your heart so that you were enslaved to him and eternal death. In Holy Baptism Satan was disarmed of his greatest weapon against you - your sin. When you were forgiven your sins the unclean spirit which ruled over you was driven out and a new Spirit took up residence - the Holy Spirit. He made you alive. He clothed you in the righteousness of Jesus. By the holy Law of God, He began to crush your heart of stone, bringing you to lament your sin and cry out to God for forgiveness.

By the Word of absolution He began to form in you a new heart and make it good soil so that the living Word of the living God might take deep root in you and bring forth an abundant crop of faith and love.

Praise and thanks be to God who has set us free, who has cast out the spirit of sin and rebellion, who cleansed us by washing away the guilt of our sin with the atoning Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ! We are no longer slaves of sin to gratify the wicked desires of the flesh which only reap corruption. We are sons and daughters of the Most High God, inheritors of our Father's eternal kingdom, freed to live lives of utterly selfless sacrificial love toward our neighbor. We have been given the Spirit of wisdom and understanding through the Holy Scriptures so that we can know and love and strive after the fruits of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindess, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal. 5:22-23) We can see the cares and riches and pleasures of this life for what they are - shiny deceptions and distractions meant to choke out the faith which was planted in us so that we don't attain to the unity of the faith and the fullness of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13)

Our lips have been opened to pray, to confess, and to sing the praises of our God who has accomplished our salvation through His death. Our hands have been released from the shackles of greed and covetous so that now they can be pressed into the service of our neighbor - building, protecting, and providing. Our feet have been lifted off the broad path that leads to destruction and set on the narrow path that leads to eternal life.

But do not think for a second that the unclean spirit from which you were cleansed in the font will not seek to return bringing with him legions of demons more evil than himself in hopes of taking up residence once again but this time permanently. The Holy Spirit will not of His own volition leave you but you can drive Him out. Though He has taken your heart which was completely disordered and disoriented and set it aright, turning your eyes toward Jesus and bringing forth holy desires, bringing forth faith through the seed of God's Word, He can be pushed out and lost, not by the demons, but by you.

The warning of Jesus to us this day is a serious one that we need to keep before us at all times. For whatever we sow, that will we also reap. If we sow to the flesh, grasping at the world's riches, using the gifts of God to gain pleasure and ease and the favor of men then we will drive out the Holy Spirit and with Him life and salvation.

This past Wednesday we looked at the deadly sin of greed which drives us to set aside and ignore the good of our soul and body in order to accumulate wealth or fame or power.

Our Lord calls us this day as His children to examine our hearts and our homes. Have they been filled with the things of faith? Or, was the space cleaned and put in order by the Holy Spirit left empty for the devil and his ilk to inhabit once again? What is hanging on the walls of your home? Beautiful and interesting things are good but when you walk through your house are your eyes also met with images of Christ, images of faith, stories from the Scriptures? Can everyone fall asleep and wake again to their baptismal certificate, reminding them of who God has made them? Are you filling your home with the things of the flesh or the things of the Holy Spirit? Look honestly at your personal and family schedules to see how you spend your time. Are you only together long enough to say goodnight and good-bye? Are you so busy with sports and work and outside commitments that you can't sit down to dinner together, to talk with one another, to pray, to read the Bible, or to go church together? Are you filling your calendar with the things of the flesh or the things of the Holy Spirit? Think carefully about the music you and your children listen to, the movies and shows you watch. Do they edify? Do they strengthen faith? Or do they arouse the desires of our flesh? Are they filled with filthiness, foolish talk, or crude joking? Do they uphold marriage or praise immodesty and promiscuity? Do they teach true things or do they spew out lies? Are you filling your heart and your mind with the things of the flesh or the things of the Holy Spirit? Consider how you use the money with which God has blessed you? Do you tithe? Do you use it for the temporal and eternal good of your neighbor? Or do you use it for your own pleasure and vanity and further enrichment? Consider the words that come out of your mouth, the same mouth that this morning is filled with the Word of God and prayer and will shortly be filled with the Body and Blood of the Son of God. Do you fill the same mouth with words that disparage and discourage your neighbor? Do you use the foul and empty language of the world to gain credibility rather than letting your yes be yes and your no be no? Is your mouth filled with laughter about those things that our Lord says are so vile that they shouldn't even be named among His children? Are you sowing words to the flesh or are you sowing words to the Holy Spirit?

We dare not ignore what Jesus is teaching us. We cannot fill our lives with the things of the flesh and expect to have the things of the Spirit. "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked." Nor can we assume that for now we can sow to the flesh and later we'll sow to the Spirit. Remember the rich man who was so foolish only to discover that there was no later for him because his soul would be demanded of

him that very night. How we spend our time and our money, the words that fill our mouths, the images that fill our eyes, the sounds that fill our ears - all these things matter. Nothing is neutral. It is either being used to sow to the Spirit or to sow to the flesh.

Everyone of us will reap what we sow. If we sow to the Spirit, if we fill our ears and eyes with the Word of God; if we discipline our flesh in order that it may be pressed into the service of God; if we deliberately set aside the time every day to call upon God and to hear and be formed by His Word; if we gather faithfully to the house of our God so that through His divinely appointed means He might strengthen the faith which He Himself has planted - then we will reap accordingly. We will enjoy the blessings of long life, a good conscience, peace with God, contentment with our daily bread, stout hearts in the midst of danger, steady hands in the hour of difficulty, confidence in the face of bad news, hope in the midst of sorrow. “Blessed are those”, says Jesus, “who hear the Word of God and keep it.” The will of God is your sanctification, that having heard the Word of God you believe it and lead a holy life according to it. And what is a holy life? It is a life made holy by the things of God - His Holy Word, the precious gift of your Baptism, Christ’s absolution which He has put into the mouth of the pastor He has given to you, the wondrous blessing of Holy Communion - and devoted to holy things - the righteousness of God, prayer, the ordinary duties of your vocations, teaching the Word of God to your children, reconciling with one another, helping the widow and the orphan and your hungry neighbor.

On the other hand, if we imagine that sowing time and money and heart to the things of the flesh is harmless, then the evil spirit which God graciously drove out from us will return with seven others to take up residence and consume us. Then the day of the Lord will come upon us suddenly, like a trap. On that day, which could be this day for any or all of us, we will have to answer for why we traded the things of righteousness and eternal life for the fleeting trinkets of this world which have no value and kept us from the means of our salvation. All of the excuses we told ourselves and others will condemn us because they only further prove that we loved our life in this world while the God who nailed His Son to the cross to pay for our sins was at best an afterthought who should be happy to get the crumbs leftover after we have paid our tribute to our false gods.

Our Lord is clear. No one will remain empty. If our hearts and homes are not filled with the things of the Holy Spirit, they WILL be filled by the demons. Only the Holy Spirit, dwelling in us richly through the constant hearing and reading of the Word of God can hold the demons at bay. We will either be ruled by the Holy

Spirit unto eternal life or by the evil spirits unto eternal death.

Beloved Baptized of God, you have been cleansed and purified. You have been set free of the evil spirits ruled over you from the moment you were conceived and to whom you would have remained hopelessly enslaved had not God in His mercy driven them out and claimed you as His dear child, filling you with His Holy Spirit. Be imitators of Him. Let your life and all that you have be a constant fragrant offering and sacrifice of thanksgiving to Him, living in love and abounding in all good works to the glory of His Name. Be as your heavenly Father is. Flee from all wickedness. Devote your heart, your home, your time, your talents, and your treasures to the things of the Spirit and from the Spirit you will reap eternal treasures and joy that will never fade away.

Grant this, O Lord, unto us all to the praise and honor of your most holy Name.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.