



ABOUT THE PROPERs

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 11

July 20, 2025



“Undivided Attention”

On the One Thing Needed

Most would agree that people often confuse their wants with needs. We might want many things; but in reality, we only need a few things. However, we might object to Jesus’ claim that only *one* thing is needed. There seems to be more than one true need. We need water, food, clothing, shelter, friendship, etc. Yet, what Jesus said is true. Because only one thing—the gospel—can create and sustain the faith that makes one God’s dear child and an heir of the everlasting kingdom. If you didn’t have water, you would die in a few days; without oxygen, in a few minutes. But without Jesus speaking to us through his Word, there is no hope for eternal life in heaven. We literally need the gospel more than water or oxygen. So, let us listen to Jesus speak, giving him our undivided attention.

First Reading³ Genesis 18:1-14

The Lord appeared to Abraham and promised him a son. While the world laughs with Sarah at the seemingly impossible promises of God, we hear the Word of the Lord and believe it. Promises of free forgiveness, eternal life after death, and the perfection of heaven seem laughable to those who busy themselves with getting ahead or serving self. Even those who are familiar with the Word of the Lord find it difficult to believe his promises when guilt haunts our hearts. But with the Word of the Lord in its rightful, central place in the life of the believer, nothing is impossible. The Lord spoke and ancient Abraham had a son.

Second Reading³ Colossians 1:1-14

Holy Spirit-worked appreciation for what has been given to them in Christ Jesus has led the Colossians to bear fruits of faith and love for the benefit of God’s kingdom. Paul’s prayer is that this work of the Spirit continues, not only in the hearts of the Colossians, but also in hearts of believers today. Rescued from darkness, we too know and embody the love of Christ, bearing fruit in every good work done for the love of our neighbor.

Gospel³ Luke 10:38-42

Twenty-first century Christians can certainly identify with Martha. So much to do and so little time! We have great excuses and fine rationalizations to explain the fact we have so little time to sit at Jesus’ feet. But like Martha, our reasons fail in the face of Christ’s simple statement: there is one needful thing—to hear the Word of God. On many an occasion, Martha would have surely sat at Jesus’ feet. But on this day, she was distracted by the many things being used to drag her away from where it was better for her to be. The busyness of Martha is contrasted by the devotion of Mary to Jesus’ words. When this one thing needful is truly treasured in the believer’s life, everything else falls into place and it will not be taken from us, even into eternity.

Psalm of the Day⁴ Psalm 119 B “Teach Me, O LORD”

The Church sings Psalm 119 in services that encourage us to take the Word of God seriously. Based on the Hebrews alphabet, it is the longest psalm and the longest chapter of the Bible. Martin Luther said, “Psalm 119 is a thorough meditation on the Word of God. It is useful for prayer and for disproving the claims of the devil and false teachers. It contains all kinds of prayer, comfort, instruction, and thanksgiving, pleasing God and grieving the devil.”

Gospel Acclamation

Isaiah 55:11

“My word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” God is present and active in his living, eternal Word. He will use it to accomplish his will, including his desire to bring the elect to saving faith. There is great comfort in knowing that while we share God’s powerful message, he is always using the Word to achieve his divine purposes.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your Word. By your Holy Spirit, help us to receive it with joy and bring forth fruits in faith, hope, and love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

645 “One Thing’s Needful” (Johann H. Schroder, 1667-99)

The hymn gets its title from the account of Jesus’ visiting the home of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42). This hymn, along with the Gospel from which it is derived, has great value and comfort for Christians during their pilgrimage on earth. It reminds us that salvation is by grace alone. For eternal life, there is only one thing needful: the forgiveness Jesus won on the cross and gives us in his Word.

Church Year Season ¹

Season after Pentecost

After reliving the great events of the life of Christ, the worshipping Church spends half a year focusing on the teachings of Christ. The Church wears green during the season of Pentecost as the Spirit uses those teachings of Jesus to grow the faith of believers. The appointed lessons cover a great body of doctrine for faith and life.

Colors & Symbolism

Green

Green is the color of life, refreshment, growth, and regeneration. Whereas the first half of the Church Year (the “Festival Half” or the “Half Year of Our Lord”) focused on the life of Christ during his earthly ministry, the emphasis for the second half (the “Non-Festival half” or the “Half Year of the Church”) shifts to the result of Christ’s work through the Word: the work of defining and creating faith, and inspiring its fruits. The theme of the Christian’s growth in faith (like healthy green plants) fills the season.

Minor Festivals

St. Mary Magdalene (July 22)

St. James the Elder, Apostle (July 25)

Nain Paraments

Sundays after Pentecost

SuperfrONTAL: When Isaiah was called to be a prophet of the LORD, two seraphs (a class of angels) appeared and called out to one another, “Holy, Holy, Holy” (Isaiah 6:3). The threefold repetition of the divine adjective emphasizes the infinite holiness of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some congregations count the Sundays in this season of the Church Year as the Sundays after the festival of the Holy Trinity, calling it the “Trinity season,” or the “Sundays after Trinity.” That is why most paraments for this season feature symbols of the Holy Trinity.

Lectern antependium: The equilateral triangle is one of the oldest emblems of the Holy Trinity. The three equal sides and angles represent the equality, unity, and co-eternal nature of the three persons of the Trinity. Though they are three distinct persons, they are of one essence as one God (Deuteronomy 6:4). The three interwoven circles represent the three members of the Trinity and emphasize their unity and eternal nature; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are without beginning or end.

Pulpit antependium: At each point of the triangle (the significance of the triangle is explained above) is a nimbus, Latin for *cloud*. The nimbus appears as a circle, or a halo. In Christian artwork, nimbi surround the head of the Father (when he is depicted as a human), Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit (when he is depicted as a dove) to signify their glory and holiness. In artistic depictions of believers (saints), nimbi are placed around their heads to show that they have been made holy by God’s grace in Christ and through faith. The three fish in between the nimbi and that meet in the middle of the triangle signify Christians who are united to the Triune God by faith. Fish have come to represent the followers of Jesus because believers have been brought into the ship of God’s church through the efforts of those who proclaim Gospel (cf. “fishers of men” in Matthew 4:19).

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author.

² Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year B”. Daniel M. Deutschlander, Author.

³ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year C”. Joel J. Gawrisch, Author.

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