

## Fifth Sunday after Easter

### John 13:31-35

Do you have love for one another? Jesus said, “A new commandment I give you.” He did not say, “A new suggestion I give you,” nor did He say, “Love one another when the other guy isn’t a jerk.” This is a really tough passage for us to live by, and some people who appear to live by it really don’t.

The word that Jesus used for “love” all through these verses is expressed by John as “*agape*”. It is the love that expects nothing in return; the love that is always selfless. *Agape* is the love that Paul describes in I Corinthians 13, “Love is patient, Love is kind. It does not envy; it does not boast; it is not proud. It is not rude; it is not self-seeking; it is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs...”

We probably fail to obey Jesus’ command most often because it is too difficult and uncomfortable. Real love means that we have to be willing to be honest with one another.

Without honesty, love can become frustrating, because it tries to ignore wrong instead of dealing with it. What is easier? To go to a friend and say that his or her life is beginning to drift away from God, or to just pretend that everything is fine, avoiding any potential for confrontation or anger? Is it easier to love our children by requiring them to attend Sunday School, or to give in to their desire not to miss out on sports participation? Is it really an action of love to fail to tell an unbelieving friend about Jesus? Often in our Christian lives we choose the *easier* path.

Obedying Jesus’ command to love isn’t simple because real Christ-like love isn’t simple. To truly follow Jesus in the way that we love one another means that we must study Jesus’ attitude in His dealings with those around Him. It doesn’t mean challenging our friends in an arrogant manner or spinning on our heel to storm out of the room when our honesty is rejected. Next to honesty, the hardest part of love is summed up in Paul’s words, “Love is *kind*.”

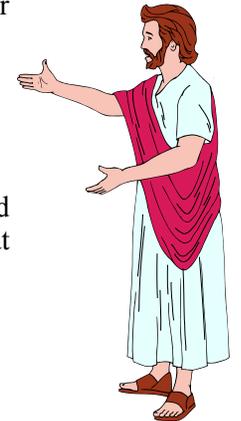
*Learn more about Jesus’ love in a Bible study with your friends!*  
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee.



## Fifth Sunday after Easter

### John 13:31-35

1. Review the earlier verses of John 13. What is the setting of Jesus words in this lesson?
2. In what event was Jesus glorified (vs. 31)? In what sense was Jesus also glorified in His resurrection (see 1 Peter 1:21)?
3. Where was Jesus going that His disciples could not come (vs. 33)? Where has Jesus gone that we can come (John 14:2-5)?
4. What was the new commandment that Jesus gave (vs. 34)? What was new about this commandment?
5. Jesus asks us to love as He loves. Describe Jesus love for us? What does it mean to love as He loves?
6. According to vs. 35 what distinguishes a follower of Christ? Can others see that you follow Him?



## Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 17:1-15

“These men who have upset the world have come here also...they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” (Acts 17:6)

Is it a Christian’s calling to upset the world? Or, was it the calling of a Christian to do this only in the early days, when the Holy Spirit was building the church. Might it be that now that the church is complete and stable, upsetting the world has actually become a sin?



Do we still upset the world, or do we let the world upset us? We find ourselves in times when the world is fighting back at God. According to the world’s view, our churches should be self-maintaining organizations that have nothing to say at all to the people outside of their walls. Christian doctrine and theology shouldn’t be spoken of outside of the Sunday service. Christians should not “proselytize” unbelievers. Christians should not base their political actions on their belief in God and His will for our world. Christians should not label anything as “sin,” and Christians should allow the world to interpret God’s Word for

them. It’s all pretty ridiculous, isn’t it?

The God of the entire universe has revealed Himself to us through Jesus, His Son. He has appointed us as His representatives in this world. He has commanded us to spread the news that Jesus is the Savior, the only Truth, the only Person by Whom we may ever know the Father. Yet the world thinks that He has no right to be heard.

What is our reaction when confronted by these demands from the “world”? Who is the one who is influencing this strange attitude in our world culture? It’s Satan, of course, but since the world rejects his existence, talking about him and his plan with other people is pretty difficult, and Christians don’t like to deal with difficult problems.

It isn’t easy to confront the world these days, even when we’re confronting it with the love and truth of Jesus. It is easier to stay behind our walls of worship; it is easier not to get involved in our communities; it is easier not to “upset the world,” but is that our calling? Our calling is still to “upset” the world with the love and truth of Jesus, and it can be a rewarding and exciting calling—when we allow Him to provide the power.

**Now is the best time to join a Bible study.**

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

## Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 17:1-15

1. A pattern for Paul’s preaching is indicated in this text. Where did Paul generally begin to share his message as he arrived in a community? Why would he begin in this setting?
2. How was Paul’s message received in Thessalonica?
3. How was Paul’s message received in Berea? Why was the response different in Berea? 
4. Find a Bible map of Paul’s missionary journeys. Find Thessalonica and Berea. Which missionary journey included these stops?
5. Compare yourself (and your congregation) to the Bereans (vs. 11). How is the Word received in your heart, your home, your church?
6. “The Jews were jealous.” (vs. 5) What effect does jealousy have in the context of our lives? What are the dangers of jealousy? How do we overcome jealousy?

## Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 8:26-40

God sent an angel to tell Philip to travel to a desert road to meet a eunuch. This man was an official, or high ranking slave, of the Ethiopian court, probably a servant to the queen mother who would have been ruler of the country while her son was the adored object of many ceremonies, since he was believed to be a son of the sun.

One commentator points out that the angel could have instructed the eunuch about the Messiah, but God did not give the great commission to angels, but to His people. Philip saw the eunuch reading aloud and offered his help. Only the Holy Spirit could have arranged it.

The story reminds us that there were thousands of personal encounters between early believers and individuals who were seeking God, but didn't know where to look. They didn't understand that God had already found them, loved them, and saved them. It was up to God's people to share with them that good news.

We don't know any more about the eunuch. His is just one story among thousands about people being blessed by people sharing the gospel. Jesus knows the story of the eunuch by heart. He once told about a shepherd who dropped everything to find a single sheep who had wandered away and the shepherd's joy in finding it.

Philip wasn't the only one sharing the Gospel. The other apostles were busy telling the story. So was the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met by the well, the healed lepers, the widow of Nain and her son, John the Baptizer's disciples, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Nicodemus and converted priests were telling their stories. These would be joined by Cornelius, Lydia, Eunice, and Lois, and by thousands of other witnesses of God's love. Not many of them were pastors or even church leaders. They were just like you and me. The Holy Spirit arranged their opportunities and gave them the words. One by one, God's kingdom grew, and grows today. You and I are the Philips, the Lydia's, the widows, the sons, and the daughters called to share the Gospel with just one lost sheep, and the Shepherd will make it possible.



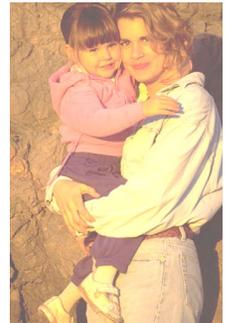
**Bible Study equips us to be Philip-like witnesses.**

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

## Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 8:26-40

1. Who was Philip (See Acts 6:1-6 and Acts 8:4-8)?
2. What section of old Testament Scripture was the eunuch reading (vs. 32-33)? Where do we find the "good news about Jesus" (vs. 35) in this prophecy?
3. While the Ethiopian had been to Jerusalem to worship (vs. 27), his knowledge was still very incomplete. What did he seem to know before he met Philip? What more did he know after Philip's teaching?
4. What is the significance of the Ethiopian's baptism?
5. The Easter message still needs to be shared. With whom has God given you the privilege to share the news of Jesus' resurrection? Is there someone along your path with whom you can share the Savior?
6. The Ethiopian "went on his way rejoicing" (vs. 39). What joys are yours because you are baptized filled with the Spirit?



## Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 13:44-52

Today's lesson ends with the words, "And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."

Isn't it amazing what God can do! The earlier verses of this passage did not seem to portend such a joyous ending. Most of the people had rejected Paul's sermon. The Jews were angry and determined to stop his preaching. Even the Gentiles did not all accept his words; only those who "had been appointed to eternal life". In fact, the apostles were driven out of town by their enemies.

I can imagine what the reaction of most of us would have been. We would have been enraged at such treatment. Some of us would have shouted obscenities at our abusers, others would have thrown a fist or two at the culprits, some might have determined never to preach again. Why did the apostles continue in joy? Why did they continue at all?

To them, the message was far more important than the messengers. Jesus had risen from the dead! There was no more need to fear death because He had conquered it. There were millions who needed to hear the great news, no matter what the cost. There must have been fleeting anger and frustration at the refusal of people to hear the truth, but these faded quickly because the message was so joyous and the messengers so happy to be chosen. There were a hundred towns still to be reached, so the apostles happily "shook the dust from their feet" and moved on to tell others the good news. Yet, don't we still have to ask the question, "Why?" Why did they act so gallantly; why did they persist in the face of frustration? What was their secret?

God can enable us to conquer fear, frustration, and fury. He enabled the messengers then and enables us now to stay focused on the joy of the message that Jesus is risen! He enables us to put the message above the messenger; to resist the temptation to give up, or get angry, or become focused on our own weariness and inabilities. God is the answer to "Why?" for the apostles' joy in life, and He is ours too.

### *Have you explored Easter in God's Word?*

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee



## Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 13:44-52

1. The same message brings different responses. What was the response of the Jews to Paul and Barnabas' message? (vs. 45, 46, 50)
2. What was the response of the Gentiles to the light that had been brought to their life? (vs. 48)
3. What does it mean to shake dust from the feet (vs. 51)? Was this the first time that dust had been shaken from the feet of messengers? (See Luke 9:5)
4. What do you know about Paul's missionary partner Barnabas? (Acts 4:36; 11:22; 12:25; 13:1) You might also want to find out more in a Bible dictionary or other reference.
5. Paul says "We had to speak the word of God to you first." (vs. 46). Why did Paul feel such urgency for sharing the Gospel with the Jews? (See also Romans 9:1-5)
6. What effect did the message of a resurrected Savior have on the believers in Iconium (and other places to which Paul traveled)? (vs. 52) Is the joy of Easter still present in your life and your church? What joys are yours because you are baptized and filled with the Spirit?



## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

Acts 17:1-15

A phrase in today's lesson almost takes on a three-dimensional image in the reader's mind. It is in verse six and a good translation of it is "*These that have turned the world upside down.*" How are you doing at turning your world upside down?

Some might suggest that the dynamic growth of the churches in the days of Paul was special and is no longer needed; that back then the Holy Spirit provided supernatural growth to young churches. However, our congregations today are still called the body of Christ on earth, doing good works in His name and spreading the kingdom of God. That is all that the men and women did in the days of Paul, and they turned the world upside down.

At first one might think that the phrase was written by a believer who wanted to enhance excitement about the new faith, but this charge of radical activity came from the enemies of the traveling preachers. Success seems to have guaranteed ongoing turmoil for Paul, his companions, and others (for instance Barnabas and John Mark) who were teaching and preaching Christ.

Like today, the congregations in the New Testament that were growing and thriving were those who were also causing all sorts of excitement in their communities and throughout the world. What excitement, what challenges, what joy they must have known.

What was their secret? First, they knew and proclaimed the risen Christ. Second, the Holy Spirit was their Guide and Enabler. Third, there was within the Christian community a determination to make a difference in the lives of those around them. They were focused on their Lord *and* on the task at hand. Today we can still make a difference. We can turn our worlds upside down if we stay focused on our Triune God—our Father, our Savior, our Enabler—*and* on our ministry within our communities and into the world as His body at work in our world.

**Learn more about serving God in the world in a Bible study this week.**

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee.*

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

Acts 17:1-15

### **Exploring the Text:**

1. What was Paul's frequent place of preaching (vs. 2)? What was the source of Paul's message (vs. 2-3)?
2. How was Paul's message received in Thessalonica? How was the message received in Berea?
3. Was the Gospel always joyfully received by Paul's audiences? Is the Gospel always joyfully received by today's audiences? Who is always trying to stop the Gospel message? What is God's promise? (Isaiah 55:10-11)

### **Family Table Talks:**

4. Today's stories are part of Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:39-18:22). Find a Bible map of Paul's travels on this trip. What places did he travel to?
5. The Jews were driven by jealousy. What were they jealous of? How is the sin of jealousy part of our lives?
6. Read Acts 17:11. Is your family a "Berean" family? Is your church a "Berean" church?

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

1 John 3:18-24

Beginning in verse 13 John describes those that truly love others and those who might say that they love others, but do not. He says that “He who does not love, abides in death” (vs.14). In vs.17 he asks, regarding one who shows no compassion for a brother in need, “...how does the love of God abide in him?” John challenges his readers, both then and now, to ask ourselves a serious question. Where do we abide? According to the Oxford Dictionary, we could say “Where do we steadfastly remain?” Are we “in love” with other people? Or, do we greet their successes with jealousy, and their needs with silence?

In vs.18 John continues, “...let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

As we live connected to God and in love for one another, we have and need an indispensable Companion. Our own hearts can become overcome with our imperfection. We strive to obey, but we can obey only partly since we are still, after all, sinners. Who will protect us from cursing ourselves for inadequacy and doubting our salvation as we seek to abide in His love?

The Holy Spirit is that indispensable Companion. He is our Guide and our Comforter in all things, especially as we strive to please God with our love for one another and our obedience to His commands. He is our Guide because He points us in the right direction and fills our hearts with a desire to do what God wants and what Jesus illustrated in His own life. He is our Comforter because He reminds us with His gentle love that we do these things not out of fear but out of a fierce desire to steadfastly abide in the Light of the world.

Our salvation is already secure because God’s love does not depend on our actions, but on Jesus’ actions. Jesus has given us the freedom to be God’s children in our lives today as well as in eternity. All of that is taken care of! Yet our acts of love are still tremendously important because they demonstrate our love for God and God’s love for all people. Our acts of love do not keep us in Jesus’ arms, they lead others into those arms.

Learn more about serving God in the world in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

1 John 3:18-24

1. Read John 8:32 and John 14:6. What does it mean to belong to “the truth”? (vs. 19)
2. What Good News does vs. 20 have for guilty consciences and for unclean hearts?
3. What two commands do we have in vs. 23? Can we fulfill the first command on our own? What guides us in living out the second command?
4. Can you know that Jesus is alive and lives in you? How can you know (vs. 24)?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. Which is harder, to love with words or works? What loving words have you spoken today? What loving works have you done today?
6. Does God answer our prayers because of our faithful deeds? (vs. 22) Why does God listen to our prayers and answer them? (Review 1 John 2:1-2)

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

Revelation 21:1-7

In today's reading we are given a glimpse of things that have been and are, and things that will be. John learns that God will dwell among His people, and that the world will be made new by His power. However, even today we know God's dwelling among us. We are in the season of Easter with all of the joy that is ours because Jesus dwelled among us, showed us His divine glory, died for our sin, and was resurrected in glory so that we could have the assurance that what He said is really true. The Holy Spirit continues to dwell within us, guiding us each day of our lives.

We are constantly in the presence and guidance of our Lord, yet we often forget this in the midst of daily frustrations and stress. John knew that his readers also lived in stress and frustration and shared his vision of assurance with them. One of the twelve apostles, he was probably around eighty when he penned his account. He had spent his life helping people understand that Jesus really was the Son of God and eternal with the Father—a truth that came under fire in John's time much as our own. The vision granted him by his Lord became a source of assurance and hope for John's original readers and for us. In it we see what will be and what has even now begun.

Some of the turmoil of John's life surpassed annoyance, bringing danger to him and other Christians. Emperor Domitian demanded to be worshiped as a god, persecuted Christians, and was guilty of forcing many into martyrdom. In addition, John's readers were concerned with high prices, poor job opportunities, bad relationships, traffic jams in the marketplace, and obnoxious politicians. Except for being persecuted by the emperor, their lives were not much different from our own.

Through John, Jesus assures them and us that God will end the tears that He now heals; even death itself will end. John passes to us the assurance that while God has made us new and continues to make us new each day, one day He will make His entire creation new. Jesus assured John and us that all of this is what we might call a "sure thing." *"It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost."* (vs.6)

Learn more about the end of time as we know it in a Bible study this week.  
*A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee*

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

Revelation 21:1-7

1. What do you know about the "old" city of Jerusalem? Where was it at? Why was it significant? What Biblical events happened there? How will the "new" Jerusalem be different?
2. When did God come to dwell with man? (vs. 3) Does He still dwell with us? How?
3. What is the significance of the "Alpha and Omega" (vs. 6) title?

### **For Family Reflection**

4. Based upon this lesson how can we answer the question "What's new?"
5. Why do people often cry at funerals? What promise do we have in vs. 4? Why won't we cry any more in heaven?
6. Who's the bride (vs. 2) in this heavenly wedding? Who's the Bridegroom? Why is this a good picture of God's relationships with His church?

## Fifth Sunday of Easter

John 14:1-14

This passage takes place during the last hours before Jesus' arrest. The disciples are trying to understand what is about to happen, but at this point, they just can't quite get it.

Their love for Jesus is obvious. In the previous chapter Peter asks Jesus, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answers, "...you shall follow later." Peter responds, "Lord, why can't I follow you right now?" The pleading in his voice is almost audible through the written words.

Today's Gospel lesson continues the account—Jesus tells the disciples that He will return and take them to Himself. Thomas is worried, "How do we know the way?" Jesus' answer is one of the most wonderful messages to the world ever recorded—"I am the way..."

Like Thomas, we often worry about how to get where we're going. Jesus tells us that He will hold on to us. He assures the prize awaiting all believers, eternity with our Lord. He is the "way, and the truth, and the life." He tells the truth—"No one comes to the Father, but through Me."

Phillip requests, "Lord, show us the Father..." Jesus replies that in seeing Him, Phillip has seen the Father. Wow! And to think there are people in the world who claim that there are no absolutes! Not so with Jesus—He does not present us with a gray, hazy, fluid picture of Himself. He is very clear. He is the only way to God the Father. He is the only source of eternal and abundant life. He is the only source of absolute truth. Like the disciples, we can't quite figure it all out, but Jesus looks at us in love and says, "I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

Learn more about Jesus and the empty tomb in a Bible study this week.  
*A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee.*

## Fifth Sunday of Easter

John 14:1-14

1. What is Jesus' answer to troubles (vs.1-2)?
2. Where is the "Father's house"? What is the Father's house like? Who is going to be there?
3. Jesus is the \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 6). What is the significance of each of these comparisons?
4. Which two disciples participate in the dialog of this text? Using a Bible dictionary or another reference find out more about these disciples.

### For Family Reflection

5. Have you ever gone the wrong way? How did you find your way back? How do we find our way back when we go away from Jesus?
6. When is it hard for you to trust God? Read or sing "I Am Trusting You Lord Jesus" (LSB #729).

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

John 15:1-8

According to the New American Standard translation of this passage, Jesus uses the words “abide” or “abides” no less than seven times in just these eight verses. He implies it two more times. “Abide” isn’t a word that we use much in our daily lives. It means to “live in” or to “remain in,” as it says in the NIV Bible. It was obviously very important to Jesus in this instance.

How often do we think about living in or remaining in Jesus? How do many Christians define living in Jesus? It may mean going to church on Sunday morning, giving God an hour a week and then turning to more important things. Not that God isn’t important, but He is not in need of immediate attention. So many other urgent things demand attention that there just isn’t enough time in the day to dwell on God

Jesus refutes this attitude. He says that “...apart from Me you can do nothing.” If we walk away from Christ as we leave the church on Sunday morning, we walk away from the Source of our strength for all of life. We cannot “bear fruit” without remaining in Jesus.

St. Paul says that the fruit of the Spirit is more than good works. Bearing fruit is exhibiting “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control....” (Gal. 5:22-23) Who of us in God’s family doesn’t need such things? Which of us can honestly say that we have more urgent things to do than to remain in Jesus in order to be able to bear such fruit? Think of the good works, good relationships, good productivity, and good witnessing that would result from remaining in Jesus seven days a week. We need to pursue our Lord, who is already holding on to us, refusing to let us walk too far from His side.

*We learn to abide in Jesus through God’s Word. Do you make time for it?*  
(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

John 15:1-8

1. Why was the vine analogy a “picture” that Jesus’ audience would readily understand? (See Psalm 80:8-16, Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21)
2. Why is our connection to the “vine” that is Jesus so crucial? What happens if we are connected to Him? What happens when we are not connected?
3. What does it mean to bear fruit? What are some of the fruits that you bear? What is the purpose of that fruit?
4. How does God “prune” us (vs. 2)? Why does God prune us?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. Does verse 7 mean that God will always answer every prayer from everyone? Does God always answer our prayers in the ways that we wish?
6. “I am the vine” is one of several “I am” statements in John’s Gospel. Who is always the “I”? What are some of the other “I am” pictures? Which is your favorite?

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

John 16:12-22

In The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod less than fifteen percent of adults are involved in any type of Bible study. Most do not read their Bible on a regular basis. Some leave it on the end table as a silent witness to guests that they are Christians. No wonder our kids don't want to read the book of God's love.

Two of the men to whom Jesus is speaking in this passage wrote gospel accounts—Matthew and John. They were eye witnesses of Jesus' teachings, miracles, and life. Luke, another gospel writer, says that, "having investigated everything carefully from the beginning..." (Luke 1:3, NASB). Mark's gospel is shorter, but nonetheless an account by one thought to have seen Jesus arrested—in other words, another eyewitness.

Yet we fall into the trap of the world that says the Bible is unreliable, filled with fanciful stories meant only to communicate the essence of Jesus' teachings, and is unrelated to this time and culture. Some of the same critics applaud the "very words" of Confucius, Socrates, or Plato—never doubting their actual words were preserved through the millennia.

Why discuss the Bible, when Jesus was teaching the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be their Guide? The Holy Spirit speaks to us through the words of Scripture. He inspired the men writing the book that we so rarely read.

Unlike the disciples, we do not have the physical presence of Jesus. We cannot invite Him to our home for dinner and a discussion of our problems and joys. We cannot hear His voice as did those who knew Him on earth. But we can hear Him speak in the gospels, and through the letters written by John, Peter, and Paul.

This season we celebrate the proof of Jesus' Being, teachings, and our salvation. We celebrate the resurrection. He did walk out of the tomb. You can rediscover this truth in God's Word.

*Are you part of a Bible study group? If not, please consider joining one.*  
(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

John 16:12-22

1. Jesus suggests a "pause" in His teaching ministry: "you cannot bear them now" (vs. 12); "a little while you will not see me" (vs. 17). What is the context of Jesus' teaching in this chapter? What events would soon interrupt His teaching?
2. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in regard to truth?
3. What is the Holy Spirit's relationship to Jesus and to the Father?
4. How can sorrow turn to joy (vs. 20)? What are the Easter implications and applications of Jesus' words? How has God turned sorrow into joy in your life?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. What are some of the truth "robbers" that you see in our culture? What does the truth of God's Word mean for you, your family, and your church?
6. What are some of the joy "robbers" in your family and church? How do we bring the joy of the resurrection back into life situations?