



## Year B (2024) – Season after Pentecost, Series 1

### ***A TOP-DOWN FAITH***

*(Truths about God Too Good to Make Up)*

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#### **NOTE TO THE PREACHER**

A *textual* preacher obviously expounds upon his text, not simply an idea referenced in the text. A *liturgical* preacher expounds upon the thread that runs through all the texts. If someone is only a textual preacher, the adage that, “There are a hundred sermons in every text” is probably true. For the liturgical preacher, that adage overstates things. The other readings and the placement within the Church Year will highlight a central theme for that day which the liturgical preacher will attempt to highlight.

This worship plan attempts to encourage liturgical preaching, drawing the theme of the day from the connection that exists between the three readings. For a fuller explanation, see comments at the beginning of Season after Pentecost, Series 2.

#### **SERIES EXPLANATION**

The phrase “from the top down” is often used to denote a hierarchical system of management or governance. The will and beliefs and directives of those “at the top” are imposed—sometimes aggressively, sometimes even oppressively—on those below. From the top town.

We have entered the second half of the Church Year, the half that focuses on the teachings of the Christian faith. We will see that Christianity is very much a top-down faith. Christian teachings come “from the top down,” but not in the sense that those teachings are oppressively imposed on us. When we call Christianity a “top-down faith,” we mean that it tells us things about God that are so beautiful and good—teachings that couldn’t possibly have originated from human thinking. The Christian faith contains teachings that are so wonderful that we would never even believe them unless God himself revealed their truthfulness to us. So, God sent his Spirit from heaven to earth—from the top down—to empower his children to believe that which would otherwise be totally unbelievable.

Our worship follows this pattern.

Holy Trinity – First Sunday after Pentecost

*Only a Triune God Can Deliver What Only a Triune God Can Offer*

Second Sunday after Pentecost

*Rest Is a Gift, Not Something to Be Earned*

Third Sunday after Pentecost

*The Devil Does His Worst, Yet Jesus Always Wins*

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

*From the Tiniest Seed Grows the Largest Kingdom*

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

*Our Gracious God Is with Us through All the Storms of Life*

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

*The Living Lord Completely Changes Our View of Death*



Holy Trinity – First Sunday after Pentecost May 26, 2024 (Holy Trinity B)

*A TOP-DOWN FAITH*

## **ONLY A TRIUNE GOD CAN DELIVER WHAT ONLY A TRIUNE GOD CAN OFFER**

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### **EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY**

No Christian teaching demonstrates that we have a top-down faith more than the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Scripture teaches that there is only one God. Yet that God exists as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Incomprehensible! It is the type of teaching about which the psalmist declares, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain” (Psalm 139:6). We believe in the Triune God without fully comprehending his existence, simply because the Spirit has given us the gift of faith. Our belief in the triune God came from the top down.

Not only is the concept of the Trinity itself something unique to the Christian faith, but what the triune God does for us and offers us is also completely unique. Our triune God invites us into the blessed relationship that is part of his very nature. The members of the Trinity share with us an intimacy that they have enjoyed with each other from eternity. Our triune God makes us not servants or subjects but blessed members of his family.

### **READING INTRODUCTIONS** *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 6:1-8 – The triune God delivers Isaiah from guilt and sin and offers Isaiah lofty purpose.

\*Romans 8:12-17 – The triune God gifts us the right to speak to our Father, the comfort of our Brother, and the indwelling of the Spirit.

John 3:1-17 – Jesus teaches a Pharisee named Nicodemus about the kingdom of the triune God, who rules in the heart of all those who are born again.

### **NOTE TO THE PREACHER**

The second reading was chosen as the sermon text because of how well it reflects the theme of the day, discussing various gifts the triune God offers: the loving care, provision, and protection of a perfect Father, an older Brother who was willing to do all that which was necessary to make us his co-heirs, and the power to believe and to live for God which comes from the indwelling of the Spirit.

### **HYMNS**

Opening	483 Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty
HOD	586 Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest
Third/Distr	480 Sing Praise to Our Creator
Closing	617 Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow

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## **SERVICE OPTIONS**

*Service Builder* includes a dialogue for Holy Trinity that would replace the confession of sins, Kyrie, and Gloria. The rubric calls for it to be followed by a hymn. One option would be the one verse version of 482, “Triune God, O Be Our Stay,” if that is familiar to your congregation. Another would be 953, “Holy God, We Praise Your Name” (a metrical Te Deum), verses 1 and 5.

480 ties closely with the sermon text. It is a simple yet unfamiliar tune. Consider having a cantor/choir sing at least the first verse.



Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 2, 2024 (Proper 4B)

*A TOP-DOWN FAITH*

## **REST IS A GIFT, NOT SOMETHING TO BE EARNED**

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### **EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY**

After a long day of work, you have earned the right to sit down in your favorite chair, put your feet up, and watch your favorite program. After a hard week on the job, you have earned the opportunity to relax a bit that weekend. After doing your job well for many months, you have earned those two weeks of vacation at the beach. This is how everyone thinks: rest is something you earn through hard work. We even teach that to our kids: no gaming until homework is done, no playing with friends until chores are complete.

Since that concept of rest being earned is so deeply engrained in us, to properly understand *spiritual* rest requires a top-down faith. God needs to send us the Spirit so that we can grasp this truth. True spiritual rest cannot be earned. In fact, the harder you try, the more restless and the less peaceful you become. Spiritual rest is a gift that God gives. The rest we need most—from guilt, from worry, from shame, from hopelessness—is graciously given to us by the Lord of the Sabbath.

### **READING INTRODUCTIONS** *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 – The LORD commanded that the Sabbath day be observed so that we might rest and remember all that he has done for us.

Colossians 2:13-17 – All God’s commands about religious festivals and the Sabbath day were meant to point us to the spiritual rest found in Christ.

\*Mark 2:23–3:6 – The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

### **NOTE TO THE PREACHER**

All texts talk about the Law and how it was given for our good. However, a careful read demonstrates that there is a narrower focus than the entire Law. The word Sabbath comes up eleven times in the three readings. In the Prayer of the Day, we ask Christ for Sabbath rest. That is why the theme of the day focuses on rest. The Gospel was chosen as the sermon text because it provides ample opportunity for the textual preacher to discuss the rest that only Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, can provide. (What a fantastic example of the sinful heart’s condition that the religious leaders had turned rest into work!)

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## **HYMNS**

Opening	818 My Soul Finds Rest in God Alone
HOD	703 I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say
Third/Distr	913 Come Away from Rush and Hurry
Closing	927 Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing

## **SERVICE OPTIONS**

818 may require introduction, a cantor singing verse 1. Likewise, 913 is new. It is slotted as the third hymn. If holy communion is observed, it could be sung entirely by a cantor/choir during distribution. Or, members could join in on verse 2 and 3.



Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 9, 2024 (Proper 5B)

*A TOP-DOWN FAITH*

## ***THE DEVIL DOES HIS WORST, YET JESUS ALWAYS WINS***

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### **EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY**

Look at our lives—the problems, the pains—and it’s easy to conclude that we are losing. Look at the world—the brokenness, the bedlam—and it’s easy to believe that the devil is winning. It all can lead us to despair. Yet this turmoil is exactly what God said would happen already in the Garden. There God declared that until the end of time enmity would prevail between the devil and mankind. But God promised more than that. He promised that from humanity would rise one who would completely defeat the devil.

We need a top-down faith to understand that things are definitely not what they seem. Yes, the devil and his allies are constantly doing their worst. Their work always brings pain. Yet, ultimately, Jesus always wins. And his victory is our victory. Jesus’ victory is so complete that even when Satan continues to cause chaos, Christ uses it to reveal his glory and grace to those gifted with top-down faith.

### **READING INTRODUCTIONS** *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

\*Genesis 3:8-15 – The devil did his worst, but a gracious God promised that from Eve’s descendants would come one who would defeat the serpent for us.

Revelation 20:1-6 – God had promised victory in the Garden. Jesus allows St. John to see that victory in his Revelation.

Mark 3:20-35 – Jesus came to oppose Satan and his allies and undo all their work.

### **NOTE TO THE PREACHER**

The first reading is chosen as the sermon text because of how simple it is to connect it to the theme of the day which is echoed in the Prayer of the Day. *The devil does his worst*. He had done that right before the first reading, leading Adam and Eve to question the tenderness of God’s love and the truthfulness of his word. In this reading, we see what the fruit of the devil’s “worst” is. Man is now terrified of God and divided (blaming) one another. Still today this is the devil’s “worst”—dividing us from God and from each other. *Yet Jesus always wins*. God promises it shall be so. The victory would come at a cost—blood. No matter what the species, if a serpent tags you in the foot, there will be blood. But Jesus was going to do more than just spill the serpent’s blood. It would be a crushing defeat (literally) for the devil and a resounding victory for Christ.

The other readings can then be used to expound upon the fact that “Jesus always wins.” It wasn’t just at the cross that Jesus defeated Satan. He is doing it daily. The second reading makes it clear that Satan’s power is finite and under the complete control of Christ. The gospel explicitly teaches that Jesus came to “oppose” all that the devil tries to do.

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## **HYMNS**

Opening	556 All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall
HOD	871 Rise! To Arms! With Prayer Employ You
Third/Distr	574 The Tree of Life
Closing	863 A Mighty Fortress - v3



Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 16, 2024 (Proper 6B)

*A TOP-DOWN FAITH*

## **FROM THE TINIEST SEED GROWS THE LARGEST KINGDOM**

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### **EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY**

Usually, a kingdom advances and is secured through things like military might or political force or worldly wealth. It can be tempting to believe the same holds true in the kingdom of God. Perhaps we think churches would flourish if we had the right rulers passing and enforcing the right laws. Or we believe that for a church to do good requires a robust budget. Political force. Worldly wealth. This way of thinking is breathtakingly wrong.

We need God to give us the top-down faith that grasps the fact that kingdom of God advances in ways that are imperceptible. Through something that seems insignificant to most—the gospel—the King of kings establishes his reign in human hearts. Even Jesus himself taught that the gospel seems unimpressive, for he often compared the gospel to a tiny seed. Yet within a seed is hidden life. As the seed of the gospel is planted, the largest of all kingdoms grows.

### **READING INTRODUCTIONS** *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Ezekiel 17:22-24 – Through the prophet Ezekiel, the LORD promised that the kingdom of God would grow large and strong and provide safety and shelter for God’s people.

Colossians 1:3-8 – We thank God that the seed of the gospel is producing fruit throughout the whole world.

\*Mark 4:26-34 – The kingdom grows when the seed is sown. The Word works.

### **NOTE TO THE PREACHER**

The Gospel reading is chosen as the sermon text for several reasons. Perhaps better than the others, it addresses the malady of believing there is something for us to do in God’s kingdom beyond proclaiming the gospel. The farmer doesn’t even understand *how* the seed produces life! So, what is there to do beyond sowing it? Additionally, the two parables Jesus tells provide abundant opportunity for application: the need to understand that growth is not instantaneous, the wonderful truth that the growth God effects is greater than we’d ever imagine, etc. *The Commentary on the Propers: Year B* delineates these in detail.

Finally, note how yet again the Prayer of the Day intersects with the theme of the day and the talking points of the gospel reading.

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## **HYMNS**

Opening	644 Almighty God, Your Word Is Cast
HOD	859 Your Kingdom, O God, Is My Glorious Treasure
Third/Distr	981 In This Place Your Word Is Planted
Closing	925 On What Has Now Been Sown



Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

June 23, 2024 (Proper 7B)

*A TOP-DOWN FAITH*

## **OUR GRACIOUS GOD IS WITH US THROUGH ALL THE STORMS OF LIFE**

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### **EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY**

A powerful tornado rolls through your neighborhood. A massive hurricane heads straight for your city. A bolt of lightning sends 300 million volts to earth. The raw power and unpredictability of storms can inspire both awe and terror. We cannot stop storms from coming. We can only hope to survive them. However, we know the Almighty God can stop storms. He can calm literal storms. He could remove metaphorical storms, other types of troubles and trials. So, if he can, why doesn't he?

Well, would you rather have a God who was distant from you but removed all the storms of life? Or would you rather have a God who allowed some storms to come but promised to be right there by your side within them, holding you close? May God give us the top-down faith that sees that the latter is by far the better option. God promises to be with us through all the storms of life. Sometimes he removes them. But when he doesn't, it's only because he has plans to use even storms for our eternal good.

### **READING INTRODUCTIONS** *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Job 38:1-11 – Job questioned why God had allowed trouble to befall him. Out of a storm the LORD spoke to Job, explaining that no mere man has the capacity to understand the wonderful ways God works.

Acts 27:13-26 – St. Paul and others were on a boat in the middle of a hurricane. God did not calm the storm. Yet, he was with them in the storm, accomplishing his good and gracious work.

\*Mark 4:35-41 – Even the winds and the waves must obey Jesus Christ.

### **NOTE TO THE PREACHER**

The gospel reading is chosen as the sermon text because it explicitly states the breathtakingly obtuse question we ask when life gets stormy. "God, don't you care?" They asked that of Jesus, who left the throne of heaven to come to the storms of earth precisely because all he does is care. He's dead asleep in a violently rocking boat because he's completely exhausted from helping the multitudes. He cares. He's going to go to the cross. He cares. We ask that question—don't you care?—when we look to the wrong things for evidence of God's love. What's ironic is the things we look for—a perfect life, perfect comfort, no problems—are things that Jesus, in time, is also going to provide. Because he cares. The other readings can be alluded to as the preacher drives home related points. The first reading illustrates that we cannot possibly hope to understand how God works through trouble. Thus, when storms come, there is little point in asking "Why?" If God were to explain, we couldn't grasp what he was saying. So instead, we ask "Does God care?" while looking at the cross and empty tomb, and that is sufficient. The second reading demonstrates how God accomplishes good things when he doesn't remove the storms.

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## **HYMNS**

Opening	504 We Sing the Almighty Power of God
HOD	501 Evening and Morning
Third/Distr	805 Eternal Father, Strong to Save - v1, 2 (original text in Service Builder), 4
Closing	874 Preserve Your Word, O Savior

## **SERVICE OPTIONS**

*Service Builder* includes an option to use the original verse 2 of 805, which best fits the Gospel reading. Another *Service Builder* option is 984, verses 1-4,6, which perfectly fits the recommended sermon text. If your congregation subscribes to *Service Builder*, 984 could be slotted in as the third hymn or even the HOD. You would then likely pick a different hymn than 805 to avoid using the tune MELITA twice.



Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

June 30, 2024 (Proper 8B)

*A TOP-DOWN FAITH*

## **THE LIVING LORD COMPLETELY CHANGES OUR VIEW OF DEATH**

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### **EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY**

Most people fear death to some degree. Some fear death because they assume it is the end. Others fear death because they assume it isn't the end at all, but that there is some sort of reckoning after death which might not go well for them. And have you seen what happens to a dead body? It is far from pretty. So, it is understandable that most people would fear death.

Not so for those to whom God has given a top-down faith. Christianity teaches that for God's children death is not discipline but deliverance. The living Lord gives Christians such a radically different view of death that they can have confidence to face death in their effort to give Christ glory. They understand that death does not cut us down, but only raises us up. Finally, the Christian has been given the top-down faith that believes Jesus can wake us from death as easily as we can wake a sleeping child from his nap.

### **READING INTRODUCTIONS** *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Lamentations 3:22-33 – God's people were suffering. But the prophet Jeremiah knew that suffering and impending death can focus our attention on what matters—the LORD's compassion and salvation.

2 Corinthians 4:7-15 – St. Paul knew that serving Christ might result in death. But he also knew the one who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us.

\*Mark 5:21-24a,35-43 – Jesus raises the young daughter of a synagogue leader from the dead as easily as you would wake a sleeping twelve-year old from a nap.

### **NOTE TO THE PREACHER**

The Gospel reading is chosen because of the phrase, "Don't be afraid." That phrase allows the speaker to address all the fears that surround death: the fear of "losing" a loved one, the fear that death is punishment, etc. Jesus takes all these fears away. There is a wonderful opportunity here for the preacher to explore the fear we have, not of dying ourselves, but of *others* dying, those we love. Jesus clearly understands and relates to that fear. Jairus calls the girl "my little daughter" and Jesus echoes him, "Little girl." And Jesus holds her hand! Jesus is perhaps the only person on earth who loved that girl more than her father.

The other readings can easily be referenced. The first acknowledges that suffering and death bring grief. Yet, the child of God faces these things with the Spirit-wrought faith that the Lord is compassionate and works salvation. With the second reading, pastors love to talk about the treasure/jar comparison. Man's role in gospel ministry and the efficacy of the Word is *not* the main point today. (That was covered in Proper 6B.) But the second reading does illustrate that since Christ's death and resurrection remove our fear of death, we are empowered to be bold witnesses, even if that brings persecution.

## **HYMNS**

Opening	846 I Know of a Sleep in Jesus' Name
HOD	831 Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me
Third/Distr	444 Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won - v1-3
Closing	835 Precious Lord, Take My Hand