



ABOUT THE PROPERs

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 18

September 6, 2026



Unexpected Truths
I Am My Brother's Keeper

When danger strikes, most people instinctively move away from it. Fire, violence, accidents, and disasters trigger a natural desire to find protection and safety. Yet first responders do the opposite. Firefighters, police officers, and paramedics run toward the very scenes others are fleeing. This response is unexpected because it goes against basic human instinct. Today God calls us to be spiritual first responders when we see people in trouble because of sin. Warning against sin is not easy. It upsets people, even offends them. But saying hard things is the loving thing to do when it is a matter of eternal life and death. I am my brother's keeper because I want to share with him the grace of God and his desire to save him.

First Lesson ¹

Ezekiel 33:7-11

Since the time of Cain, man has hated being his brother's keeper. Are we any different today? Who but little Pharisees enjoy pointing out others' sins? But God tells us the task is not optional. No one wants to wake up their next door neighbor at 6:00am on a Saturday. But if his house were burning, and you let him sleep, you are not just loveless and careless. You are a killer. In the same way God drops on us the heavy message of being a watchman for our brother. God's judgment on fallen man is as clear as it is severe. If we fail to do the job God has assigned us, God promises to hold us accountable. With the Law driven deeply into our hearts, God then reminds us why he has given us this job: because of his grace and his desire for the salvation of all mankind. The responsibility of waking our neighbor asleep in a burning house becomes a joyful privilege when he emerges safely from the smoke. May our task of being our brother's keeper always be one done with such responsibility and joy.

Second Reading ¹

Galatians 2:11-16

Being your brother's keeper will lead at times to uncomfortable situations or even confrontations. Here Paul tells how he had to oppose Peter to his face. Paul did not do this out of jealousy of this reputed pillar; this was no power play pitting the Apostle to the Jews against the Apostle to the Gentiles. This had to do with the eternal salvation of everyone involved. Trusting in anything other than Christ is like sleeping in a burning house. Paul took his job of being a watchman seriously: if righteousness could be gained through the Judaizers' demands, then Christ died for nothing! So Paul woke his sleeping neighbor with the harsh reality of Peter's hypocrisy. But the Word did its work; Paul didn't merely keep his brother, he won his brother over.

Gospel ¹

Matthew 18:15-20

"Matthew 18" has become shorthand for Christian discipline. This Sunday provides an excellent opportunity to ensure that shorthand has not become short shrift. The importance of Christian discipline lies in the fact that the keys have been placed into the hands of the Church and in no other. The Christian and the Church are a fallen sinner's only life line. Satan tries to make Christian discipline seem like the height of hypocrisy or meddling. But his is a self-interested motive: he wants the fallen brother's sins bound like his for an eternity in hell. Only love could lead the Christian and the Church to go to a fallen brother. Only love led our Savior to command it. Even the manner Jesus prescribes shows great love for the fallen. First, privately, so that offense and embarrassment might be contained, and pardon and forgiveness might all the more readily flow. Then with two or three, that the matter might be underscored without making tongues wag throughout the congregation. Finally, also in love, the Church calls and, if necessary, shuns. Such a great privilege and power has Christ bestowed on us! It leads us to even greater reliance on prayer for guidance and the presence of our Savior among us.

Psalm of the Day⁴

Psalm 32 B

“How Blest Are Those”

The Church sings Psalm 32 in services that proclaim forgiveness for the penitent. It is the second of the seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). In Romans 4:6-8, Paul uses the first two verses of the psalm to demonstrate that the doctrine of salvation is the same in both the Old and New Testaments. Martin Luther said, “Psalm 32 is an outstanding way to teach us what sin is, since our reason does not know what sin is, and tries to make satisfaction for sin by works. The psalm describes instead how a person is freed from sin and declared righteous before God. Here the psalmist says that even saints are sinners, and are holy or blessed only by confessing their sins to God, knowing that they are declared righteous in the sight of God only through grace, apart from any service or work. In summary, our righteousness is called our forgiveness of sins.”

Gospel Acclamation

1 Timothy 2:4

“God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

Prayer of the Day

O Lord Jesus Christ, preserve the congregation of believers with your never-failing mercy. Help us avoid whatever is wicked and harmful, and guide us in the way that leads to our salvation; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

654 “Jesus Sinners Does Receive” (Erdmann Neumeister, 1671-1756)

Church Year Season¹

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.

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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