

5th Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 9:18-24

In verse 18 of today's passage it says that Jesus was praying alone. Perhaps He was praying for His disciples, that they would understand and answer the very important question that He was about to ask them.

Before the most important question of, "But, who do you say that I am?" Jesus asked, "Who do the multitudes say that I am?" In our world, the "multitudes" do believe in Jesus. They believe that He was a teacher, a social reformer, a guru, a manifestation of Buddha, one of the children of God, etc. Our world is a battlefield in which those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, Savior of the world, born of a virgin, raised from the dead, Ruler of the universe, etc., are condemned as elitist, unloving, or ignorant. The "multitudes" of our world are shouting their defiance of God and often go unchallenged. Many years ago the disciples who first announced that Jesus was "The Christ of God" died for that belief. (And the world says that Christianity is "too easy" to be true.)

How "easy" is your faith? Jesus says that we must be willing to lose our lives for His sake (vs. 24). In America, it is easy to assume that losing our life for Jesus would never happen, but what does "life" include? It certainly means our physical life, but it can also mean losing popularity, credibility, or acceptance. Am I willing to tell the truth about Jesus when a friend or teacher describes Him as a good teacher, or a good philosopher? Am I willing to share Jesus with a devote Jew, Hindu, or Muslim? Or, will I keep quiet about Jesus in order to avoid confrontations or accusations. Will I protect my comfort zone? Will I keep my faith "easy," or will I seek to display my faith in Jesus in ways that will shout to the world that I belong to my Savior?

Jesus prayed for His disciples, and it must be through prayer that we seek God's strength in denying our comfort in order to stand for His truth. He calls us to love a very unloving place, and it is only by His power that we can be His voice of hope.

Have you tried out a group Bible study at your church?

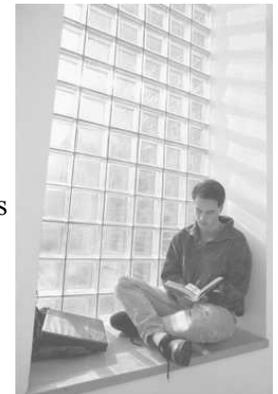
A message from your District Education Committee.



5th Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 9:18-24

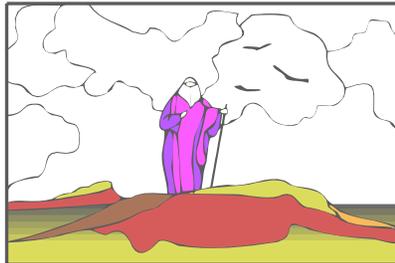
1. What question dominates this text? (vs. 18) What answers were being offered by Jesus' audiences?
2. Peter answers for the disciples. What is his answer? (vs. 20) What is the significance of that answer?
3. If Jesus were to ask you "Who do you say I am?" what would be your response?
4. Why would Jesus ask the disciples not to tell anyone (yet) about His identity and mission? (vs. 21)
5. Summarize Jesus' call to discipleship in vs. 23-24.
6. Note the adverb "daily" in vs. 23. How is your walk with Jesus going today?



Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 20:7-13

Jeremiah was not a popular preacher in his time. His job was to proclaim the people's sinfulness and disobedience, and the coming judgment from God. For some reason, no one wanted to hear what he had to say. At times Jeremiah's mission was frustrating and depressing. He had even been beaten and placed in public stocks to be ridiculed by those who passed. There is a common belief among Christians that if the message of God is presented in a loving way, there will be no strife and no rejection. Jeremiah's experience proves this an incorrect belief. Though he sometimes complained, Jeremiah reflects his true commitment to God in verse 9 where he first voices the possibility of not proclaiming God's word and then tells how impossible that would be, "...in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in." Though much of his message was hard, Jeremiah also proclaimed God's love and mercy to his nation. Along with the bad news, he always



offered hope. When the nation was about to be conquered and exiled, Jeremiah bought property in Jerusalem as a witness to the people that they would return.

Like Jeremiah we live in a world that does not want to hear about its rebellion and God's authority, and sometimes we try so hard to share

God's love that we forget that the world also needs to hear about the rebellion and the sinfulness in which it chooses to dwell. Jeremiah and other great prophets of his time knew how to teach and at the same time give comfort. Peter did the same. In his sermon at Pentecost he proclaimed the great sin of the people to them, and then shared God's love and free salvation with them.

That is our challenge—How to chastise, inform, and love the world in which we live. God loves this world and hates the sin that goes on within His creation. We need to share that with people that just plain don't want to hear about the sin or the love. But, like Jeremiah, God's word burns in our hearts and must be told.

Have you ever been in a study of the prophets of God?

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 20:7-13

1. What is the plight of the prophet (vs. 7-8)? (Skim through the introductory verses of chapter 20.)
2. What happens inside Jeremiah when he tries to ignore God's message or when he tries to run from the prophet's role?
3. Does Jeremiah receive any peer support (vs. 10)? Has there been a time where you can identify with the loneliness of a being a Christian witness?
4. Jeremiah gets renewed confidence (vs. 11). Where does that confidence come from?
5. What is the response of Jeremiah (and all God's people) when they experience His presence and power? (vs. 13)
6. God takes Jeremiah's lament and turns in into a song of praise. When has God caused a similar change in your response to Him?



Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

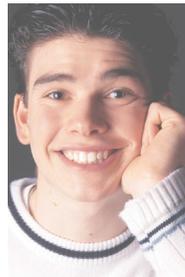
Job 38:1-11

Job went through horrible times and finally, frustrated at his plight, he approached God, not for His aid, but to question his treatment. His “friends” pretty much blamed Job for his dilemma. The most important and accurate explanation to Job’s demands and questions came from God.

Here is a sampling of what we find out about ourselves and God in this wonderful piece of poetry: God says, “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations?”; “Have you ever given orders to the morning...?”; “Have you walked the recesses of the deep?”; “Can you bind Pleiades? Or loose the cords of Orion?”; “Can you set up God’s dominion over the earth?”; “Do you send the lightning bolts on their way?”; “Who endowed the heart with wisdom or gave understanding to the mind?”; “Do you hunt prey for the lioness...”; “Who provides food for the raven...?”

God was not saying to Job that he was evil or that he was good. God was saying that Job could not possibly understand His ways. God communicated two things to Job. First that God knew everything, and that He was in control of everything. Second that Job was not able to comprehend any of it.

Though He allowed turmoil to enter Job’s life, God did not let it consume Job. Jesus, thousands of years later, said that nothing can take us from His hand (John 10:28-29). God’s words to Job, and Jesus’ words to us are our great encouragement in the struggles that we face. We belong to the omnipotent God of the universe Who promises us His love and His protection. We belong to the God who has sacrificed His Son for us. Nothing can overcome our connection with Him, “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing....” (Rom. 8:38-9)



Get to know our almighty God better through a Bible study!

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

Job 38:1-11

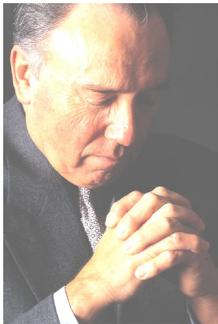
1. Page through the earlier chapters of the book of Job and note the chapter headings. Who has been sharing in the dialog to this point?
2. Who entered the conversation in chapter 38? How did He appear?
3. Read vs. 4 and following (even reading to vs. 38). To what events and actions does God direct Job?
4. What effect would God’s questions have on Job? Could Job begin to understand God’s ways or God’s plans?
5. When have you questioned God’s plans or God’s ways in your life? How did God redirect your thoughts to Him?
6. Read Job chapter 42. What was Job’s Spirit directed response to God’s questions? How did God bless faithful Job?



Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Zechariah 12:7-10

God's all-abiding love is a constant theme through the Old Testament along with His unfailing mercy. In verse 10 of today's reading God says that He will not only pour out His grace on the land, but also a spirit of "supplication." Supplication means to ask, to pray, to approach for mercy. Like us, the people in Zechariah's time could not seek forgiveness on their own. Trapped by sinful natures, they could not see God without His help. Jesus sometimes said that any of those who had the "ears to hear, let him hear." God gives the gift of spiritual ears and eyes. They are not naturally attached to our heads at birth.

Writers of the New Testament quoted Zechariah around forty times, so it is likely that commentators are correct when they cite verse 10 as a picture of the piercing of Christ. That is the hardest of the realities of our sin to face or understand. It was not only Zechariah's listeners who brought about the piercing of Christ; it was us all. His piercing was the most terrible consequence of our sin, but it was also God's way of rescue from our sin. The visions of the prophets foretold that the resurrected Christ would rule over a restored nation and world. Jesus makes God's mercy and peace a reality for us.



The Jews struggling to rebuild the temple from the ashes of destruction and we who struggle with the difficulties of everyday life have something in common. God has promised us a spirit of grace and a spirit of supplication. We will know God's grace because through Him our hearts will be opened to ask His forgiveness for our failure, knowing that through the unwarranted and willingly-given death of Christ on the cross we have an unending life with Him.

Learn more about God's mercy and love in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa West Education Committee

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Zechariah 12:7-10

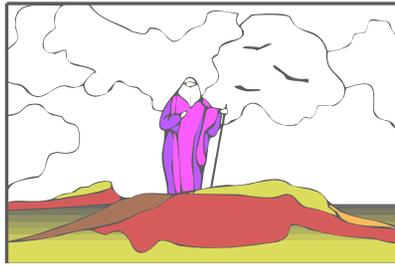


1. Zechariah is one of the minor prophets of the Old Testament. See the notes in the Concordia Self-study Bible or another reference. Who is Zechariah? When did he live? What is the context of his message?
2. "That day" is a frequent designation in this chapter (vs. 3, 6, 8, 9). What day is being prophesied by Zechariah?
3. What prophecy of the Messiah is found in vs. 10? Where else in the Old Testament do we find that prophecy (Isaiah 53:5; Psalm 22:16)? How is the prophecy fulfilled? (John 19:37)
4. Zechariah's message comes to those rebuilding Jerusalem and restoring a kingdom that had been decimated. What words of hope did the people hear (vs. 8, 10a)?
5. Sometimes we find ourselves "feeble" (vs. 8) and hopeless. How does this text encourage us at those times?
6. The theme of the book of Zechariah is encouragement. Where do you find the Word of encouragement? To whom can you be a Zechariah this week offering a message of encouragement?

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 20:7-13

Jeremiah was not a popular preacher in his time. His job was to proclaim the people's sinfulness and disobedience, and the coming judgment from God. For some reason, no one wanted to hear what he had to say. At times Jeremiah's mission was frustrating and depressing. He had even been beaten and placed in public stocks to be ridiculed by those who passed. There is a common belief among Christians that if the message of God is presented in a loving way, there will be no strife and no rejection. Jeremiah's experience proves this an incorrect belief. Though he sometimes complained, Jeremiah reflects his true commitment to God in verse 9 where he first voices the possibility of not proclaiming God's word and then tells how impossible that would be, "...in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in." Though much of his message was hard, Jeremiah also proclaimed God's love and mercy to his nation. Along with the bad news, he always



offered hope. When the nation was about to be conquered and exiled, Jeremiah bought property in Jerusalem as a witness to the people that they would return.

Like Jeremiah we live in a world that does not want to hear about its rebellion and God's authority, and sometimes we try so hard to share

God's love that we forget that the world also needs to hear about the rebellion and the sinfulness in which it chooses to dwell. Jeremiah and other great prophets of his time knew how to teach and at the same time give comfort. Peter did the same. In his sermon at Pentecost he proclaimed the great sin of the people to them, and then shared God's love and free salvation with them.

That is our challenge—How to chastise, inform, and love the world in which we live. God loves this world and hates the sin that goes on within His creation. We need to share that with people that just plain don't want to hear about the sin or the love. But, like Jeremiah, God's word burns in our hearts and must be told.

Have you ever been in a study of the prophets of God?

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 20:7-13

1. What does Jeremiah have to complain about? (Jeremiah 20:1-2) See the Concordia Self-study Bible note on vs. 7 or check another reference to learn about Jeremiah's frequent complaints.
 2. What seemed to be the immediate results of Jeremiah's preaching? (v. 8, 10)
 3. Why couldn't Jeremiah stop sharing God's Word? (vs. 9, 11)
 4. Why could Jeremiah still praise his God? (vs. 13)
- For Family Reflection
5. Do you ever complain? Does it sometimes seem that the faithful are not rewarded?
 6. For what do you praise God?



Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

“Since Christ is now my Lord, I am no longer the center of my life.” How many of us can willingly make that statement without feeling fear or doubt in our hearts? Paul spends the early verses of this chapter saying exactly that. Whatever people might think of his actions or his teaching is irrelevant. What counts is who God knows Paul is and what Paul may be able to persuade men to believe about Christ. All of Paul’s being is compelled, by his love for Christ and Christ’s love for him, to tell the world about the reconciliation that has taken place between God and man.

Paul says that the true joy that is left in this life is to please God. He says that his desire is to be “home” with his Lord. Paul was indeed a rare person—to be able to look into the certainty of his death without fear because he was certain of his salvation. Christ was the center of life for Paul.

So we find ourselves at verse 14, today’s reading. Here Paul tries to persuade his readers, and us, of what it means to be changed from God’s enemy into God’s servant. Do we really understand what Paul is saying here? That we have been reconciled, or brought back, to God by the death of Christ; that in this reconciliation we have become Christ’s ambassadors to the world?

Many Christians seem to believe that being reconciled to God is the end of the story. Jesus has died for my sin and now I am bound for heaven, period. Paul says that this is not the attitude that God expects from a renewed and reconciled servant.

Paul says to the contrary that “the love of Christ controls us” (vs.14); and “He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.” (vs.15) Finally in today’s lesson Paul says, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us...” (vs.20)

This is not just a directive from Paul that we must tell people about Christ. It is an appeal to recognize that we are new persons in Christ ready to do His will rather than our own. In order to do that, we must be willing to make Christ the center of life. In doing this, the entire world will be able to see the reality of His love.

Learn more about serving Christ in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

1. How is the love of Christ described in vs. 14-15? Who are the recipients of His love?
2. What does it mean to look at someone from a “worldly point of view” (vs. 16)? What other viewpoint is there?
3. What does “reconciliation” mean? Are we reconciled with God? How? What does this reconciliation with God mean for our relationships with other? Is there somehow with whom you need to be reconciled for Christ’s sake?

For Family Reflection

4. What is an ambassador? What does it mean to be Christ’s ambassador? (vs. 20)
5. Review Luther’s Small Catechism (The Significance of Baptism, LW, p. 303). When did we become new? How was the old taken away? How are we renewed each day?
6. What is the reality of Christ’s love compelling you to do?

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Paul wrote these words to Christians. Of course, unbelievers would need to hear how to act with each other and be reminded of what actions are acceptable and which are not—but Christians?

It is so easy to slip into the world's ways, even for many of us “born and raised” Christians. When one stops to think about it, the church itself is where we often show our worst sides. Who has not been through, or heard about, a church split? Who has not found themselves involved in some sort of *enmity, strife, jealousy, outburst of anger, dispute, dissention, envy*, or found that they have become a member of one *faction* or other even in the church? (On the positive side, most of us have not dabbled in *sorcery* lately.)

Christ has died for our sin so that we can be assured that when we fall into sin, we are forgiven. However, Paul cautions us not to make falling into sin a daily practice. We are called to higher behavior. When we rely on the Holy Spirit as our constant guide and strength, He will inspire within us better things, better fruit—*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*.

Notice that the fruits inspired within us by the Holy Spirit affect not only our own wellbeing, but affect the lives of those around us as well. God knows what is good for our relationship with Him, those around us, and even good for our very health—as our doctors keep reminding us. The fruit of the Spirit expressed in our lives will be a blessing for our family, friends, community, and congregation. Can you imagine a factional, unhappy congregation in which all the laity, leaders, and pastors exhibit all of the Spiritual traits listed in verses 22-23?

Paul finishes his thought with, “*If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.*” Struggling in our sinful nature we will not live perfectly. However, we are to strive to be God's best. Those times when we fail, we recall Paul's other words to the Galatians—that we are God's adopted children. Even when sinning we remain His own, and He forgives us and lifts us up to begin anew each day!

Learn more about being Christians. Join a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

1. Note the contrast between slavery and freedom. How were we in slavery? When were we freed?
2. Note the contrast between life in the flesh and life in the Spirit. What's the difference?
3. Picture the “walk by the Spirit” (vs. 16). Where are we walking? Who's walking with us? What's the walk like?

For Family Reflection

4. We have a “catalog” of sins in vs. 19-21. How does this listing apply to you? What other sins would be included in your personal catalog?
5. Which Spiritual “fruits” are evident in your life? Share with others (family members, small group members) the fruits that you see in their lives.
6. How do we sometimes “bite and devour one another” (vs. 15) in our family, places we work, neighborhood or even the church? What happens when we eat away at others (or they eat away at us)? What is God's direction to us in vs. 13-14?

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 9:35-10:20

Matthew says that Jesus had compassion on the multitudes that followed Him because, "...they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd." Shortly after this, Jesus sent the disciples out as His witnesses. He gave them authority to cast out unclean spirits and heal sickness and disease. Some of us daydream about how great it would be to have a miracle-filled ministry like that! But that physical healing and casting demons wasn't the primary task of the disciples. God granted physical miracles in order to confirm that the deeper message concerning Jesus the Savior was really true!

Jesus said, "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Jesus indeed had compassion for the physical ills of His people, but His deeper concern was for their spiritual distress; their eternity. Remember Matthew's words, "...they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd." Times haven't changed. How many of the people surrounding us are like sheep without a shepherd, wandering from idea to idea, mountain to valley, all the while hoping to find something that will have true meaning in their lives?

Jesus' disciples, and we too, were called to minister and witness as they went on with their everyday lives, not just at special times. In 10:7, the Greek implies, "While you're going..." Your Bible may say, "And as you go..."

Like Jesus' early disciples, we are called by God to be ministers and witnesses of the Gospel. Jesus says to us to keep watch for the lost sheep as we go about our busy lives; keep seeking to comprehend the need and loneliness in those around us.

It seems that the news today is filled with comments like, "I never knew he felt that way"; or "I was so shocked to think that she could do such a thing." Our culture is becoming a place of confusion; self-isolation; and the disastrous consequences of each. Our land is in need of God's love. Our neighbors are God's "harvest" and we are called to be workers in their behalf, witnesses to them that there is hope, perhaps even making an eternal difference in their lives. It is God's miracle when one sheep finds peace, but it is our privilege to assist our Shepherd.

Learn more about the need for God's love in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 9:35-10:20

1. List the twelve disciples. Which disciples were most familiar to you? Which disciples were relatively unknown by you?
2. At this point in their training to whom were the disciples sent (vs. 5-6)? Why did Jesus limit their audience at this time?
3. According to Jesus' instructions what was it going to be like to be Jesus' witness? What would be the challenges? What would be the rewards?
4. What does it mean to be "shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves"?

For Family Reflection

5. We may worry that as Jesus' witnesses we won't have the right words to say. What promise does Jesus give in vs. 19-20? How is His promise helpful to you? Can you think of a time where God gave you the right words?
6. Where is God sending you as His witness? What fears do you have? What challenges have you met? Have you been ridiculed or persecuted? How has God blessed your journey as His disciple?

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 6:1-13

Even Jesus “wondered at their unbelief.” Jesus visited His home town of Nazareth to teach. He was rejected by most.

We are tempted to blame them: “How could they not accept and trust Him?” What about us? Do we really believe that Jesus can do mighty things in our lives? Or do we accept that Jesus is our Savior, our “pass” into heaven, without recognizing that He is our Lord and God today?

There are two gifts from Jesus at work in our lives. One is justification—that is, our reunion with God; the forgiveness of our sin through the death of Christ on the cross. The second gift, the one that we often leave unopened and unexplored, is sanctification—the process of becoming more like our Master every day.

When we fail to seek Jesus in our daily lives, we fail to proclaim Him “Lord.” While our justification is secured by the gift of faith, our sanctification can lie motionless for years. When we fail to yield to the Holy Spirit to guide us and provide our needs, we end up trying to run on our own power (which is at best questionable) and missing out on growing stronger in Christ. At such times, do we, like the people of Nazareth, cause Jesus to wonder at our unbelief?

On the other hand, what about those who believed Jesus and became His companions—the apostles. His message to them can be summed up as “Keep moving and telling the good news to anyone who will listen.”

It wasn’t just the apostles that He sent. He sends us too. Not just the pastors or the elders, but we—the pew sitters.

We are to share the Good News with our friends. When did you last share Christ with an unbeliever? (Swearing doesn’t count).

Speaking about our faith isn’t easy, but few will discover our faith in Christ through osmosis.

Only God has the power to make you and me tellers of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Ask Him!

Join a regular Bible study—it will change your life!

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 6:1-13

1. The Gospel writer refers to Jesus’ hometown. What place was known as His “home”? (Mark 1:9; Luke 2:39-40) What do you think Jesus’ life was like growing up in His hometown?
 2. What prevented those who knew Jesus best from believing in Him and worshipping Him?
 3. What instructions did Jesus give to the Twelve? What were they to do if their message was rejected?
 4. How do we know that the disciples’ mission was “successful”? Who or what was the source of their power?
- For Family Reflection**
5. Why do you think the disciples went out “two by two”? Can you think of a time where the presence or support of a partner was important to you?
 6. To whom is Jesus sending you? Where is He sending you? What power does He give you?

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 9:51-62

How often do we excuse ourselves from the difficulties of truly following Jesus? How often do we decide that God doesn't really expect us to make sacrifices for Him if it would be inconvenient? Of course, God doesn't ask us to lay lambs on altars, but He asks us to serve Him in this world. He asks us to love the unlovable, to serve the undeserving, and to stand firm for Christ in all that we say and do. Somehow, we usually find more urgent priorities to occupy our time. Besides, Jesus can't possibly understand how hard it is to get all of our responsibilities accomplished.

Today's passage says, "He [Jesus] resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem." The time had come for Him to endure the death He had chosen, and He would not be swayed from His task.

"Resolutely" tells us that this was not easy for Jesus. As the Son of God, He could have walked away, leaving us condemned and hopeless. After Satan first tempted Jesus, the Bible says that the Evil One withdrew "until a more opportune time" (Luke 4:13). How many more times did Jesus face and defeat Satan's temptations to give it all up? Instead, Jesus chose to continue toward the Cross.

In the second part of today's gospel reading, several people try to excuse themselves from following Jesus for various reasons. While we might be tempted to sympathize with them, their reasons for holding back pale in comparison to Jesus' commitment to His people—the very unlovable rebels making up His people.

How about our excuses for our own lack of commitment to the tasks that God sets before us each day? We cannot be perfect as Jesus was perfect, but as He "resolutely" set His face to do His Father's will, how can we not try to emulate Him?

Doesn't He expect us to follow His will in our lives and serve those around us? Doesn't He call us to remember that He has promised to equip us in all things? He is our Lord and our Strength. He can enable us to reset our priorities and place His will at the top of the list, but He will not force us to love Him more than we love ourselves.

Join a regular Bible study—it will change your life!

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 9:51-62

1. What does it mean that Jesus was to be "taken up"? (vs. 51)
Where was he going to? When? Why?
2. Why did the Samaritans ignore Jesus? What was James' and John's response to that rejection? What was Jesus' response?
3. Three "volunteers" seem to come forward (vs. 57-62). Why are they "ineligible" for kingdom service?
4. What does vs. 58 have to say about Jesus' earthly journey?
Why wasn't a place "to lay his head" important to Jesus?

For Family Reflection

5. Do we sometimes have excuses for not following Jesus?
What might be some of our excuses?
6. Do we sometimes want to get even with others (vs. 54)?
What can we learn from Jesus about our own desire for justice?