

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost—July 29

Luke 10: 25-37

This “scribe” or “lawyer” came to Jesus in order to test what He would say to certain questions. Most scribes were Pharisees seeking to assist in the task of proving that Jesus was a false prophet, so it is not unreasonable to assume that the visit was not without an ulterior motive. But, the scene seemed to change as the meeting began. Jesus asked a question in response to the lawyer’s first query.

After reciting the answer that he believed Jesus would want to hear, the lawyer asked Him another question, “Who is my neighbor?” Don’t we ask the same question, and for the same reason? The Bible says that the lawyer wanted to “justify himself.” We may not believe that we can justify ourselves to God, but we sure would like to think that we have done all that we are expected to do as far as loving our neighbors is concerned. Like the lawyer, we would like to limit the definition of “neighbor” as much as possible.

At the end of the parable of the good Samaritan, the lawyer was forced by his own honesty and the power of Jesus’ teaching to admit that one is a neighbor by showing mercy to all those with whom he has contact, even to people like the victim in Jesus’ story—which may not be easy. After all, the robbery victim was a stranger. If he was a Jew, he hated the Samaritan who came to his aid. Having been robbed, he could not repay the generosity of his benefactor. If he was traveling alone on the road to Jericho (infamous for its robber bands and places of ambush) then he was reckless for having placed himself in danger. *THIS* is one to whom I must show mercy? Even more, Jesus said that the Samaritan “had compassion” for the victim.

We don’t know the end of this story. Unlike the meeting with the rich man, the Bible doesn’t say that the lawyer went away in sadness. How about our own stories? How do they end? Can we, through Jesus’ love, show compassion and mercy to *everyone* we meet? If not, how much more vivid does Jesus’ mercy toward us become?

Have you tried out a group Bible study at your church?
A message from your District Education Committee.



Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 10: 25-37

1. Several questions are key to the text. What question of the “expert” expresses our human (and inadequate) drive for godliness? (vs. 25)
2. The words of vs. 27-28 are found in several New Testament texts (Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31). They are based on Old Testament instructions (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). What’s the problem with our response to these laws?
3. What question (vs. 29) generates Jesus’ story?
4. What is the response of the priest to the victim? The Levite? The Samaritan?
5. What is the answer to the question “Who is my neighbor?”
6. When Jesus says to you “Go and do likewise,” where and how is He asking you to respond?



Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 55:10-11

When reading Chapter 55, we can almost hear God pleading with a people that just doesn't get it! We hear the same message in Jesus' words many times as He pleads with His own people to follow Him.

God reveals two sides of His nature in these verses. First we see His compassion. He is inviting people to Himself who pursue the wrong things, think the wrong thoughts, and are deaf to His call, yet His love is obvious and His willingness to accept these sinners is incomprehensible. Second, we see God's power. He not only wants to pardon, He has the ability to do so, and to do so abundantly (vs.7). He pleads with His children to abandon the pursuit of unrighteousness, and to pursue Him. He is the answer to their adversities and frustrations. They can trust Him, but why? In 8 and 9 God says that His thoughts and His ways are different and higher than our own. In verses 10 and 11, He tells one way in which this is true.

Thus we come to today's passage in which God declares that His Word shall not fail in its purpose. Sometimes we think of this passage



as referring to God's Word, the Bible. We think of it in terms of preaching the Word or sharing the Word with others, and this is very true, but it is even more. God is reassuring a questioning people that His ability and wisdom is so far beyond their own that they can only trust Him, not understand Him.

God created the universe by the Word of His mouth. His declaration made all things so. Jesus spoke words of healing and resurrection; miraculously He provided bread and fish to thousands. God's declarations through the prophets became fact; His promises never failed. His words are always perfect. What better example of His holiness and of His power to love and care for us? Who of us can say that our words are everlasting, all powerful, and never evil? We can't—nor can we understand how this is possible. We can only believe and trust, and only God can enable even that. How could we question whether to follow such a God?

Studying God's Word is easier with friends. Join a Bible study group!

A message from your District Education Committee

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 55:10-11

1. God's creative and preserving power is summarized in vs. 10. What is the effect of the physical moisture God provides?
2. How is God's Word like the rain and snow?
3. In today's Gospel lesson Jesus uses another illustration to tell of the power of the Word. Read Matthew 13:8,23. What happens when the Word is planted and watered?
4. What assurance does Isaiah 55:11 give to the pastor as he preaches, to the Sunday school teacher as she teaches, and to the parent who shares a Bible story?
5. How have you seen the power of God's Word in your life? In your family? In your church?
6. In what way are you being watered with the Word?



Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Amos 7:10-15

God's people had suffered a civil war which divided it into two nations. One, called Israel, was north of Jerusalem. The southern kingdom, centered around Jerusalem, was known as Judah, after the line of kings there. The king of Israel to the north built a worship place in Bethel in defiance of the temple in Jerusalem. In this he disobeyed God and the worship in Bethel became corrupt. Amaziah was a priest in Bethel who hated Amos and his message which contradicted his own false teaching. Amaziah carried his poisonous evaluation of the prophet to his king, deleting and adding words to make the report cast Amos in as bad a light as possible.

Amos was a Godly man called by his Lord from his farming and herding business in Judah to proclaim God's word in Israel. His message of coming judgment was not popular. Israel was enjoying a time of wealth and strength and wanted nothing to do with a messenger of coming doom and gloom.

The people of Israel had pursued their own comfort and wealth, rebelling against God in the process. Israel practiced the form of worship, but in fact they held their own power and ability far above God's. Worship was only form and no substance. They believed that if they held to the form of worship that God would be unable to turn away from them.

Amaziah is an example of what we are not to be. Like him, are we sometimes tempted to shove God out of our busy lives? Do we go through the structure of our worship service every Sunday out of habit, out of a desire to "keep God happy"? God loves us; He owns us; He desires that we worship Him in sincerity and love. God calls us to make Him the center of our lives. He calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. He wants us to regularly re-examine our own actions and attitudes in light of His wisdom given through Amos and the other prophets of the Old Testament. We may find that changes are needed in our own lives. After all, growing up in Christ is a lifelong process! (And He makes it possible!)



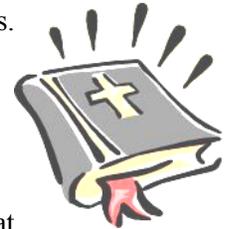
Bible study helps us grow up in Christ!

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Amos 7:10-15

1. Who was Amos (see 7:14 and 1:1)?
2. Who was Amaziah and what was his complaint against Amos?
3. Why would Amos have been prophesying against Bethel (vs. 13)? (I Kings 12:25-30)
4. What gave Amos and his message credibility? (vs. 15)
5. Are these some messengers and messages that God's people choose to ignore today?
6. God uses a shepherd and tree tender to be his instrument. How can God use you to be his messenger? What message is He asking you to share?



Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Deuteronomy 30:9-14

Christians struggle with the “if, then” statements of the Old Testament (and those in the New Testament). They seem to contradict all we know of salvation by grace through faith. They seem to imply that there is some set of rules to obey in order to get right with God and be saved.

Actually there is a set of rules, and if we obey them we will be saved. God presented His Law in the Old Testament. Moses was right in his message to the people that if they obeyed, they would be blessed. If they never rebelled, they would be welcome in God’s kingdom. Contrary to some popular opinions in the 20th century, Moses was not mistaken, nor was he speaking to the God of the Old Testament who was replaced by the God of the New Testament whom Jesus served. If Moses was right, then why do we believe in salvation by grace instead of works? Perhaps in Moses’ time, the answer to the question was clear only to God.

If we look at the history of God’s people in the Old Testament, it’s pretty sad. They believed and then they didn’t believe; they were rescued miraculously time after time, only to turn from God as soon as safety was reached. God kept sending them the same message over and over again—that obedience was necessary, and He added that heartfelt love for God and their fellow men was also necessary. It would seem that the requirements in becoming righteous got even tougher!

In reality, the truth that God was teaching them through their long and difficult journey was that they couldn’t do it! The message of all of the Old Testament “if, then” statements was the ultimate truth that God wanted them to realize. If they could understand just one truth, then they would receive His Son with joy when the time was fulfilled for His coming. That truth was the ultimate “if, then” statement—“*If I* rescue you from your sin through My Son’s death, *then I will* carry you to My presence in My arms.”

Learn more about God’s mercy and love in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa West Education Committee.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Deuteronomy 30:9-14

1. The text is from the last chapters of Deuteronomy. What transitions are about to take place (Deut. 31:1-8; Deut. 32:48-52; Deut. 34)? How does this context contribute to the significance of the message?

2. What promise does God have for His people? (vs. 9) What is the “if” aspect of the covenant? (vs. 10)

3. Were God’s demands impossible or unreasonable? How has God removed all obstacles?

4. How has God placed his Word “near” you (vs. 14)? When was it placed in your heart? When has it come from your mouth?

5. Read Romans 10:8. How does the Apostle Paul apply vs. 14?

6. Moses promised prosperity to God’s faithful people. Is our prosperity always received in material blessings? In what ways are you prosperous?

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 8:15-25

If the “world” was interpreting these verses it might charge Paul with sounding pretty arrogant in his “opinions.” “After all,” the world would charge, “No one can be sure of anything in a world of gray. The world that we live in has no answers that can lead an intelligent man to these conclusions.” They would be right, if Paul were speaking of an assurance given by the world.

To discover Paul’s reason for such confidence, we return to the first verse of chapter 8, where he writes that “*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” Think of it. For those of us who are brothers and sisters of Christ through the Cross, there is the assurance that we are loved by God and that this love is better than anything that the world has to offer. We do not face uncertainty. We eagerly await our Savior’s return. This is not a “hope” in the world’s sense, but an “assurance.” It is a hope already guaranteed by God! Paul says in verse 25 that, “with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.” (NASB) We know that we will rejoice with nature itself in the revelation of Christ.

Those who do not know Christ as Savior have only the assurances that they can create by their own minds or works. As creatures without Christ we can accumulate wealth, power, honor, position, or possessions, but we cannot gain the love and assurance that a loving God can bestow upon us. We cannot earn that love or come to a point of prestige or goodness that will entitle us to it. It is a free gift, yet it is of the greatest value possible.

Paul says that as Christians we have the joy of understanding that our relationship with Christ is more precious and joyful than having money, house, cars, boats, marriage, job, or even this life! We, more than any people in the world, can look at all of the strife of life and face it confidently, knowing with certainty that the glory of Christ will be revealed and that the creation itself does obey His command; that our faith, so silly to the world, is the gift that surpasses all understanding.

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

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 8:15-25

1. Paul continues the chapter’s emphasis on life through the Spirit. How many references to the Spirit do we find in 8:1-17?
2. Find words in this text that describe the sinful human condition (suffering, groaning, etc.).
3. Find Gospel words in this text (hope, glory, etc.)
4. What is the “hope” in which we are saved (vs. 24)? See also Romans 5:3-5; Colossians 1:27

For Family Reflection

5. Do you know someone who has been adopted? When did God adopt us? What does it mean to be adopted into God’s family?
6. Verse 25 states “We wait patiently.” When is it hard for you to be patient? How can the Spirit help us with patience? (Galatians 5:22)

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Ephesians 1:3-14

“Who am I?” Millions of people ask this question every day. For most of them, the answer is elusive. Our whole culture struggles with questions concerning where we come from, what determines our reactions to life, who we will emulate and why. Tragically, some who cannot find an answer to the question, “Who am I?” may even turn to suicide. Depression, illness, and stress can torment those who find themselves wondering if identity even matters. In today’s lesson Paul reminds us that identity really does matter and that only in Christ can we find the answer that brings peace and satisfaction to our yearning to know who we are.

We are each known and loved by God—the most powerful Being in all of time and in all of the universe. He knows even how many hairs cover our heads. He says that we are of much value to Him, even to the point that He sent His only Son to rescue us from the sin that would separate us from our God. He cares that much for us. Even when we think very little of ourselves and believe that we are unnoticed, unloved, and unimportant, we are important enough for God to have come to our world to personally guarantee our eternity with Him.

We were each known by God even before our conception. No matter what our jobs; no matter what our gender; no matter what our financial position, God says that each of us is His child, an adopted heir of His kingdom. We are equally loved. Jesus died for you as surely as He died for your pastor, the president, or the janitor of the local gas station. God knows the homeless mom who prays to Him for strength and He knows the bank president who looks to Him for guidance.

Who are you? You are God’s adopted and beloved child. Are you an important person? Yes, especially in the eyes of Jesus who knew you from the womb and set your value by giving His own life to guarantee your eternity with Him. On those days when the world seems too big to handle; too overwhelming to survive, God is there—not watching you struggle, but diving in to bring you through to victory, because He knows who you are. You are His!

Learn more about God’s love for you in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Ephesians 1:3-14

1. For eight week our New Testament lessons will focus on the book of Ephesians. Using the Concordia Self-study Bible or another resource find out about this book and the people to whom it was addressed. What do we know about Ephesus and the Christians who lived there? What do we know about this letter?
2. These verses are a doxology of praise. Where do we find the work of the Father described? Where do we find reference to the Son? What is the role of the Holy Spirit?
3. When did God choose us? (vs. 4) Why did He choose us?
4. Read the Baptismal liturgy (LW, p 199). When were we “marked” as God’s (vs. 13)?

For Family Reflection

5. Have you been adopted by God? (vs. 5) What joys do you have being in God’s family?
6. The theme for the 2007 LCMS national youth gathering is “Chosen.” Why is that an appropriate theme for teenagers? For anyone? For you?

Saint Mary Magdalene Sunday

Acts 13:26-31

Contrary to the supposed research (not really researched by a certain author who shall remain unnamed in this devotion) Mary Magdalene was not Jesus' wife. Now that we have that absurdity out of the way, what do we really know about Mary?

Mary's name indicates that she was from the town of Magdala on the western shore of the Lake of Galilee. Her name appears twelve times in the New Testament. She was one of the women disciples who gave financial support to Jesus and the apostles. (Luke 8:2-3) The gospels tell us that she was at the tomb on Easter morning, having gone there with at least one other woman to anoint His body with spices. She witnessed what Paul preaches in today's lesson! She was also at the foot of the cross and was one who proclaimed Christ's resurrection to the rest of the disciples. Mark tells us that Jesus had driven seven demons out of Mary.

That is what we know of Mary, though Christianity has many other traditions concerning her. Was she Martha's sister? Some think she was the woman who wiped Jesus' feet with her hair, or the woman caught in adultery, but these are unnamed in the New Testament, so we cannot say for sure.

It is doubtful that Mary Magdalene was any more prominent in the early church than any other serving disciple. If she had been, Luke, the writer of Acts and an author who tells us much of ministering women in the early church, may have told us. So, why is she so important?

Perhaps Mary Magdalene shows us what we are and how we should be. Mary had been a victim of demon possession, but was freed by Jesus. In a way, we also were demon possessed in that we were trapped by Satan in sin. There was no escape for us. We were hopeless and Mary was hopeless—until Jesus came to us and pulled us out of Satan's grasp. Mary became a living witness to the Gospel, as we are called to be.

Mary Magdalene lived her witness by showing her love for Jesus. She served Him with her time, her finances, her life, and her voice. She told the world that Jesus lives!

Learn more about Jesus' plans for you in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Saint Mary Magdalene Sunday

Acts 13:26-31

1. Several times during the church year saints of the church are remembered. Today we remember Mary Magdalene. Read Luke 8:2; Mark 15:40; and John 20:1-2,10-18. Who was Mary Magdalene?
2. How is today's epistle lesson (Acts 13:26-31) connected to the Mary Magdalene story?
3. What is the context of Paul's sermon in Acts 13? What is the essence of his message (vs. 28-30)? How does Paul explain the resurrection of Jesus?

For Family Reflection

4. The Lutheran Service Book hymnal includes a hymn praising God for faithful women (#855). What does the hymn have to say about Mary Magdalene? (stanza 11) Who is your favorite woman in the Bible?
5. When you think of the women in your church or other contexts, who stands out as a faithful woman in your life?
6. Who are some of the other Marys whom we meet in the Bible? What is their role?

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 11:25-30

Why would “babes” be able to understand the truth about Jesus, but not the “wise and intelligent”? What is Jesus talking about when He refers to them?

The “wise and intelligent” that Jesus speaks of are those who are wise and intelligent in their own eyes and in the eyes of the world. The Lord says, “**I** will give you rest.” The wise and intelligent believe that they are able to attain their own rest. No one else has a right to tell them what they need. Jesus says, “Take My yoke and learn from me.” The wise and intelligent will not be yoked to anyone and need no teacher. They already know what they believe and choose to have no further thought about it. They do not realize that the burdens they bear could be lightened by the wisdom, power, and love of Jesus. They do not realize that they don’t have to bear life alone. They do not realize that there is something far greater and more satisfying than being “successful” in the eyes of the world.

What about the “babes”? Elsewhere, Jesus talks of receiving the kingdom of God “like a child.” A relationship with Christ is based in child-like trust. God says, “Step out and off the cliff. I will catch you.” A small child jumps off the dock and into the arms of Dad. Dad is standing in five feet of water. If he misses the catch, the child will drown. But it never occurs to the child that Dad could miss; Dad will be there; Dad knows how to take care of everything.

Adults must be child-like in their trust of Jesus in order to have an exciting and personal relationship with Him. That isn’t naivety or irresponsibility. It is understanding the truth that God is our Creator, Savior and Sustainer. He knows all about us and our lives and our sin. He saves us at no cost, except to Himself. He invites us Christians each day to lean on Him, obey Him, love Him and rest our lives in His open arms.

Is Bible study on your “to do” list this week?

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

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 11:25-30

1. What advantage do little children have over the “wise and learned”? How is this statement consistent with Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:3 and Matthew 21:16?
2. How does vs. 27 explain the relationship between the Father and the Son?
3. How does vs. 29 explain the nature of Jesus? What evidences of this nature do we see in other instances of Jesus’ ministry?

For Family Reflection

4. What makes you weary? What promise does Jesus give to us when we are weary?
5. What is a yoke? What “yoke” does Jesus put on us? How does this yoke feel? Why don’t we want to take it off?
6. Jesus begins this prayer with praise. For what do you praise your Heavenly Father?

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 6:45-56

Before discussing the spiritual message of today's passage, you have a question to answer—and it is a serious one. Did Jesus walk on the water?

Many Christians today would reply, "Of course not—not *really*." It all comes back to a question Jesus asked the disciples at another time in His ministry—"Who do you say that I am?" You see, if Jesus' separation from God on the cross did not really pay for all the sins of mankind; if He did not walk out of the tomb, even if He were not born of a virgin, then His ministry is of no more value than that of Mahatma Gandhi or Confucius. His religion, as many in our world already proclaim, is no more real than Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Scientology.

But, if you believe that He, as one Person, could pay for all sin; that He did walk out of His tomb; that He was born of a virgin; then why would walking on water seem so impossible? Just a thought.

The apostles were terrified at the sight of Jesus walking past them on the rough seas. Then Jesus calmed them and the sea. He again demonstrated to them that, far from fearing Him, in Him they could always find peace. He was still teaching them that He was the Son of God, their Savior, and their Master. He would get into the boat with them, no matter how impossible the situation seemed. He would provide the answers to their confusion. He will do the same for us.

Verse 52 says that the apostles' hearts were "hardened". Commentator John D. Grassmick has an answer for this difficult verse. He says that they were not hardened like the Pharisees, but were still finding it difficult to realize that the Son of God was their traveling companion and teacher.

It is wonderful to know that even the apostles could be as foggy as we are at times. Happily, we can come to know what they came to know: no matter how hopeless life seems, Jesus keeps loving us, encouraging us, answering our doubts, and helping us know Him better. He really was and is the Miracle Worker, the Son of God, the Man who walked on water.

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

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

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 6:45-56

1. What does Jesus do after a very busy time of earthly ministry? (vs. 46) What can we learn from Him?
2. What was the disciples' first reaction to the stormy seas and the "ghost"? What was Jesus' solution?
3. Why were the disciples still ignorant about their Master and "amazed" by His power?

For Family Reflection

4. At what times in your life have you been afraid? How do Jesus' words in vs. 50 help you?
5. If you could approach Jesus for yourself or for another (vs. 55) what would you seek of Him? What promises does He give you?
6. The lessons for the past four weeks have come from Mark chapter 6. Review the events of this busy chapter. What did you learn about Jesus?

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 10:38-42

“Mary” and “Martha” are two people who are discussed in some of the best selling books on the shelves today. Oh, you may not see their names in many of these publications because these loving women are more often referred to by terms like “left-brained” and “right-brained,” “organized” and “disorganized,” or “great housekeeper” and “don’t go over there before you call.” In our Bible studies we delight in comparing ourselves to one or the other of these New Testament women probably more than with any other people in Scripture.

Some wonder if Jesus is trying to tell them that they shouldn’t keep a neat house, while those of us who have been disorganized, right-brained strugglers all our lives delight in this passage and zealously proclaim, “See! Even Jesus says that it’s okay to let the dishes go and find a spot to procrastinate!” But, I’m sure that as much as Jesus delights in our enjoyment of Mary and Martha, He has an important teaching for us in this passage.

Jesus talked to Mary and Martha and the other people in the house that day about priorities. His message for them is perhaps even more important to us today. Our lives are filled with an overload of information, tasks, responsibilities, and desires (even for those of us who aren’t all that concerned about a neat house or a balanced checking account).

Not one of those things is bad for us unless it begins to crowd out our time with Jesus. Martha had placed preparing her plans for her Guest above meeting and visiting with Him. If you are among the many over-stressed pastors, teachers, greeters, leaders, elders, musicians, etc. in our churches, or a parent or company mail clerk, you may identify with the problem.

Whether our inborn natures lead us into being Marys or Marthas, our prayer each morning should be that Jesus will keep our lives focused on Him, and that sitting quietly at His feet will always be at the center of our lives.

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

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

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 10:38-42

1. What were Martha’s priorities? How did she try to make her priorities also those of Mary?
2. What were Mary’s priorities? How does Jesus affirm those priorities?
3. Where else in Jesus’ ministry do we meet this family? (See John chapter 11) What good news did Jesus have for Martha (John 11:25)? What miracle did Jesus perform for the family?

For Family Reflection

4. Jesus noted that Martha was “anxious and troubled about many things” (vs. 42). What makes you anxious or troubled? What message does Jesus have for you?
5. What’s the “one thing necessary” (vs. 42) that Mary chose? When and where do you take time to listen to Jesus? What distracts us from listening to Jesus?
6. Is it wrong to try to be hospitable like Martha? Do we need people to make meals, clean rooms and in other ways serve others? What is Jesus’ reminder to us?