

**Into Deeper Water with  
The Apostles' Creed**

**(16 Weeks, 14 Meetings)  
September 11, 2021—January 1, 2022**

**SMALL GROUP PACKET**  
**Into the Deep Water with Christ**

## HEALTHY SMALL GROUPS

(Please review the following regularly together as a group)

### GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR “DEEP WATER” SMALL GROUPS

- Try to keep your group size from two to six people. The larger the group, the more time it will take at each meeting for everyone to participate and share actively.
- Try to meet together once a week, on average.
- Meet in a place that is conducive to listening and speaking. Loud, crowded restaurants, for example, will probably not work too well.
- Everyone should bring a bible, a pen, and this packet to each of their small group meetings.
- This packet, focusing on the Psalms, has enough material to cover 13 weeks’ worth of meetings. On New Years Day 2022, a new packet of materials will become available for the next part of our “deeper water” journey.
- **Buffer weeks:** We are adding *two additional weeks* to this session, so that **you have sixteen weeks in which to cover 14 weeks’ worth of materials**. Your group can use these extra two weeks to 1) catch up if your group has to miss a weekly meeting or two, or 2) If your discussions go long on some weeks, you can use the extra time to spread things out and/or backtrack as necessary. Also, the two buffer weeks will naturally coincide this time around with a break around Christmas.
- While it is not a requirement, we recommend that men partner with men, and women partner with women.
- You do not need to designate any particular person in your group to be a facilitator or leader. Just follow the materials together and agree on a time limit to your meetings.
- Allow extended silences to happen during your small group discussions. The bible is a challenging book and the Word can sometimes shake our thoughts up at first before bringing them around towards Christ. Silence allows time for the Spirit to give us speech.
- While you are discussing with your group, always jot down thoughts that the group shares.
- It is likely that you will encounter different Bible translations within your group. If the group feels this is an obstacle to understanding or discussion, discuss the possibility of procuring bibles of the same translation for everyone. The New Revised Standard Version, which St. John’s uses at worship, is an example of a well-balanced, readable and accurate translation. Call Pastor Seth (217.255.2118) or Pastor Patti (614.875.2314) if you need any help or guidance regarding Bible translations.
- On January 1, 2022 we will start a new topic in our Deep Water journey. Every time we begin a new topic (about every two-three months), small groups and partnerships can reconfigure themselves as necessary. As you approach the end of each topic, please talk intentionally about how and whether your group will continue into the next topic together intact, or what changes you need to make based on your personal schedules, etc. While we encourage everyone to plug in to as much of our deep water journey as possible through the next few years, we also understand that some of us will need to drop out and rejoin at various points in the journey.

### THE MOST IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE TO OBSERVE IN YOUR SMALL GROUP: CONFIDENTIALITY

Keeping things confidential is vital to establishing trust and open communication with your partner or small group. Be sure to acknowledge this rule clearly with each other at the beginning of your journey together, and regularly over the course of the following weeks. What is said in your small group should stay in your small group!

**REMEMBER: PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS OF ST. JOHN'S ARE WELCOME TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS JOURNEY!**

We encourage you to invite non-members to participate. Think of a friend with whom you'd like to take this journey, and invite them to jump in.

**IF YOU LOSE YOUR PACKET, OR NEED MORE PACKETS**

Hard copies are available in the church office, in the display in the Link (breezeway) at church, or from one of the pastors. You can download a packet from our St. John's website:

<https://www.stjohnsgc.org> If you have a printer, you can request an electronic copy of the packet by email: [SJersild@stjohnsgc.org](mailto:SJersild@stjohnsgc.org) Just remember, the packets can be over 40 pages long!

**IF YOUR SMALL GROUP IS STRUGGLING OR DISSOLVES**

Call Pastor Seth at 217.255.2118 if you need help or have special concerns.

**SMALL GROUP INFORMATION**

(Names, phone, email etc.)

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)

**Into Deeper Water with the Apostles' Creed**  
**WEEK #1 SMALL GROUP MEETING**  
**Target Week: September 12-18**

1. Confirm as a group what your time limit is going to be. Over time, each group will develop a natural feel for what kind of pace they need to maintain in order to fit everyone's schedules.
2. Please review the material under the heading "Healthy Small Groups" together, above.
3. Emphasize together the crucial importance of keeping what you share in this group confidential. Also, make sure you have each others' phone numbers, email addresses, and etc. for communication purposes.
4. Please note our practice of adding **buffer weeks** for each topic (from the "Healthy Small Groups" section, above). Remember, you will have 16 weeks in which to cover 14 weeks' worth of meetings.

5. OPENING PRAYER

- Designate someone to pray the prayer in italics, below. Always feel free to improvise as the Spirit moves you. You can use the written prayer loosely, as a model. Special intercessions can be added.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for bringing us together to study the Creed and to grow in our appreciation of your powerful Word. Thank you for sending Jesus into our lives for our salvation, and for the new life and power that you pour into us through the Holy Spirit. Protect, heal, and uphold all those for whom we have special concerns today. Give us courage to go into deeper water in order to be more effective witnesses to Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.*

6. Spend about 5 minutes having everyone share high points and low points from the last several days.
7. Have someone in your group read the following aloud (or better yet, break it up among different readers):

*During the next sixteen weeks, we'll be discussing the Apostles' Creed. **The Creed summarizes all of God's work in creation and human history as taught in the Bible.***

*All orthodox Christians (of all denominations throughout the world) subscribe to the three ecumenical Creeds of the Christian church:*

- *The Apostles' Creed*
- *The Nicene Creed*
- *The Athanasian Creed*

*None of these creeds are explicitly written anywhere in scripture. So why does the Church have creeds?*

*From the very beginning of the Church, people have interpreted the Biblical witness differently, leading some to promulgate ideas which have contradicted the good news of Jesus.*

*The word we use for ideas or concepts which misrepresent God is “heresy.” In short, heresy takes what is supposed to be good news about God and makes it into bad news for everyone. We can compare heresy to when someone speaks falsely about someone we love. For example, instead of proclaiming that our only hope for salvation is God’s free grace and forgiveness in Christ, often people pervert this message to say things like “Jesus saves you, but only if you follow the rules.” Most heresy is the result of people trying to add something **we do** to what only God can do for us. Heresy makes us big, and makes God small.*

*Early on, leaders of the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, realized that in the face of constant human temptation to “cherry pick” our preferred ideas from the Bible and pervert the message of the gospel, it was necessary to come together and compose brief, baseline formulations of true Christian faith, based on the **total witness** of Holy Scripture. They knew that we needed some basic statements of the true faith. We can disagree on all sorts of things in this world, but on **these essential truths** about who God is and what he’s done for us, we must agree.*

*The three main ecumenical (cross-denominational) creeds, were composed early in church history, but at different times. The Apostles’ Creed (the earliest) is relatively short, the Nicene Creed is a little longer, and the Athanasian Creed (the latest creed) is the longest. Each creed was composed to speak to the biggest and newest heresies of its time. Each is rooted in the same faith in Christ, but the Nicene and Athanasian creeds elaborated on the basics in order to speak to developing challenges.*

*Besides being basic doctrinal statements of the Christian faith, you’ll notice that we use the creeds in worship as corporate statements of faith, in response to the good news of Jesus. At St. John’s we say the creed together, usually right after the sermon. They are a beautiful public witness to the Holy Trinity. When we say the Apostles’ Creed together, we are acknowledging not only God’s act of salvation for us in Jesus, and also expressing the unity into which he has brought us as believers. Finally, the creeds are excellent teaching tools for all Christians. As we study the Apostles’ Creed together through these weeks, it will be an opportunity for us to grow “in the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we may know him better, and know the hope to which he has called us.”*

8. Discuss the following questions together as a group.

- What, in the above material about the creeds of the church, strikes you the most (if anything), and why?
- What questions might you have about the ecumenical creeds of the Christian Church?
- Have you ever witnessed someone misrepresenting God, either verbally or in writing? What was the situation? What false picture of God do you think they were painting?
- Why is it so important to us that others speak the truth about people we admire, love, and care about? How can this help us understand the need for creeds in the Church?
- Can you think of a time when you’ve witnessed someone “cherry-picking” things out of Holy Scripture to justify their agenda or position on some issue? What was the situation?
- What are your thoughts, feelings and impressions of how we say the Apostles’ Creed together during worship...usually right after the sermon? In your own words, why do we do it? Why is it important?

9. Have someone read the following out loud (or better yet, divide it up for different people to read):

*When discussing the Apostles' Creed, it is helpful to make a distinction between (a) natural revelation and (b) special revelation.*

*To some extent, we can learn about God as our Creator through our own experience of the world. Creation witnesses to God, his goodness, and his power. The human conscience also witnesses to God and his righteousness. Being able to know God through our own experience falls under the heading of "natural revelation." In short, we can know some things about God without being told anything special about him. Just looking at the mountains, the sky, the ocean, the forests—these can be enough to give us the impression that a good and loving God is behind it all. Also, scripture attests to the fact that most humans seem to have a conscience "built in" to them, and that this is a sign of God's hand in our lives, even though we are broken by sin. Our inborn sense of good and evil (conscience) points to the reality of God. Please read the following verses and discuss what they tell us about "natural revelation."*

- Psalm 19:1
- Acts 14:17
- Romans 1:20
- Romans 2:15

*On the other hand, we also see things in creation and experience things in life that might lead us to question whether there is a Creator at all, much less whether he is good! For example, what's the point of deadly parasites? The food chain—where each life-form is always feeding off of others for its own survival—makes the world look like a dog-eat-dog place. The seeming "waste" of so much life in nature—with millions of eggs becoming food so that just a few fish can be born—can make the world seem like a cruel and arbitrary place (where individual lives mean very little). Looking at the violence and vastness of the universe might convince us that human beings mean nothing. We see birth defects and horrible diseases and childhood cancer. To say nothing of how human beings can treat each other—and how many human lives seem wasted and meaningless to the point where we are tempted to despair. In short, our experience of life and the world might very well lead us to NOT believe that there is a good and loving God in charge of it all. Thus, natural revelation can only bring us so far when it comes to our understanding of who God is.*

- *With your small-group partners, discuss things in the world that you think can drive people to disbelief and/or lack of trust in God. Have people ever given you reasons for their unfaith? Discuss experiences you personally have had that may have tested your belief in the goodness of God.*

*Continue reading aloud: This is where, for Jews and Christians, **special revelation** comes in. The Apostles' Creed is almost entirely devoted to God's special revelation in history, centered around Jesus Christ. The First Article of the Creed (**I believe in God the Father almighty**), is pretty wide open and certainly allows for natural revelation to inform our knowledge of the creator. But even our knowledge of God as Creator, as Christians, is completely shaped by things that God has done in history and "given to us" as gifts, so that we can know him clearly for who he is. For example, there*

*are many religions that picture a creator God, but the first chapter of Genesis tells us many things about God that are very different from what other religions say about him. In a sense, special revelation is God's way of shaping our understanding and knowledge of him by intervening in our lives, and doing and saying particular things so that we can know him in truth. He literally enters into history and becomes part of human life—he tells us a story about himself through his real interactions with us—so that we can know him. He chooses particular people (e.g. Israel) through whom he will show himself, so that everyone can see who he is through his specific dealings with them. In a sense, God says “if you look at the story of Israel that I give to you, you will come to know who I am.”*

*Special revelation refers to special things that God has done and said in history to show himself clearly to human beings. The Bible is the recorded witness to God's acts in history. It tells the story of God repeatedly intervening in human affairs to save them from themselves. The Bible itself is an **intervention** by God into our lives. Such revelation is “special” in the sense that God barges into our lives in order to give us information about himself that we would never grasp on our own through our experience of life and the world. We can be sure that God will always be much more than the things he has shown us about himself through special revelation—but through special revelation he gives us **enough** of himself (all that we need) out of love.*

- Please Go over the Apostles' Creed as a group and spend some time discussing how every statement within the creed is based on some particular action that God has taken in history. In short, how is the Apostles' Creed completely based on *Special Revelation*? Another angle on this: as we go through the Creed, we can ask, “Would we come to any of these beliefs on our own without the witness of scripture to God's acts in history?”

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

- As a group, note how the Creed is structured on the name of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

10. In turn, without going into too much depth about each situation, share one or two specific issues that you would like your partner(s) to pray about for you this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.

11. Remind each other that there's homework to do (below) before each group meeting. The homework material provides the substance for each group meeting. Confirm the time and place of your next gathering. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.

12. Close with prayer. Today, have one person volunteer to pray for the group. Try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer. Include a prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit to guide your group and fill you with confidence and determination as you get started on this journey together.

## **HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (2<sup>nd</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING**

1. Find a place where you can concentrate. Say the following prayer *aloud*; always feel free to add extra petitions and thanks.

*Almighty Father, I praise you for having fashioned me in love and set me within this world, which you have created. For all that you have given me in body and soul, and for the ways you take care of me, I give you thanks. Keep me mindful of your gifts. Help me to look to you for all that I need. Teach me to receive your gifts as a grateful child; through Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen.*

2. We'll start this week by exploring the difference between (a) natural revelation and (b) special revelation a little further. Why is this distinction important for the Church to understand and think about these days? Please read the following critically and be prepared to agree, disagree, and respond to it.

With today's emphasis on personal experience, people are relying almost completely on *natural revelation* (without any intervention from outside) for any understanding of God. This means, among other things, that rather than having respect for traditional authorities (like the Bible or religious teachers, church etc.), people tend to reject anything that smacks of "tradition" in favor of immediate experience. They prefer to figure things out on their own, based on their personal experience of life.

This is why many people's conception of God today is built on a loose smattering of materials and sound-bites. Rather than understanding the story of God like a huge oak tree, with roots and a trunk and branches and leaves, people are more likely to carry a loose bag of religious "leaves" around with them. They pick up these leaves in the course of time, often without knowing where they came from. They will pull out a leaf (like a sound bite) when they need to bolster their own position in the moment, (for example "don't judge other people"), but they will not relate that single leaf of biblical truth to the roots of the biblical story from which it grew. Thus, while our culture today still *looks* like it is infused with many Jewish/Christian values and concepts (in the form of loose leaves), it is actually only a surface-appearance of Christianity which is now rooted in something deeper: a *humanistic*, non-biblical world-view.

Much of the fragmentation of religious ideas and beliefs in our popular culture today is due to a modern *humanistic* assumption: that the individual human being, guided by his/her own lights, is the judge and jury on all things. Truth is rooted in *personal experience*. This means that "God," for many people, is a concept which will (or will not) fit into their lives based on what they find useful, what they want, or what they feel they need.

As long as we start with the assumption that "I am the center, the judge, and the final jury on what my truth is," it doesn't matter how hard or deeply we study any religious materials—we will probably end up in the same place we started. For example, think of how many modern parents decide to let their



children “make their own decisions” about religious truth. Parents who take this position are not actually teaching their children to make choices; on the contrary they are actively teaching their children the humanist world-view. With these assumptions being taught in the home, it is highly unlikely that children will “choose” Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Instead, they are more likely to see Jesus as an *option*.

The point is that if we *start* as humanists, then no matter what we learn, we will continue to believe that every person has their own truth, and therefore we will not really submit ourselves in faith to any truth that we think is “bigger” than we are. There is a huge difference between believing in our own truths and actually submitting ourselves in faith to a reality that is bigger and more powerful than we are.

It follows that there is powerful resistance to *being told* anything by anyone. We become perpetually suspicious of what other people say. This makes it especially challenging for God’s Church to witness to God’s Word in scripture and teach the story of God (as given to us in scripture) to others. Please look at the following questions and be prepared to discuss them with your group:

- Often, people’s first response to being told or taught about God (or anything, for that matter) is to be resistant and skeptical right off the bat. What dynamics in our culture right now do you think are contributing to this attitude?
- Think of how a dependence on *natural revelation* might lead to a huge variety of different notions about God’s character. For example, how might a person in who is exposed to violence and exploitation throughout their childhood in an impoverished country come to a different picture of God’s character based on “natural revelation” than a person who was raised in a safe suburban neighborhood in Ohio?
- In what ways do you see Christian congregations, as they have typically functioned in American culture since World War II, struggling to adjust to new realities when it comes to people’s basic attitudes towards life, God and humanity?
- In what ways might you agree or disagree with the diagnosis given in the above paragraphs, regarding our culture today? How would you personally modify or expand upon the above diagnosis?
- How do you think Christians today can more effectively speak to and engage people who are so suspicious about truth claims and authority in general? What kind of general approaches to evangelism and outreach for Jesus do you think will be more effective in today’s world than simply saying “join us for worship!”

3. This week, we begin looking at the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed:

**I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

Please read **Genesis 2:7-25** and respond to the items below.

- Without knowing God or believing in any purposeful creative will behind the universe, in what different ways might people answer the question: “what is a human being?”
- How does seeing myself as *God’s creature* fundamentally shape my relationship to him, my understanding of myself, and my purpose in this world?

4. Please read the following passages and, in your own words, express the slightly different things each passage tells us about God as the *Father*.

- John 3:16
- Galatians 4:4-6
- Acts 17:28-29

5. Different religions depict the Creator God in different ways. For example, for Muslims, the proper relationship between God and humans is “master-servant.” For Buddhists and Hindus, the relationship between us and ultimate reality is not personal. In what ways is our understanding of God as “Father” so different from these examples?

6. Read **John 8:34-36**. In your own words, what is this passage saying about being God’s own child, versus being a “slave” in God’s house? How do you apply this to your own life as a Christian?

7. What do the following passages tell us about God the *Creator*.

- **Genesis 1:1**. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
- **Psalm 115:15-16**. May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth. The heavens are the Lord’s heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings.
- **Isaiah 36-37** (from your Bible)

Your response:

8. When we say that our Father created all things, we’re acknowledging that *only the one who created heaven and earth can make his creation new again*. Please reflect on the following passages and express in your own words how they witness to this truth.

- **2 Peter 3:13.** But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.
- **Revelation 21:5.** And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.”
- **John 1:1-3.** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.
- **Romans 8:18-23.** I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Your response:

- What do the passages above tell us, ultimately, about *our power* as human beings to bring the world to balance and perfection?

9. If we are in a personal, father/child relationship with God, we also acknowledge our infinite indebtedness and gratitude to him for life. Read **Psalm 139:13-14**, **James 1:17-18**, and **Genesis 1:31**.

- What are these passages telling us about our relationship with God, and what it means regarding our *accountability* to him?
- If a person does not believe in the Creator or looks at their creator as a distant impersonal force, how might this affect their sense of *gratitude* towards life?
- How might not believing in a *good* creator affect a person’s general sense of the *value* of life and the world in which we live?

10. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns from your first group meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John’s as we follow Jesus’ call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective “fishers of people.”

**Going Deeper with the Apostles' Creed**  
**WEEK #2 SMALL GROUP MEETING**  
**Target Week: September 19-25**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer, (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer):  
*Heavenly Father, we thank you for bringing us together today to study your Word and to support each other in our walk of faith. Help us to listen to each other with open hearts and minds. We thank you for the new life and forgiveness you have given us in Christ, and we pray that you will remove all fear from our hearts as we follow your call to let go of our old lives, that we may live for you alone. In Jesus' name, Amen.*
3. Please go back to the homework you all did for this session, starting on **page 8**. Discuss the material as a group. After you finish, return here and continue with item #4, below.
4. In turn, without going into too much depth about each situation, share one or two specific issues that you would like your partner(s) to pray about for you this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, have one person volunteer to pray for the group. Try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer. Include a prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit to guide your group and fill you with confidence and determination as you continue this journey together.

**HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (3<sup>rd</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING**

1. Find a place where you can concentrate. Say the following prayer *aloud*; always feel free to add extra petitions and thanks.  
*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free spirit. Make me an agent of your love towards all. In Jesus' name. Amen.*
2. This week, we will continue our discussion of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed, and make some everyday connections and applications.

**I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

3. In your own words, what are the following verses telling us about *how* God created everything.

- **Genesis 1:1, 3, 31.** In the beginning when God created[a] the heavens and the earth, Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.
- **Psalm 33:6, 9.** By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

Your response:

4. As believers, how shall we consider other competing accounts of how the world came into existence? We should evaluate the assumptions they use, determine the reason for these assumptions, and consider whether they lead to unbiblical conclusions. For example:

Many ancient and modern views assume that the universe always existed and thus all gods and beings arise from it and exist on a spectrum of deity. This leads one to assume that everything is in some way divine or part of divinity, thus confusing the Creator and his creation (for example, folk religions, pantheism, and polytheism). Mystical religions like Hinduism and Buddhism fall into this category.

**Atheistic** theories (that openly deny the existence of God) assume that the Bible is not the Word of God and the universe is closed with no possibility of outside intervention. This invites the conclusion that the world and universe have no special meaning or purpose. This approach also suggests that there is no absolute truth and that all human relationships, such as marriage, are simply arrangements of convenience that can be changed as cultures or individuals desire.

Many **agnostic** understandings of the origin of the world (which say “there might be a creator but we don’t know”) see the universe as *perhaps* reflecting the hand of a creator. But like atheists, they tend not to see God actively involved in the workings of the universe or as a loving power who intervenes in the world. According to them, if a divine power was involved in the creation of the universe, the power is so beyond our knowledge or so hidden that we cannot see it. Meanwhile, the universe follows impersonal physical rules (e.g. natural selection, physics) that were there from the beginning without intervention or involvement from any power from outside.

- Have you encountered any of the above described beliefs regarding the origin of the universe? Make note of your experiences below and be prepared to share them with your group.
- If we believe that we all exist at different points along a “spectrum of divinity” (i.e. some people and life-forms are closer to ultimate reality, and others farther from it) what might we start thinking of other people who have different abilities or characteristics than we do?
- Have you ever had a good conversation with an atheist? If so, write about it and be prepared to share it with your group.

- If the universe is indeed a closed book and there is nothing higher than what we can observe with our senses, what implications does this have for our moral codes and beliefs (see the thoughts under “atheistic theories”)?

5. Read the following passages and express in your own words what each says about the specialness of human beings in relation to all other creatures.

- **Genesis 1:26-27.** Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
- **John 1:14, 16.** And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.
- **Philippians 2:5-7.** Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

Your response:

6. In your own words, what do the following passages say about the value of every single human life?

- **Ephesians 1:7.** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace
- **Hebrews 9:12.** He entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

Your response:

7. Please read the following passages and express in your own words what they are saying about the basic dignity of all people, even though we are all in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.

- **Genesis 9:6.** Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind.
- **James 3:9.** With it [our tongues] we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.

Your response:

8. Will we ever regain the image of God that has been twisted beyond recognition in us by sin? Yes. In Christ, the restoration of God’s image in us has begun, but in this life it is only a beginning, and will

be fully restored on the Last Day. Please read the following passages and express in your own words what they are saying about the image of God being restored to us in Jesus Christ:

- **Colossians 3:10.** [You] have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.
- **Ephesians 4:24.** ...to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.
- **2 Corinthians 3:18.** And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Your response:

9. We know that God has created all other creatures on earth, with human beings in the special role as God's representatives [stewards/priests] for all. We can think of "being made in God's image" as being God's "stand-ins" in the created world. Please reflect on the following passages and then in your own words express your understanding of our role as stewards/priests/representatives of God for the sake of all creation.

- **Psalms 150:6.** Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
- **Genesis 1:29.** God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.
- **Genesis 2:15, 19.** The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. Out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.
- **Genesis 9:3.** Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.
- **Psalms 148** (from your Bible)

Your response:

10. In your own words and in light of the above verses from #10: for what purpose did God create nonhuman creatures on earth?

11. Scripture also speaks of non-worldly creatures such as angels. Please use these verses to answer the questions which follow, concerning angels: **Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 2:18; Revelation 22:8-9; Psalms 91:9-12.**

- Do we become angels when we die?
- Are we to look to angels for direction in our lives or pray to them?

- Do I have a personal guardian angel (does scripture answer this question directly)?
- Does scripture picture angels guarding over us?

12. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns from your first group meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John's as we follow Jesus' call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective "fishers of people."

## **GOING DEEPER WITH THE APOSTLE'S CREED WEEK #3 SMALL GROUP MEETING**

**Target Week: September 26—October 2**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer, (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer):  
*Lord God, we give you thanks for all the gifts you have given us in this life: our family, friendships, and the beauty of your creation. Most of all, we thank you for sending Jesus into the world to save us from the powers that seek to enslave us. Lift us up, Lord God, and set us free by the blood of Christ to live our lives in joy and confidence as your sons and daughters. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen*
3. Go back to your homework for last week, beginning on **page 12**. As a group, please discuss your responses to the material. When you are finished, return here and continue with item number 4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week, for you. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be "doubling up" on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, pray a "popcorn" prayer. Go around the room, and have everyone offer a brief word of thanks and/or praise to God. As is possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

## **HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (4<sup>th</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING**

1. Find a place where you can concentrate. Say the following prayer *aloud*; always feel free to add extra petitions and thanks.  
*Heavenly Father, I thank you for you for the gifts, talents and abilities that you have given me, and I pray for a spirit of discernment, that I might continue to find ways that I can best serve you and build up your holy Church on earth. Bless the work of your people throughout the world, and make us*



*strong in our witness to you, so that people may be drawn to Christ and find eternal life in him. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

2. This week, we continue our discussion of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed:

**I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

3. As creatures, we need certain basic necessities to nourish and support our life on earth. God himself provides these necessities for me, as he does for all his creatures.

- Write down your thoughts: Where do you think most people would say that the basic necessities of their life come from?
- Please read **Psalm 104:10-30**. How does the psalmist describe the beauty and joy of creation under God's care and provision?

4. As Christians, we confess that God provides for us each and every day by working *in and through* his creation. When you think of your daily needs, how do you understand God working through different "hands, channels, and means" to provide you with what you need?

5. Please reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your answer to the question, "Does God continue to be involved in his creation, and if so, how?" **[Please note that with the variety of scripture passages given for you to reflect on in some of these questions, your group may express a surprising variety of responses...this is a good thing!]**

- Jeremiah 23:23-24. Am I a God near by, says the Lord, and not a God far off? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord.
- Acts 17:26-28. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'
- Job 12:10. In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.
- Hebrews 1:3. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
- Psalm 147:8-9. He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry.

Your response:

6. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: *If our gracious Creator provides for all of our needs and protects us from all evil, why do suffering and death exist in the world?*

- **James 1:14-15.** But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death
- **John 8:44.** You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.
- **Romans 5:12.** Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.
- **Genesis 3:17-19.** And to the man he said, because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."
- **Romans 8:20-22.** for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now;

Your response:

7. Please Read **Luke 13:1-5** and express in your own words what Jesus is saying about tragic suffering sometimes being a call to *repentance*.

8. Some of us clearly experience more suffering and misfortune than others. Scripture acknowledges both that (a) we can bring suffering upon ourselves through our own behavior, and that (b) a lot of suffering is unexplainable—the reason remains hidden in God, whose purposes are often beyond our understanding (just as those who saw Jesus suffer were not at the time aware of God's great and loving purpose behind the cross). Please reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: "*Why do some of us experience more suffering and misfortune than others?*"

- **Galatians 6:7.** Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow.
- **James 4:1-2.** Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask.
- **2 Samuel 12:1-15.** (from your Bible)
- **Isaiah 55:8-9.** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

- **Deuteronomy 29:29.** The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law.
- **Romans 9:19-23** (from your Bible)

Your response:

9. What do the following passages tell us about how we can/should respond to suffering...to other people's, and our own?

- **Psalm 130:1-2.** Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!
- **Psalm 90:13-15.** Turn, O Lord! How long? Have compassion on your servants! Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil.
- **1 Peter 4:12-13, 19.** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.

Your response:

10. Please reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: "*What is God doing about all the suffering and death in the world?*"

- **Genesis 8:21b-22.** The Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."
- **Acts 14:16-17.** In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy."
- **Romans 5:8.** But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.
- **Isaiah 53:3-4.** He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.
- **John 11:25.** Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live."
- **Romans 5:3-5.** And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

- **Romans 8:28-29.** We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family
- **Revelation 21:4.** he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

Your response:

11. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns from your first group meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John’s as we follow Jesus’ call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective “fishers of people.”

**GOING DEEPER WITH THE APOSTLES’ CREED  
WEEK #4 SMALL GROUP MEETING  
Target Week: October 3-9**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer, (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer):  
*Holy Spirit, direct us in all we do towards our Savior, Jesus Christ. Keep us deeply rooted and grounded in him, that we will serve him faithfully and give our lives generously to the work of his Church. Help us to love each other as the Father loves us, and guide us to new insights today as we study your Word together. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*
3. Go back to your homework for last week, beginning on **page 17**. As a group, please discuss your responses to the material. When you are finished, return here and continue with item number 4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week, for you. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, pray a “popcorn” prayer. If possible, hold hands. Go around the room, and everyone offer a brief word of thanks and/or praise to God. As is possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

**HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (5<sup>TH</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING**

1. Say the following prayer *aloud*; always feel free to add any petitions or thanks as you wish.

*Lord Jesus Christ, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, I give you thanks that you have become my Brother. Give me the confidence and boldness to confess you as my Lord and so live and die within your loving care. In your precious name I pray. Amen.*

2. This week we will begin discussion of the Second Article of the Creed (the article about Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity).

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

Jesus once asked, “Who do people say that I am?” He received many different answers. In the space below, share your thoughts: What do people today think of Jesus? Who or what do they say he is?

3. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: *What does it mean, in general, to confess that Jesus is Lord?* **[Please note that with the variety of scripture passages given for you to reflect on in some of these questions, your group may express a surprising variety of responses...this is a good thing!]**

- **Romans 10:9-10.** Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.
- **Colossians 1:16-20** (from your Bible)
- **John 20:20-24** (from your Bible)

Your response:

4. Why do you personally confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord?

5. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: *What does it mean to confess that Jesus is true God?*

- **John 1:3.** All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life.
- **1 Corinthians 8:6.** yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.
- **Colossians 1:16-17.** for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Your response:

6. Reflect on the following passages. What are they telling us about Jesus becoming *true man*?

- **Hebrews 4:15.** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.
- **1 Timothy 2:5-6.** For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all—this was attested at the right time.

Your response:

7. Use this passage to help you answer the question that follows:

- **Luke 1:30-35** (from your Bible)

What does it mean to confess that Jesus was *conceived by the Holy Spirit*?

8. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: *What were God's intentions with the incarnation (with the Second Person of the Trinity coming to us in the flesh)?*

- **John 1:14.** And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.
- **Colossians 2:9.** For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.
- **1 Timothy 3:16.** Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.
- **Hebrews 2:11.** For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.
- **Isaiah 7:14.** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

Your response:

9. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: *What does it mean to you that Jesus has become your brother? That he has become like you in every way, except that he had no sin?*

- **1 Timothy 2:5.** For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all.

- **Luke 24:39.** Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”
- **Matthew 26:38.** Then he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.”
- **Matthew 4:1-2.** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.
- **John 11:35.** Jesus began to weep.
- **John 19:28.** After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.”
- **Hebrews 4:14-16** (from your Bible)

Your response:

10. Use these passages to answer, in your own words, the question that follows.

- **Romans 5:19.** For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.
- **Galatians 4:4-5.** But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.
- **Mark 10:45.** For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”
- **Galatians 3:13.** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”
- **1 Peter 1:18-19.** You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.
- **Hebrews 2:14.** Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,
- **1 Corinthians 15:57.** But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

*What are the above passages telling us about what Jesus has done for us?*

11. Why is it so important for us that the man Jesus, our brother, is also the Son of God *who created the universe*? Use the following passages to think about and respond to this question.

- John 14:9. Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”
- 1 Timothy 2:5-6. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all

- 1 John 2:1. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;
- Matthew 28:18. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”
- Ephesians 4:10. He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.
- John 5:21-23. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.
- Philippians 2:9-11. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Your response:

12. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other prayers, ask for God’s continued guidance and blessing on your small group and on our congregation as we continue into deeper water with Christ. May the Holy Spirit fill us with life and power so that we can become more confident and effective “fishers of people.”

## **GOING DEEPER WITH THE APOSTLES’ CREED WEEK #5 SMALL GROUP MEETING**

**Target Week: October 10-16**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Have someone in your group say the following prayer out loud (feel free to add petitions as you wish):  
*Come Holy Spirit, make God’s Word known to us. Make us desire the truth in all that we do and always bring us home to the source of all truth, our Savior Jesus Christ. Open our hearts and minds to your guidance today as we discuss the sacred scriptures and share this time together. Give us joy in our fellowship, and set us free from our fears, that we may welcome others into the peace of your presence with the graciousness with which you have welcomed us into eternal life with you. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.*
3. Go back to your homework for last week, starting on **page 21**. As a group, review the material and discuss your responses to the material. When you are finished, return here and continue with item number 4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week, for you. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.



5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, pray a “popcorn” prayer. Go around the room, and everyone offer a brief word of thanks and/or praise to God. As is possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

### **HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (6<sup>TH</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING**

1. Say the following prayer aloud; add any petitions or thanks as you wish.  
*Lord God, lift me up, heal me, and renew me. Help me to give my life completely into your hands and to trust in your will for me. Be with (my small group partner[s]), help them to know your constant love for them. I thank you for all that we have been able to share in our meetings. Help us to continue to lovingly uphold and support each other in this journey, and make us faithful to you in all that we do. In Jesus' name. Amen.*
2. This week, we continue our discussion of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed:

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

Human history has been constantly characterized by selfishness, hatred, and violence resulting from a failure to fear, love, and trust God above all things. Despite all our scientific and technological progress, why have we not overcome these deep-seated problems that plague our human race? Share your thoughts below.

3. Please read **Luke 23:32-56**. Consider how Jesus willingly suffered and died for us to overcome these deep-seated evils. Share your thoughts in the space below.
4. Ask yourself: What does it say about Jesus that he willingly gave his life for me? What does it say about me? Share your thoughts in the space below.
5. Please reflect on the following passages, and use them to respond to the question: *What are we saying when we confess that Jesus has redeemed us?*

- **Colossians 1:13-14**. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

- **1 Peter 1:18-21** (from your Bible)
- **Titus 2:14.** He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.
- **Hebrews 2:14-15.** Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.
- **1 John 3:8.** Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

Your response:

6. Please read the following passages from your Bible. Let them guide your response to the question: *Why did we need to be redeemed (rescued)? What was our situation?*

- **Genesis 3:1—4:12.**
- **Genesis 6:5-12.**
- **John 8**
- **Romans 3:9-18**

Your response:

7. In this section, read the passages and use them to help you respond to the general question: *How did Jesus rescue me from sin?*

*Passages which describe Jesus' death as **paying the penalty of my sin and guilt**:*

- **Mark 10:45.** For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.
- **2 Corinthians 5:21.** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- **Galatians 3:13.** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”
- **1 Peter 1:18-19.** You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.
- **Romans 4:25.** [Jesus] was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Your response to these passages (what stood out for you and why):

*Passages which describe Jesus' death as where he fully **endured and appeased the wrath of God** toward all people, thereby reconciling us to God:*

- **Romans 3:25.** [Jesus], whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed.
- **Hebrews 2:17.** Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.
- **1 John 2:2.** And [Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.
- **2 Corinthians 5:19.** that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

Your response:

*Passages which describe Jesus' death as where he **destroyed the power of sin to enslave me:***

- **John 8:34-36.** Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.
- **1 Peter 2:24.** He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

Your response:

*Passages which describe Jesus' death as **rescuing us from the power of death:***

- Hebrews 2:14-15. Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.
- 1 Corinthians 15:54-57. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2 Timothy 1:10. but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Your response:

8. Read the following passages and respond to the questions: *What does the Bible teach about Jesus' resurrection? Why is it so comforting to us?*

- **Acts 10:40-41.** but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

- **Romans 1:4.** and [he] was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,
- **John 18:37.** Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”
- **Romans 5:10.** For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.
- **John 11:25-26.** Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”
- **John 14:19.** In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.
- **1 Corinthians 15:22-23.** For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Your response to these passages (what stood out for you and why):

9. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other prayers, ask for God’s continued guidance and blessing on your small group and on our congregation as we continue into deeper water with Christ. May the Holy Spirit fill us with life and power so that we can become more confident and effective “fishers of people.”

**GOING DEEPER WITH THE APOSTLES’ CREED**  
**WEEK #6 SMALL GROUP MEETING**  
**Target Week: October 17-23**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer, (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer):  
*Lord, please give us your wisdom now as we approach your word. Help us to discern your will for us, and open our hearts to hear your voice speaking to us through the scriptures. Help us not rely on our own understanding. Thank you God for the clarity, encouragement and hope your Word brings. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.*
3. Go back to your homework for last week, starting on **page 25**. As a group, discuss your responses to the material. When you are finished, return here and continue with item number 4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week, for you. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.

6. Close with prayer. Today, do a “popcorn prayer.” Hold hands and go around the group. Each person says a brief prayer. Then, everyone join in the Lord’s Prayer.

## **HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (7<sup>TH</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING**

1. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish.

*Lord, Jesus Christ, my Brother and Savior, I praise you for rescuing me from sin, death, and the devil’s power by your innocent suffering and death. Thank you for your great love and your sacrifice that won me, a lost creature, to be yours. Give me faith to trust in you and to live in the knowledge of your salvation. In your precious name I pray. Amen.*

2. This week, we continue our discussion of the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed:

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

As a man, Christ did not always or fully use or manifest the divine powers and majesty that were communicated to his human nature. This began with the lowly manner of his incarnation, continued in the manner of his birth and life, and was completed with his death and burial. We call this his state of humiliation.

Please read **Philippians 2:5-8** and **2 Corinthians 8:9**. How do these passages help you understand the reason for Jesus’ state of humiliation during his earthly ministry?

3. Please read the following passages. Beside each, write down what the passage tells you about Jesus and the fact that he willingly chose to be “limited” in such surprising ways during his earthly ministry.

- Luke 2:7
- Matthew 24:36
- John 11:38-44

4. Please read **Matthew 4:1-11** and **Matthew 26:36-46** and respond to the following items:

- In your own words, what does it mean to you that Jesus underwent these temptations and trials?
- What was the nature of the temptation in each passage?
- What connections can you make between these passages and your own life and experience?

5. Please reflect on the following passages about Jesus' suffering, death and burial:

- **Matthew 27** (from your Bible)
- **John 19** (from your Bible)
- **Luke 23:52-53**. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid.

How do you relate Jesus' suffering and death to your own experience?

6. Jesus, who remains true man, also manifests the divine attributes communicated to him in his incarnation. His power and majesty are manifest fully in his victorious descent into hell, his resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven, his present reign at the right hand of the Father, and his future return for judgment. We call this his *state of exaltation*.

During his earthly ministry (before Good Friday), we see glimpses, here and there, of God's divine power in Jesus, especially in his healings, miracles, and exorcisms. Jesus downplayed these demonstrations of his power. In fact, he regularly told people not to talk about them. Why? Because his ultimate mission was not to show his own power but rather to give it away for everyone else on the cross. Nevertheless, the flashes of amazing power we do see in Jesus' life serve the purpose of telling us that here, indeed, is our all-powerful God in the flesh. Please read the following passages.

- **John 2:11**. Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.
- **Luke 6:8**. Even though he knew what they were thinking, he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come and stand here." He got up and stood there.
- **Matthew 17:1-2**. Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.

In your own words, what do these passages tell you about Jesus?

Below, write about a time when you experienced what you would say was God's miraculous power; be prepared to share it with your group.

While we do appreciate stories of people dying, going to heaven, and coming back (and we grant that these things can happen), why are peoples' miraculous experiences of the "afterlife" not the type of thing we count on, as Christians?

Can you think of instances/examples from your own experience where someone (perhaps yourself) was looking for God to be a miracle worker, and was disappointed?

For Christians, miracles are wonderful signs that God is present in our lives. At the same time, we know that our faith is not built on miraculous signs. In your own words, why does the New Testament downplay “signs and wonders” even while acknowledging that we should be thankful for them?

7. Reflect on the following passages. Then respond to them: how do they help you understand Jesus’ exaltation and what his victorious resurrection means to you personally.

- **1 Peter 3:18-20.** For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.
- **Colossians 2:15.** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.
- **Mark 16:6.** But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.
- **Luke 24:50-51.** Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.
- **Hebrews 1:3.** He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
- **Hebrews 8:1.** Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.
- **Acts 17:31.** Because God has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Your response (what in these passages particularly strikes you and why):

8. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other prayers, ask for God’s continued guidance and blessing on your small group and on our congregation as we continue into deeper water with Christ. May the Holy Spirit fill us with life and power so that we can become more confident and effective “fishers of people.”

**GOING DEEPER WITH THE APOSTLES’ CREED  
WEEK #7 SMALL GROUP MEETING  
Target Week: October 24-30**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.

2. Someone pray the following prayer, (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer):

*Lord, you have called us to serve you. Grant that we may walk in your presence: your love in our hearts, your truth in our minds, your strength in our wills; until, at the end of our journey, we know the joy of our homecoming and the welcome of your embrace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

3. Go back to your homework for last week, starting on **page 29**. As a group, discuss your responses to all the questions in the homework. When you are finished, return here and continue with item number **4**, below.

4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week, for you. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.

5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.

6. Close with prayer. Today, in your prayers, have each person share one thing for which they are especially thankful to God right now. Then close with the Lord’s Prayer.

### **HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (8<sup>TH</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING**

1. Find a place where you can concentrate. Say the following prayer aloud; always feel free to add extra petitions and thanks.

*King of glory, by your mercy and compassion, you gave yourself over to death on the cross to gain eternal life and victory for me and all believers. By your Spirit, keep me firm in this faith that I might always live under you in your kingdom and serve you in joy and peace. I pray in your precious name. Amen.*

2. This week, we continue our discussion of the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed:

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

In the *Small Catechism*, Luther summarizes the meaning of the Second Article of the Creed with the following words. Please pay special attention to the words in bold type, as we will be focusing on them.

*I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death, **that I may be his own and live under him in***



*is kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead, and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.*

3. Our lives are meaningless without some sense of higher purpose. In the space below, please share your response to the question: What are some things that you would say people live for today?

4. Please read **Luke 24:36-53**. How did Jesus' resurrection change the lives of the disciples? How does it give our lives new purpose and meaning? Share your response, below.

5. Please reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: "*For what purpose has Christ freed me from sin, death, and the devil?*"

- **2 Corinthians 5:15**. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.
- **Jude 24-25**. Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Your response (what particularly strikes you from the passages and why):

6. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: "*What does it mean to confess that I belong to Christ?*"

- **Galatians 2:20**. and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
- **Romans 14:8**. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.
- **Philippians 3:12**. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.
- **1 Peter 2:9**. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Your response:

7. Read the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: "*What does it mean to confess that I live under him in his kingdom?*"

- **Matthew 11:28**. Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

- **John 14:27.** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.
- **Colossians 1:13-14.** He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Your response:

8. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the following question:

*“What does it mean that through Christ, I live in the power of the Holy Spirit?”*

- **John 14:16-17.** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.
- **John 14:26.** But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.
- **John 16:13.** When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

Your response:

9. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the following question:

*“What does it mean that we will ‘serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness?’”*

- **Colossians 2:6.** As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him,
- **Philippians 1:6.** I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.
- **Romans 16:20.** The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
- **Revelation 21:4.** he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

Your response:

10. Please reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: *“What is the basis for my confession and confidence that I will live forever in his kingdom?”*

- **1 Corinthians 15:3-5.** For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.
- **1 Corinthians 15:17-20.** If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have

hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

- **Colossians 3:1-4.** So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Your response:

11. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns from your first group meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John's as we follow Jesus' call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective "fishers of people."

**GOING DEEPER WITH THE APOSTLES' CREED  
WEEK #8 SMALL GROUP MEETING  
Target Week: October 31—November 6**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).
3. Go back to the homework you did for this week, starting on **page 32**. With your small group, discuss your responses to the material. After you finish your discussion, come back here and continue with item #4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be "doubling up" on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, have each person pray for the person on their right. As much as is possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayers.

**HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (9<sup>TH</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING**

1. Find a place where you can concentrate. Say the following prayer aloud; always feel free to add extra petitions and thanks.

*Holy Spirit, I give you thanks that you have called me to saving faith in my Lord Jesus Christ. Without you I could never come to him. By your words, which are power and life, keep me united with my Savior in true faith, that I may live for Him alone. In his name I pray. Amen.*

2. This week we will begin our discussion of the **Third Article** of the Apostles' Creed:

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

In the Small Catechism, Luther begins his summary of the Third Article of the Creed with the following words:

*I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.*

3. "I believe...that I cannot believe." As fallen people, we are unable to find God on our own, let alone choose to entrust our lives to him. Which is harder to accept—(a) that I choose to believe or (b) that I am brought to saving faith apart from my own efforts? Your thoughts on this:

4. Please read **Acts 9:1-22**, about Paul's conversion, and **Acts 16:13-15**, about Lydia's conversion. What role did Paul and/or Lydia play in their conversion?

5. The *Large Catechism* states: "As Christians, we confess that the Holy Spirit has made us new creatures by bringing us to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Such faith is granted to our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel." In the space below, express your understanding of this teaching: that even our faith in the gospel comes to us from outside ourselves. How and where does this happen, according to your understanding?

6. Please reflect on the following passages and use them to respond to the question: "*How was I brought under the gracious lordship of Jesus?*"

- **Romans 10:13-15.** For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"
- **Hebrews 4:12.** For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
- **John 4:39-42.** Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

- **1 Corinthians 12:3.** Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.
- **John 6:65.** And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”

Your response:

7. Reflect on the following passages and use them to respond to the question: “*Why can I not come to faith in Jesus by my own reason or strength?*”

- **1 Corinthians 2:14.** Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.
- **Ephesians 2:1.** You were dead through the trespasses and sins.
- **Acts 7:51.** “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do.
- **Romans 8:7.** For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot.
- **Galatians 5:17.** For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

Your response:

8. The reason you don’t hear Lutherans speaking in terms like “you need to make a decision to accept Jesus” is that we firmly follow the biblical teaching that human beings cannot come to faith in God through their own reason, strength, or by any choice they make. Instead, we emphasize the Holy Spirit’s work of calling us and bringing us to faith through the Gospel. The gospel always comes to us as an external word. As is made clear in the passages from #6, above, the word comes to us initially from other human beings. This is just one of the reasons we Lutherans really emphasize the importance of the Church in the world. In the space below, please share your thoughts on this.

9. Please reflect on the following passages, and use them to respond to the question: “*What does it mean that the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel?*”

- **Romans 1:16.** For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
- **Romans 10:17.** So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.
- **2 Thessalonians 2:14.** For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- **1 Peter 1:23, 25.** You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. But the word of the Lord endures forever. That word is the good news that was announced to you.
- **Ephesians 1:13.** In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit;

Your response:

10. It is very helpful to remember that the Word of God is not just information that we read and interpret. The Bible consistently speaks of the Word as having **power** (e.g. God created the world through his Word). So, the Word does not just come to us as textbook information which we decide whether or not to accept; on the contrary the Word has the power to change us when we hear it. The word *delivers* what it says. With this in mind, please share your thoughts on the following passages:

- **Acts 4:31.** When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.
- **1 Thessalonians 2:13.** We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.
- **Isaiah 55:11.** So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Your response (what particularly strikes you from the passages and why):

11. Can you think of a time when the Holy Spirit, working through God's Word (or through perhaps a sermon, class, or a conversation with another believer), did not just make you "think" differently, but actually changed your heart? If so, describe the experience and be prepared to share it with your group.

12. Reflect on the following passages and use them to answer the question: "*What does it mean to be sanctified by the Spirit?*"

- **1 Corinthians 6:11.** And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.
- **Hebrews 10:10.** And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
- **Psalms 51:10.** Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
- **Galatians 5:22-23.** By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.
- **Ephesians 2:10.** For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.
- **Titus 2:14.** He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Your response:

13. Please reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the questions: “*What are good works in God’s sight?*” *Can good works save us? What different purposes do they serve?*

- **Psalm 51:12-13.** Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
- **Hebrews 11:6.** And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
- **John 15:5.** I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.
- **2 Corinthians 5:17.** So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!
- **Colossians 3:17.** And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
- **1 Corinthians 10:31.** So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

Your response:

14. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: “*What does it mean to be kept in the true faith?*”

- **John 8:31-32.** Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”
- **Philippians 1:6.** I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.
- **1 Peter 1:5.** [you] are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
- **Jude 22-25.** And have mercy on some who are wavering; save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies. Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Your response:

15. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John’s as we follow Jesus’ call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective “fishers of people.”

## GOING DEEPER WITH THE APOSTLES' CREED WEEK #9 SMALL GROUP MEETING

**Target Week: November 7-13**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).  
*Lord, you have called us to serve you. Grant that we may walk in your presence: your love in our hearts, your truth in our minds, your strength in our wills; until, at the end of our journey, we know the joy of our homecoming and the welcome of your embrace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*
3. Go back to the homework you did for this week, starting on **page 36**. With your small group, discuss your responses to the material. After you finish your discussion, come back here and continue with item #4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, have each person pray briefly for the person on their right. If possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

### HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (10<sup>TH</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Find a place where you can concentrate, with few distractions. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish:

*Heavenly Father, make me an instrument of your will. Forgive me of my sins and rid me of every fear that keeps me from serving you. Take away my selfishness, my tendency to dwell on past hurts and slights, my anger and frustrations. Help me to let go of the past and to move on to what you would have me do this day, to glorify you and serve the people around me. Give me joy in my work and give me confidence in your love for me. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

2. This week we continue our discussion of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed:

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

We also continue to focus on the first part of Luther's summary of the Third Article:



*I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.*

3. Please reflect on the following passages and use them to respond to the question: “*What is the special role of the Holy Spirit in our salvation?*”

- **Psalm 51:13.** Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
- **John 3:5-6.** Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.
- **John 15:26.** “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf.
- **Acts 26:17-18.** I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

Your response:

4: Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: “*Does the Holy Spirit want to bring everyone to faith in Jesus?*”

- **Ezekiel 33:11.** Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?
- **1 Timothy 2:4.** [God], who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
- **2 Peter 3:9.** The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

Your response:

5. Reflect on the following passages and use them to respond to the question: “*Why do not all who hear the Gospel believe in Jesus as their Lord?*”

- **Matthew 23:37.** “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!
- **Acts 7:51.** “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do.

Your response:

6. Please read Matthew **22:1-10**. In the space below, share your thoughts on Jesus' story of the banquet and the excuses.

7. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: “*Do people believe in Jesus because they decide to follow him of their own free will?*”

- **John 15:16**. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.
- **1 Corinthians 12:3**. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:8**. Therefore whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you.

Your response:

8. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: “*Did God determine in advance that he would not convert some people?*”

- Ephesians 1:3-7 (from your Bible)
- Acts 13:44-48 (from your Bible)

Your response:

9. Note: The Bible (and Jesus himself) sometimes speaks in terms of *predestination*. This the idea that God has pre-planned everything, including who will be in heaven and who will not. In those passages where this idea is strong, it is clear that God is provoking us to think seriously about our status with him.

It is really impossible for us to accept the idea that we have no free will—that we are “hemmed in” by a plan that is beyond our power to change. However, the Bible confirms that on our own—if we are left with nothing but our own free will and with the consequences of our own choices—we are certainly doomed, and our freedom will turn out to be nothing but a mirage that lures us further into a dead-end.

The point of pre-destination language in the Bible is not only to affirm the truth that God is in control of everything (which can be comforting), but also to make us *uncomfortable*. It confirms that we can do nothing for ourselves when it comes to salvation. Only God can give us a future, by his sovereign will.

At the same time, as Lutherans we understand that we should not think of salvation/damnation as if everything is working according to a closed, pre-arranged system. If this were the case, what would

God's point be in sending Jesus into the world? If everything is pre-planned, why would we need a Savior to enter into our lives and call us to him? The whole point of Jesus is that in him, our destiny *changes*. Throughout the gospels, we see "prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners" turning to him and finding new life in him.

The point is, by our own power, we cannot change our destiny. But "with God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19:23-26). God takes pre-destined goats and re-makes them into sheep with a new future, through Jesus. He is the Lamb of God who became a goat for our sake. Jesus trades his life for ours, and makes it possible to have a future that we would never gain by our free choices. Without Jesus, our human freedom of choice *always leads us astray* because it gives us the false impression that we can choose our ultimate destiny. With Jesus, however, we are brought into a relationship with God that only he can make possible. With faith in Jesus, and in a renewed relationship with God, our freedom takes on its proper function: to choose how we will serve and love and praise him each day. Rather than using our freedom to "win our destiny for ourselves," in Christ we leave our destiny to God, and use our freedom to make small choices as to how we will show our love for him and for others.

To think more about this difficult topic, please read **Matthew 25:31-46**. In the space below, share your thoughts on this awesome passage paying special attention to the disturbing language of predestination which Jesus uses.

10. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the following question: "*Can we be truly spiritual without the Holy Spirit and the Gospel?*"

- **John 1:18**. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.
- **John 3:31-32**. The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony.
- **Romans 10:17**. So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.
- **1 Corinthians 2:9-11**. But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God.

Your response:

11. Look back at your partners' prayer concerns from your last meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John's as we follow Jesus' call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective "fishers of people."

**GOING DEEPER WITH THE APOSTLES' CREED  
WEEK #10 SMALL GROUP MEETING  
Target Week: November 14-20**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).  
*Come Holy Spirit, make God's Word known to us. Make us desire the truth in all that we do and always bring us home to the source of all truth, our Savior Jesus Christ. Open our hearts and minds to your guidance today as we discuss the sacred scriptures and share this time together. Give us joy in our fellowship, and set us free from our fears, that we may welcome others into the peace of your presence with the graciousness with which you have welcomed us into eternal life with you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*
3. Please go back to the homework you did for this week, starting on **page 40**. With your partners, discuss your responses to all the homework. When you are finished, return here to item #4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be "doubling up" on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, have each person pray briefly for the person on their right. If possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

**HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (11<sup>TH</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING**

1. Find a place where you can concentrate, with few distractions. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish:  
*Holy Father, by your Spirit you brought me to faith in your Son and made me a member of his body, the Church. Thank you for forgiving me of my sins, and for giving me comfort and peace in this life, and a certain hope for the life to come. Give me joy in the promise you made to me in Baptism and a ready heart to hear and keep your Word; through Jesus Christ. Amen.*
2. This week we continue our discussion of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed:

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

...with special emphasis on the following section of Luther's summary of the Third Article:

*In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.*

3. God did not create us to live in isolation from one another. From your own experience, what do people today generally think about the Christian Church? What are some typical attitudes towards the Church, positive and negative?

4. Please read **Acts 2:42-47**. How is the Church described here?

5. Please reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: "*What did the Holy Spirit do when he brought me to faith?*"

- **1 Corinthians 12:13**. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
- **Ephesians 2:19-22**. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Your response:

6. Reflect on the following passages and let them to guide your response to the question: "*What is the Church?*"

- **John 10:16**. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.
- **1 Corinthians 12:27**. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.
- **Matthew 18:20**. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.
- **Revelation 5:9**. They sing a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation."

Your response:

7. Note: the creed in its original words speaks of the Church as “catholic” (universal)—that is, existing throughout all time and throughout the world, including people who confess and believe in Jesus Christ from every background. The word catholic carries a wonderful meaning of “many varieties united into one body.” Confusion sometimes arises around this, because when catholic is capitalized—as in Catholic—it’s usually referring specifically to the Roman Catholic church based in Rome, with the Pope and etc. Why do you think that many western protestant churches, about fifty years ago, purposely went back to using the original word “catholic” with a small “c” when we write the Creed, or say it together?

8. Reflect on the following passages and let the rich variety of material in them guide you in your response to the question: “*How is the Church different from all other communities?*”

- **Colossians 1:18.** He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.
- **Colossians 1:13-14.** He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
- **John 20:23.** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.
- **Ephesians 2:19-20.** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.
- **Ephesians 4:4-6.** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Your response:

9. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: “*What is the forgiveness of sins?*”

- **Psalms 130:3-4.** If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.
- **1 John 1:7.** but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
- **2 Corinthians 5:19.** In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.
- **Matthew 18:23-35** (from your Bible)

Your response:

10. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: “*Why does God forgive our sins?*”

- **Psalm 86:15.** But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
- **John 3:16.** For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.
- **Ephesians 1:7.** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace
- **1 John 2:2.** And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Your response:

11. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: “*How is it possible for a just and holy God to declare sinners righteous (justification)?*”

- **2 Corinthians 5:21.** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- **Romans 3:21-24.** But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets; the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
- **Romans 4:25.** [Jesus], who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Your response:

12. Reflect on the following passages and let them guide your response to the question: “*How do I receive the forgiveness of sins?*”

- **Genesis 15:6.** And he [Abraham] believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.
- **John 3:18.** Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
- **Romans 3:28.** For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.
- **Romans 4:5.** But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

Your response:

13. Look back at your partners' prayer concerns from your last meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John's as we follow Jesus' call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective "fishers of people."

**GOING DEEPER WITH THE APOSTLES' CREED  
WEEK #11 SMALL GROUP MEETING  
Target Week: November 21-27**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).  
*Loving Father, lift our eyes to seek you first today and always. Forgive us for getting bogged down in the cares and worries of this world. Renew us through the power of the Holy Spirit to live confidently as your sons and daughters. Give us strength to build up your Church on earth, to witness to Christ, and to serve the people around us with humility and joy. We pray this in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*
3. Please go back to the homework you did for this week, starting on **page 44**. With your partners, discuss your responses to all the homework. When you are finished, return here to item #4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be "doubling up" on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, have each person pray briefly for the person on their right. If possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

**HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (12<sup>TH</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING**

1. Find a place where you can concentrate, with few distractions. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish:  
*Gracious Heavenly Father, give me grace to set a good example for everyone around me, to be fair and gracious towards others, and to be true to the commitments I make. When I stumble, help me to know your forgiveness, and when I wrong others, give me courage to set things right. I pray that when people witness my words and deeds, they will know that I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I pray in his name. Amen.*
2. This week we continue our discussion of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed:



**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

...specifically focusing on the following section of Luther's summary of the Third Article:

*In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.*

3. Please reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: "*When my sins condemn me and I am doubting, how can I be sure of my forgiveness and salvation?*"

- *Romans 8:38-39.* For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- *2 Corinthians 1:20.* For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." For this reason it is through him that we say the "Amen," to the glory of God.
- *John 19:30.* When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.
- *1 Peter 1:18-19.* You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.
- *Hebrews 10:12-14.* But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, "he sat down at the right hand of God," and since then has been waiting "until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet." For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.
- *Acts 2:38.* Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
- *John 20:22-23.* When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
- *Matthew 26:28.* for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Your response:

4. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: "*Why must we firmly maintain this teaching of forgiveness—the doctrine of justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith?*"

- **Acts 4:12.** There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.
- **Romans 3:21-25** (from your Bible)

- **Galatians 5:4-5.** You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.
- **Revelation 1:5-6.** ...and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
- **Romans 5:1-14** (from your Bible)\

Your response:

5. As Lutheran Christians, we know that the Church as it exists within the world today is filled with broken sinners who fall short of the glory of God. Because of this, we refrain from judging whether we are looking at the “true Church” by the *behavior of the people* who call themselves Christian. If we did that, all congregations would show more and more warts, the closer we examined them.

Rather, as Lutherans we identify the Church in the world by just a couple of basic characteristics—we call them “marks of the Church”—that are not based in human behavior, but rather in God’s gospel promises. Specifically, we Lutherans say that “wherever the gospel is preached in its purity, and the sacraments are administered rightly” is where the Church will be found.

Notice that according to this standard, for Lutherans, it doesn’t matter what denominational titles people assign to themselves...whether Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist, Nazarene, etc. The Church is the Church wherever the word is preached truly and the sacraments (Baptism and Communion) rightly given. Both of these marks—word and sacrament—are based in God’s action for us, and not in our response to God.

For example, some Christian groups think that true believers will speak in tongues, or speak in terms of “having a born again experience.” Notice that these practices are more about a *human response to God* than they are about what God has done in Jesus Christ. Lutherans have no problem with these human responses to God...we just don’t count them as essential marks of the true Church.

With this in mind, think of a time (if you can) when you felt that other Christians were judging whether you or others were “real Christians” based on your behavior, the way you talk, your religious practices, or special spiritual experiences. What was the situation? In the space below, share how you understand the difference between their standards of “true church” and the Lutheran standards described above.

6. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide you in your response to the question: “*What are the identifying characteristics of the Church?*”

- **Isaiah 55:10-11.** For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and

bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

- **Romans 10:17.** So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.
- **1 Corinthians 10:16.** The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?
- **Matthew 18:20.** For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

Your response:

7. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide you in your response to the question: “*What are some other outward indications that the Church is present?*” (Note: Such things as gatherings for prayer and worship, the fruits of faith, and suffering for Christ also serve as good indications that the church is present *without guaranteeing it.*)

- **John 13:35.** By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.
- **1 Peter 2:21.** For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.
- **2 Timothy 1:8.** Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God,
- **Acts 2:42-43.** They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
- **Hebrews 10:24-25.** And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
- **Romans 12:14.** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Your response:

8. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide you in your response to the question: “*What is the mission of the Church on earth?*”

- **Matthew 28:19.** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
- **Acts 2:42.** They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
- **1 Peter 2:9.** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
- **Acts 8:26-35** (from your Bible)

Your response:

9. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide you in your response to the question: “*What are some of the privileges and responsibilities of members of the Church?*”

- **Colossians 3:16.** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.
- **2 Corinthians 6:14.** Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness?
- **2 Timothy 4:3-4.** For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.
- **Romans 16:17-18.** I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them. For such people do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded.
- **John 20:21.** Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”
- **Luke 10:2.** He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”
- **Galatians 6:6.** Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.

Your response:

10. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide you in your response to the question: “*What are some of our responsibilities toward other Christians and church bodies?*”

- **Ephesians 4:3-6.** Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.
- **1 Corinthians 1:10.** Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.
- **John 17:17-21** (from your Bible)
- **Matthew 18:21-35** (from your Bible)

Your response:

11. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide you in your response to the question: “*Will the Church always exist?*”

- **Matthew 16:18.** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

- **Matthew 28:20.** "...And teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- **John 17:12.** While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.

Your response:

12. Reflect on the following passages, think about your own experiences as a believer, and let the passages guide you in your response to the question: "*Should I expect the Church's life to be one of continual peace and harmony?*"

- John 16:33. I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!"
- Ephesians 6:12. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
- 1 Peter 4:12-14. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.
- 1 Peter 5:8-9. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

Your response:

13. How do the following verses help you understand the "big picture" when it comes to your life as a believer and as a member of God's Church in this broken world?

- **Isaiah 25:8.** He will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.
- **Revelation 7:17.** For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
- **Revelation 21:4.** He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

Your response:

14. Look back at your partners' prayer concerns from your last meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the

congregation of St. John's as we follow Jesus' call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective "fishers of people."

## **GOING DEEPER WITH THE APOSTLES' CREED WEEK #12 SMALL GROUP MEETING**

**Target Week: November 28—December 4**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).  
*Lord, you have called us to serve you. Grant that we may walk in your presence: your love in our hearts, your truth in our minds, your strength in our wills; until, at the end of our journey, we know the joy of our homecoming and the welcome of your embrace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*
3. Please go back to the homework you did for this week, starting on **page 48**. With your partners, discuss your responses to all the homework. When you are finished, return here to item #4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be "doubling up" on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, have each person pray briefly for the person on their right. If possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

## **HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (13<sup>TH</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING**

1. Find a place where you can concentrate, with few distractions. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish:

*Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life, you have brought me to Christ, and by his gospel you promise me the final victory over sin, death, and the devil. Keep me firm and confident in the knowledge that on the last day, you will raise all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ, my Lord, in whose name I pray. Amen.*

2. This week we continue our discussion of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed:

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

...specifically focusing on the following section of Luther's summary of the Third Article:

***On the last day he will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.***

All people yearn for a better future and hope that things in their lives and in the world will improve. In general, what sort of future do you think people today hope and long for? What kinds of things are they hoping will happen? Share your thoughts below.

3. In the *Large Catechism*, Luther writes that *As Christians, we yearn for the resurrection of the body and life eternal in the new heavens and new earth—the time when we will be “perfectly pure and holy people...free from sin, death, and all evil, in a new, immortal, and glorified body.”*

How might our hope of the resurrection affect the way we view suffering within this world? How might our Christian view of suffering be different than a person who does not believe in anything bigger than this worldly existence? Please share your thoughts below.

4. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: “*What will happen when Jesus returns visibly?*”

- **Job 19:25-27** (from your Bible)
- **John 5:28-29.** Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:16.** For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first.
- **1 Corinthians 15:12-26** (from your Bible)

Your response:

5. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: “*What will my resurrected body be like?*”

- **Philippians 3:21.** He will transform the body of our humiliation[a] that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.
- **1 Corinthians 15:42-43.** So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

Your response:

6. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: “*What will happen on the Last Day to those who have rejected Christ (unbelievers)?*”

- **Isaiah 66:24.** And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.
- **Matthew 10:28.** Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.
- **Matthew 25:41.** Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’
- **Luke 16:19-31** (from your Bible)

Your response:

7. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: “*Why do people die?*”

- **Romans 5:12.** Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, so death spread to all because all have sinned.
- **Romans 6:23.** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Your response:

8. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: “*What happens to me as a believer when I die?*”

- **Philippians 1:23-24.** I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.
- **Philippians 3:20.** But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **2 Corinthians 5:8.** Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.
- **2 Timothy 4:18.** The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.
- **Luke 23:43.** He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Your response:

9. The Roman Catholic teaching of *purgatory* is that there is a state or condition after death for souls to be purified for entrance into heaven. The teaching came to prominence in the late middle ages. Purgatory is thought to apply only to believers who need cleansing from the penalty of their sins (kind of like a “penalty box” for particularly ornery believers before we can join the heavenly game). In the space below, share reasons (a) why you think the medieval church came up with this teaching, and (b) why it is contrary to Scripture and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



10. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: “*What will happen to me when I am raised from the dead on the Last Day?*”

- 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
- Matthew 25:34. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’
- Psalm 16:11. You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Your response:

11. Holy Scripture speaks of both (a) an immediate life after death in heaven with Jesus (Luke 23:43) and also (b) a general resurrection of all people (for life or death) at the end of time (see the verses in #9, above). This can be a mind-bending question that goes against our understanding of linear time, but how do you understand both (a) and (b) being true at once? It might help to think of Jesus as the end-time judge who has entered into our time NOW to bring God’s final judgment upon us NOW. This probably doesn’t sound like a good thing until we think of our *Baptism* into Christ’s death. Share your thoughts below.

12. Look back at your partners’ prayer concerns from your last meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John’s as we follow Jesus’ call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective “fishers of people.”

**GOING DEEPER WITH THE APOSTLES’ CREED  
WEEK #13 SMALL GROUP MEETING  
Target Week: December 5-11**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.

2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).  
*Heavenly Father, we thank you for bringing us together today to study your Word and to support each other in our walk of faith. Help us to listen to each other with open hearts and minds. We thank you for the new life and forgiveness you have given us in Christ, and we pray that you will remove all fear from our hearts as we follow your call to let go of our old lives, that we may live for you alone. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

3. Please go back to the homework you did for this week, starting on **page 54**. With your partners, discuss your responses to all the homework. When you are finished, return here to item #4, below.

4. Your next meeting will be the last for this unit of “Going Deeper.” Now’s a good time to start talking together about your plans for the next chapter of *going deeper with Christ*. Will you be staying together as a group? Reconfiguring? Disbanding for the time being? Be sensitive to each other’s needs and commitments. If you are continuing to the next topic and need to find a new group, please act now! Pastor Seth (217.255.2118) or Pastor Patti (614.875.2314) can help you as needed.
5. The next unit of our Going Deeper journey will begin on January 1<sup>st</sup>. We hope you will participate in the next part of our *Going Deeper* journey!
6. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
7. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
8. Close with prayer. Today, have each person pray briefly for the person on their right. If possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

### **HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (14<sup>TH</sup>) SMALL GROUP MEETING**

1. Find a place where you can concentrate, with few distractions. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish:

*Heavenly Father, make me an instrument of your will. Forgive me of my sins and rid me of every fear that keeps me from serving you. Take away my selfishness, my tendency to dwell on past hurts and slights, my anger and frustrations. Help me to let go of the past and to move on to what you would have me do this day, to glorify you and serve the people around me. Give me joy in my work and give me confidence in your love for me. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

2. This week we conclude our discussion of the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed:

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

...specifically focusing on the following section of Luther’s summary of the Third Article:

***On the last day he will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.***

3. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: “*What will happen to this world after we Christians are raised from the dead?*”

- Romans 8:19-23 (from your Bible)

- James 1:18. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.
- Revelation 21:5. And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Your response:

4. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: “*What will the new creation be like?*”

- **2 Peter 3:13.** But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.
- **Isaiah 65:17-18.** For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.
- **Revelation 21:1.** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.
- **Revelation 22:3-5.** Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.
- **Isaiah 60:19-20.** The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.
- **2 Peter 3:5-13** (from your Bible)

Your response:

5. In the space below, talk about how the images of the new creation in the above passages are both familiar and unfamiliar to us. Please also read **Genesis chapters 1-2**. How are the images of creation from the passages in #4, above, similar to images of creation before the fall in Genesis? How are they also different from the images in Genesis?

6. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: “*Do we know when all this will take place? What should our attitude be in regard to the Last Days?*”

- **1 Thessalonians 5:2.** For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.
- **Matthew 24:44.** Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.
- **Mark 13:3-8.** (from your Bible)

- **Mark 13:35-37.** Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”
- **Revelation 22:20.** The one who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Your response:

7. In view of the above passages from #6, what do you think our attitude should be towards people who claim to know the time and date of the Second Coming?

8. What are your thoughts on people who are digging shelters and stockpiling supplies in preparation for the final day? Would you say that our faith in Christ would lead us to “dig in” and protect ourselves in this manner? If not...how would you describe a faithful attitude?

9. Reflect on the following passages, and let them guide your response to the question: “*what will happen on the last day?*” These passages may lead you to create a *list* of responses.

- **Matthew 25:31.** When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.
- **Revelation 21:23-24.** And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.
- **1 Corinthians 15:51-52.** Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
- **Matthew 25:31-36** (from your Bible)
- **2 Peter 3:7-13** (from your Bible)
- **Revelation 7:9.** After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.
- **Revelation 19:6-9.** Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure.”
- **Revelation 21:3.** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.
- **Revelation 22:4.** They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

Your response:

10. Please read the following and share your thoughts concerning some popular *false* teachings about the end of time and everlasting life.

- **Millennialism** typically teaches a literal thousand-year visible reign of Christ on earth before the final judgment, not recognizing that the Scriptures often use numbers symbolically. Lutherans and most Christian churches understand the 1000-year reign of Christ in Revelation 20:4-6 as a symbolic reference to Christ's reign over his Church on earth from his ascension until the last day (1 Corinthians 15:52). Teachings such as millennialism tend to complicate our faith and lead us away from daily trust in Jesus into fruitless speculation about things we'll never understand. Some groups use these esoteric teachings (like millennialism) simply to stand apart from other believers.
- **Rapture** teachings claims that the thousand-year reign follows a secret return of Jesus, when believers are "caught up...in the air" and removed from the earth. This turns the simple, comforting hope of Christ's second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) into complicated stages (contrary to 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3; Hebrews 9:27-28; John 5:28-29); denies that believers will suffer Satan's tribulations (contrary to Matthew 24:9; Acts 14:22); and claims that those who reject Christ will have a second chance to achieve salvation during an earthly reign (contrary to Luke 16:27-31; Revelation 20:11-15)

Perhaps the main question to ask about these teachings: why do you think some Christian groups talk about the end of time and final judgment in terms that are *more complicated* than what the Bible actually teaches about the end of time? What do we think we might gain by adding "stages" to the end of time? Share your thoughts, below:

11. Please think and pray about your next step *going into the deeper water with Christ*. By this time, you will know what our next "Going Deeper" focus will be, starting ..... At your upcoming small group meeting, you will be discussing with your partner(s) whether you will continue as a group or reconfigure.

12. Please consider writing a blurb about your experience so far with going deeper with Christ for our church newsletter (the Eagle) and/or our website.

13. Look back at your partners' prayer concerns from your last meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John's as we follow Jesus' call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective "fishers of people."

**GOING DEEPER WITH THE APOSTLES' CREED  
WEEK #14 SMALL GROUP MEETING  
Target Week: December 12-18**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).

*Loving God, thank you so much for the opportunity we've had here to praise you for your grace and generosity, and to grow together in Christ our Savior. We thank you for the Apostles' Creed and for its faithful witness to the truth of the gospel. Keep us in the true faith. Free us from all fear and give us a spirit of boldness, that we will live our lives in joyful obedience to your will and bring glory to your name in all that we do. We pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

3. Please go back to the homework you did for this week, starting on **page 58**. With your partners, discuss your responses to all the homework. When you are finished, return here to item #4, below.
4. Please talk together about your plans for the next chapter of *going deeper with Christ*. Will you be staying together as a group? Reconfiguring? Disbanding for the time being? Be sensitive to each other's needs and commitments. If you are continuing to the next topic and need to find a new group, please act now! Pastor Seth (217.255.2118) or Pastor Patti (614.875.2314) can help you as needed.
5. The next unit of our Going Deeper journey will begin on January 1<sup>st</sup>. We hope you will participate in the next part of our *Going Deeper* journey!
6. Could any of you (or all of you) write a blurb about your experience for the newsletter and/or website and/or Facebook regarding your journey so far?
7. For your final prayer, have everyone pray in turn. Thank God for your partner(s). Thank our Lord for this opportunity we've been given to share our faith, and to build each other up in the love of Christ. Ask for God's blessings and guidance for our congregation as we continue together on this journey into the deep water with Christ.