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

PSALM OF THE DAY: PSALM 119c
A: Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.
L: Oh, how I love your law!
G: I meditate on it all day long.
L: I have more insight than all my teachers,
G: for I meditate on your statutes.
L: I have more understanding than the elders,
G: for I obey your precepts.
L: I have kept my feet from every evil path
G: so that I might obey your Word.
L: I have not departed from your laws,
G: for you yourself have taught me.
L: How sweet are your words to my taste,
G: sweeter than honey to my mouth!
A: Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

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 15:15 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: With this Sunday a modified lectio continua from the Gospel of Mark resumes and with it a shift again in emphasis for the third cycle of the Pentecost season. Loosely expressed, the emphasis in this third cycle might be this: Jesus wants to so deepen our understanding of his grace that he becomes all in all to us. The particular emphasis in the readings for this Sunday is the truth that all God pleasing obedience must begin in the heart. As so often, the Prayer of the Day affords us a good summary of the thoughts for 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: MARK 7:1-8, 14, 15, 21-23

Adding to God’s Word is just as bad as subtracting from it. In both cases man sets aside what God has said in favor of what he wants in order to justify himself apart from God’s Word and Christ’s work. Precisely because the Word of both the law and the gospel is addressed to the heart, it allows for no additions, no subtractions. For to the extent that the heart is cleansed by the gospel, to that extent what flows from it will be clean and in accord with the law. An unclean heart can produce only unclean works, no matter how clean those works may appear on the outside. Those who take the law seriously need first and always the cleansing power of the gospel, lest their outward works be only outward and ultimately a mask for hypocrisy. (Pietism and self-righteousness are often the last refuge of a guilty conscience!) On the other hand, those who refuse to take God’s law seriously prove thereby that their hearts are still unclean and separated from God. The sin that begins in the heart will not agree to stay there; it will look for ways to get out and express itself. The Pharisees should have recognized that happening in their own hearts: their hearts harbored hatred for Jesus which yearned for expression in acts that ended in murder during Holy Week.

My takeaways:

FIRST LESSON: DEUTERONOMY 4:1, 2, 6-8

God is serious about all of his Word, both the law and the gospel. As the verses left out of the reading (3-5) make clear, those who only take God’s gifts seriously soon lose those gifts as a consequence of despising his commands. His commands are good because he who gave them is good. And because he is good, his abundant blessing through a peaceful and orderly life rests on those who follow his Word. That blessing brings forth a still greater blessing and honor: those who do not know his Word may be moved to hear it by the evidence of God’s blessings on the godly lives of Christians.

My takeaways:

SECOND LESSON: Ephesians 6:10-20

Faithfulness and obedience to the Word of God are not merely one aspect of life out of many. They are the all-important matters of life that should be reflected in all of the rest of life. There is a life-and-death struggle going on with us, as Satan strives with all his might to pull us back into sin and unbelief. The only help that avails in that life-and-death struggle is the help of God’s own Word, the covering of the gospel and the confidence of faith which comes from it. Armed with the promises of God, we storm the gates of heaven with our prayers for assistance, in the certainty that God will hear us and in his Word answer us. May our awareness of the battle and of the victory Christ gives permeate all that we do at work and at play, at home and away, in our lives with family, with friends, with foes as well.

My takeaways:

SUPPLEMENTAL SECOND LESSON:  
JAMES 1:17-27

Calls for a sanctified life always find their basis and their motivation in the precious gospel message of God’s gifts to us. His gifts are all good and perfect (even and especially the crosses—a point coming up on another Sunday) because God is changeless; he only knows how to give good and perfect gifts that suit our needs and fit our circumstances in life. But to recognize those gifts and to appreciate them and then make use of them in life we need the Word. The Word clears the clutter from life and the temptation to hypocrisy from the heart by showing us the first and best gifts, the gifts of salvation and adoption. With such gifts how could we doubt that anything he does in our lives would be anything but good and perfect? Therefore, listen to the Word; be honest with God in confession; get on with the life that reflects the good and perfect gifts of God. For his gifts are given to us as a reflection of his goodness, so that we can reflect his goodness in our use of those gifts.

My takeaways:

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