INVOCATION
L: In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.
G: Amen

PSALM OF THE DAY: PSALM 121
A: Keep me, keep me
    as the apple of your eye.
    Hide me, hide me
    in the shadow of your wings.
L: I lift up my eyes to the hills.
G: Where does my help come from?
L: My help comes from the LORD,
G: the maker of heaven and earth.
L: He will not let your foot slip,
G: he who watches over you will not slumber;
L: indeed, he who watches over Israel
G: will neither slumber nor sleep.
L: The LORD watches over you,
G: the LORD is your shade at your right hand.
L: The LORD will keep you from all harm,
G: he will watch over your life;
L: the LORD will watch over your coming and going
G: both now and forevermore.
A: Keep me, keep me
    as the apple of your eye.
    Hide me, hide me
    in the shadow of your wings.

PRAYER OF THE DAY
L: 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.

READING & MEDITATION see next page

PRAYER

LORD’S PRAYER
A: Our Father, who art in heaven,
    hallowed be thy name,
    thy kingdom come,
    thy will be done
    on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.

VERSE OF THE DAY
A: Your words became a joy to me, and the delight of my heart. (Jeremiah 15:16 cf. RSV)

BENEDICTION
L: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
    and the love of God
    and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.
A: Amen
READING AND MEDITATION:

**Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost:** The Church is militant: first the cross, then the crown. The Prayer and Verse of the Day center the lessons. Today Christ tells us that for him and for us, going God’s way means death must come before life. He calls on us to deny ourselves and follow him on the way of the cross. Those words offend our sinful flesh and make our Old Adam cry with Peter, “Never!” They make us accuse God with Jeremiah. So today the Church prays for the never-failing mercy of Christ that we might avoid such wicked and harmful thoughts and instead be guided on the cross-laden path to salvation. Then, and only then, do these words of Christ cease offending our flesh and become a joy and delight for our heart (Verse of the Day).

As you study this week, seek to find the **connecting theme** in all the lessons by using Luther’s Four Big Barber Questions to ponder and discuss each individual reading:

1. What is God saying to me in this lesson?
2. For what does this lesson lead me to give thanks?
3. What sins does this lesson lead me to confess?
4. For what does this lesson lead me to pray?

**THE GOSPEL: MATTHEW 16:21-26**

Peter’s great confession from last Sunday’s Gospel showed the disciples understood who Jesus was. But though they understood his person, they still failed to understand his work. He had come to fulfill the redemptive mission for which he was anointed; he had not come to fulfill Israel’s earthbound views of Messiah. He couldn’t be the Messiah they wanted, and still be the Savior they needed. “He must go...” Cross and death were necessary first. When Jesus spoke most clearly about his cross, Peter spoke Satan’s words of compromise. Thanks be to God that our Savior saw the necessity of the cross before the crown! Now for Christian followers, cross comes before the crown as well. We die to self, but gain Christ, the Life.

**My takeaways:**

**FIRST LESSON: JEREMIAH 15:15-21**

The church is militant, and that means dying to self and the things of man. After a hard ministry, Jeremiah began to forget the things of God and concentrate too much on the things of man. The prophet Jeremiah struggled to carry the cross given him by God. God’s Word was a joy and delight to his heart, but Jeremiah’s life had been anything but joy and delight. After bearing much persecution, God’s prophet finally tired of self-denial. He wondered whether God’s promises amounted to nothing, but were as failed and fruitless as a dried-up brook in times of drought. How does God respond? Does he remove the cross and persecution? No, he commands his prophet to repent and turn to God for mercy. Then, God will permit him again the privilege of carrying a cross in his name. God renews a promise that he had made at the beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry. He didn’t promise to remove the persecution, but to make Jeremiah strong enough to take it. May God make each of us bronze walls, certain of the fact that even as we follow the way of the cross—no, especially as we follow the way of the cross—our God is with us to rescue and save us, and redeem us from the grasp of the cruel. That knowledge renewed and restored Jeremiah to a ministry centered on the things of God as he served in the Church militant.

**My takeaways:**
SECOND LESSON: ROMANS 12:1-8
This is the fourteenth in a series of sixteen lessons that run through Pentecost 17. Jesus did not heed Satan’s temptation or Peter’s command. He denied himself and carried his cross to the hill of his death and our eternal life. Through that one act of righteousness, God gave justification that brings life to all mankind. St. Paul spends eleven chapters outlining the amazing nature of God’s plan for our salvation centered on our crucified Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Then in chapter 12, Paul begins, “Therefore...” He points back to the past eleven chapters and says, In view of all that—in view of everything God did to save you eternally...let death come before life for you. First the cross, then the crown. Offer your bodies as living sacrifices. This oxymoron only makes sense in the Christian response of life lived by dying to self and living for Christ.

My takeaways:

SUPPLEMENTAL SECOND LESSON: GALATIANS 6:12-16
Christians will be tempted to give in to license or legalism in order to escape persecution. But Christ told us to expect persecution and burdens that come from carrying his cross. For the Christian, bearing the cross is a point of pride and the basis for our boasting. How can this be? We are the Church militant, and so death comes before life, the cross before the crown. By the cross the world dies to us, and we die by that same cross to the world. But after that death comes life—new life—an entirely new creation.

My takeaways:

SUPPLEMENTAL FIRST LESSON: JUDGES 16:22-31
What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Jesus’ words of warning form a perfect picture of Samson. He had the world: strength, fame, power, leadership, love. Yet he was losing his soul. But the God of grace humbled him. Samson repented and took up his cross and followed. He lost his life, but died in faith. His words comprise the most fervent plea that a sinner can make at the end of life. Like the thief, he cried, “Remember me!” Once again a man of faith, he had in mind the things of God rather than men and died in service to his Savior God.

My takeaways:

What major theme(s) connect(s) all the lessons?