

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost—August 5

Luke 10:38-42

Mary and Martha — 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 this pair of loving women is more often referred to by terms like “left-brained” and “right-brained,” “organized” and “disorganized,” or “great house keeper” 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 of 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 over a neat house or a balanced checkbook). Not one of these things in itself is bad for us, unless it begins to crowd out our time with Jesus. Martha had placed preparing for the Guest above meeting and visiting with the Guest. If you are among the many over-stressed pastors, teachers, greeters, leaders, elders, musicians, etc. in our churches, you may identify with the problem.

Whether the nature with which we were born lends us to 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 a part of our day.

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

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 10:38-42

1. Who else lived at the home of Mary and Martha? (See John 12:1-3). What was the name of the village?
2. Describe Martha. What are her admirable traits? What are her shortcomings? (See also John 11:20-27)
3. Describe Mary. (See also John 11:28-32 and John 12:3)
4. What is the “one thing needed” (vs. 42)?
5. Jesus was blessed with this friendship in Nazareth. How do these relationships help us understand Jesus’ human nature?
6. Are you more like Martha or like Mary? In what ways can you be more attentive to Jesus’ words?



Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 44:6-8

“Is there any God besides Me, or is there any other Rock? I know of none.” (vs.8) Yet, man continues to pursue His own gods, gods that he builds with his hands or imagines in his heart.

Today’s culture in America may answer the question of why man (and woman) continues to turn from the true God in order to pursue false gods. Idols are no longer just the money, possessions, or power of the last fifty years. These replaced the obvious idols of Isaiah’s time, and have in turn been replaced themselves.

Today’s false gods don’t often include fame and fortune. Family, friends, and knowledge all outweigh these for younger adults seeking idols, but our idols do again include stones. Native American/Far Eastern cultists (combo-religions if you will) go to desert parks and rearrange the stones in order to draw power from the universe. Feminist cultists pursue the worship of Mother Earth. But perhaps the most telling of the false gods in our society today has nothing to do with objects.

The most dangerous idol today is *me* because *I* believe that *I* am evolving into godhood. Many Christian sci-fi fans have noticed that the heroes of the future (via StarTrek or Isaac Asimov for example) have outgrown the need for gods because they have at last understood that they too shall evolve into what were once perceived to be gods. That thought isn’t voiced only in fiction, but is growing in mainstream world belief. There are also the atheists like Carl Sagan who plainly worship man. He wrote that if we must have a god, why not make it the stars? Are these examples the “disease” or merely symptoms?



What is really man’s object of worship? Rebellion against what he knows to be true in his heart. Paul said in Romans that man cannot miss God, except by rebellion. (Romans 2:5)

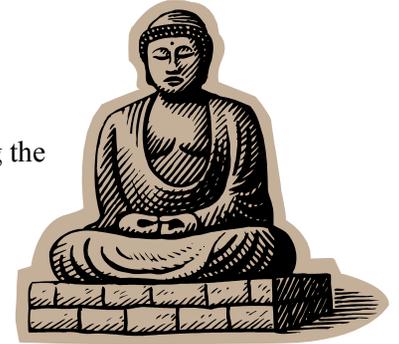
When confronted by the false gods that surround us, God challenges us to compare them with Him. His reality can convince anyone—anyone who is willing to see. We can share with confidence the reality of the *one* True God, and be proud to be His people.

Do you enjoy knowing God? Join a Bible study group!

A message from your District Education Committee

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 44:6-8



1. Read the verses immediately following the text (Isaiah 44:9-11). Why are idols worthless?
2. According to our text in what ways is the LORD different from an idol?
3. List all the titles for the LORD found in vs. 6-8. Which one is especially meaningful to you?
4. What phrase of verse 6 do we also find in Revelation 22:13?
5. How do you personally answer the question of vs. 8 “Is there any God besides me?”
6. Review the First Commandment and its explanation.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 23:1-6

The leaders of Judah failed miserably and they were without excuse. Their rebellion against God led to the triumph of Babylon and the exile of God's people. Their belief that God could be forced to protect His city and His people if they observed their religious traditions with empty hearts; that He would honor them despite their greed and devious actions, brought them down. Their attitude that the Lord would never punish them even when they worshiped other gods beside Him is unimaginable to us. What they had become on the inside was even worse than what they were on the outside.

How would God solve the problem? He would remove His protecting wall from His people so that they would be brought low by their enemies and turn back to Him for wisdom, strength, and salvation. But when it was all over, the kings of Israel were gone forever. Leaders who rose up in the last few hundred years before Jesus' birth were ineffective and frequently corrupt and sometimes gullible. In 63 A.D. it all ended when Rome annexed Jerusalem and its surrounding territory.

So, why is all this history important? Because it was all part of God's plan. God Himself was about to provide a King to His people. The Messiah was coming; the righteous Branch; the Lord Our Righteousness; the Christ. The people were sure that Jeremiah meant that Israel would return to its political glory and again be a powerful nation, but God had something better in mind.

Scholars argue about whether Israel will physically find peace in her own land, or if the joy of peace is meant to refer to the Jews who believe in Jesus as Messiah with Gentile Christians. That question is in God's hands and only He has the perfect answer. What we can know without doubt now is that in Christ we have our perfect Shepherd King who cannot be corrupt, or self centered, or unwise, or uncaring, or unable. We do not have to know fear or terror anymore because He is our Savior, Master, Shepherd, and eternal Lord. In His arms we can rest.



Now is the best time to join a Bible study.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

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Jeremiah 23:1-6

1. What criticisms are directed against the “shepherds who tend my people”? (vs. 1-2)
2. What was God's answer to unfaithful shepherds? (vs. 3) What rescue would God provide for the people in exile? What ultimate rescue would God provide for all people?
3. Read John 10:11-18. How does Jesus fulfill Jeremiah's prophecy?
4. Who is the “Righteous Branch”? (vs. 5) What would it be like to live under His reign?
5. What do these words say to pastor/shepherds who care for the flocks today?
6. Can you think of a time where you have been “afraid or terrified”? What does it mean to you have a perfect Shepherd to care for you and to keep you safe?



Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 18:1-14

Abraham was sitting in the shade of the tent awning to escape the heat of the day. When he squinted out into the sun and saw strangers coming, he didn't know that it was the Lord. He did what he would have done for any visitor. The coming of friends or even strangers in those days was a rare privilege. According to custom Abraham had Sarah prepare a feast. Sarah would not have had to do all the work. Being wealthy, there were servants and family members to help. Sarah, however, would do all of the directing. She even had time to stand near enough to her husband and visitors (though out of sight) to keep track of the conversation.

The Lord, now that all was settled and He knew that both Abraham and Sarah were listening attentively to hear the news of the day, calmly dropped His bomb. The elderly couple would bear a son. Sarah had given up on becoming a mother and had already given her maid to Abraham to bear children. She was far beyond childbearing age and Abraham was 99 years old! It is easy to imagine both her expression of doubt (today she might have muttered, "Yeah, right") and her expression of surprise and fear when the stranger accused her of doubting. [*Just to be fair to Sarah, Abraham had already been told the news (see chapter 17) and apparently didn't tell her. He may also have had doubts.*]

The wonderful message in this lesson is in verse 14, and is our great encouragement still today—"Is anything too difficult for the LORD?" God has answered that question many times over the centuries. His ultimate answer to the question came in Jesus. We, even we, the sinners who were born sinful and still continue to sin were saved by God. God answered our dilemma by covering us in the blood of Christ. Sarah's doubt never exceeded our own, even though we may chide her for it. She, Abraham, and we have all been saved by the Son of God. We know this because we know that nothing is too difficult for our Lord.

Learn more about God's almighty power in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa West Education Committee.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 18:1-14

1. Review God's previous promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 15:1-6). What was God's plan through Abraham?
2. How had Abraham and Sarah already taken some matters into their own hands? (Genesis 16) How effective had their solution been?
3. Abraham and Sarah's response is a lesson in the hospitality of their culture. What actions showed their kind and sincere welcome to their guests?
4. What was the message to Abraham and Sarah? What was Sarah's response?
5. Who are the three "mystery" visitors? (See the Concordia Self-study Bible—or other reference—for notes on vs. 2. Also see Genesis 19:1; 18:1; 18:22; 16:7.)
6. What "hard" (vs. 14) or seemingly impossible things has God done in your life? Share your blessings with others. Share your thanksgiving with God.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 8:26-27

Last week we talked about the wonderful assurance that is ours in Christ. It is such a remarkable existence that we live; to know that God is real and that He really is “on our side.” Sometimes, though, life is still hard. There are days when we fear what might be coming next; when we wonder if God really does know what is best for us. How do we handle times like that? Paul says that we never face those times alone.

The Holy Spirit not only dwells within us, He cares for us. Paul reminds us that He even prays for us “with groanings too deep for words.” In other words, at those times when we are too tired to even ask God for help, or are too confused by our situation to know what to pray for, God Himself intercedes with Himself on our behalf. (No, it doesn't make sense, but this is another divine action that will be explained to us in heaven.)

In verse 27 Paul reminds us that the Holy Spirit will intercede for us with the Father only according to the Father's will. That is a great comfort for us who often hesitate to even try to talk to God about a difficulty for fear that we will try to persuade Him to follow a path of our own making instead of His! In these confusing times, it is wonderful to know that the Holy Spirit knows our hearts, including both our needs and our wants, and also dwells with the Father and knows His perfect will for us. What a joy—to know that we are loved and guided by such a God!

What can we do to deserve such a gift? Nothing. What is our calling from such a God? To respond to His kindness by telling others about His love. We are to share the marvelous assurance that God is real; that He loves even the worst of sinners and that He is in control of any situation; that there is a Savior who has paid for all of our evil thoughts and even inclinations; that the Holy Spirit wants to draw all sinners into the arms of a loving Lord. How could we not respond to the call to share such remarkable news?

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

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 8:26-27

1. Who is groaning in verse 23? Who is groaning for us in vs. 26?
2. What are some of the weaknesses which we experience? How does the Spirit help us in our weakness?
3. What is God's will (vs. 27)? Review the Third Petition explanation in Luther's Small Catechism.
4. What is the Spirit's relationship to the Father and to the Son? Review the explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles Creed to celebrate the Spirit's relationship to us.

For Family Reflection

5. Are there times when it hard to find the words for prayer? How is it comforting to know that the Spirit “intercedes” for us?
6. How does the Holy Spirit bless and enrich your family?

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 2:13-22

In the second chapter of Ephesians we find a frequently used passage concerning salvation by grace through faith “and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” (vs. 8)

In Verse 13 is the fourth use of the word “formerly” (NASB) in this chapter. Paul is emphasizing that by God’s grace we are no longer who we used to be. We have been changed. One can almost hear the impassioned evangelist speaking the words.

In this letter to the Gentile Christians of Ephesus Paul emphasized that “formerly,” before our adoption by God, we lived in hopelessness. We were powerless to change our sinful habits, or to love anyone but ourselves. We were not only enemies of God, but due to our sin-nature we were enemies of one another.

Now we are different. Because we have been saved by grace through faith, we are able to respond to God’s call to love one another and to live as the Holy Spirit directs. We are able to emulate our Lord Jesus.

The walls and cornerstones in our lives have changed. Our own wants and desires once formed the cornerstone of life. On that base, walls that separated us from God and one another were built; walls built of God’s Law which we could not appease and walls built of our own selfish ambitions. Those walls trapped us in a courtyard ruled by Satan. Now, Paul assures us, the wall of the Law is overcome once and for all, and the walls of our selfish ego are coming down—not because of our own will, but because the cornerstone has been supernaturally replaced. Christ is now the Cornerstone on which we build our lives.

How are your walls coming along? Is Jesus the firm base that controls your life? If He is then the walls of selfish concern are coming down (a day-by-day process for most of us, not a sudden crash), replaced by open-space living, a willingness to love others; to see others with the eyes of Christ. That doesn’t mean that we accept the sin-filled world in which we live without question. It means that we are willing to reach out to make a change in our community, to help others, to share the blessings that God has given us, to invite the “formerly” unlovable into God’s arms.

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

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 2:13-22

1. The “but now” of vs. 13 implies a “before” condition. Read vs. 11-12. What was our previous situation? “But” what about “now”? What changed things?
2. The text has some interesting illustrations. Find the wall, the foundation, the building (and perhaps others). What do all of these illustrations have in common?
3. Did Jesus come only as a messenger of peace (vs. 17)? How does vs. 14 add to the meaning of His message?

For Family Reflection

4. What does it mean to you to have Jesus as the cornerstone (vs. 20) of your life, of your family’s life?
5. Can you think of a time when you were far away from God (vs. 13)? How did God bring Himself closer to you again?
6. What does a “dividing wall of hostility” (vs. 14) look like? How did God take down the wall? Do we still put up walls between ourselves and others? Can God still take down those walls?

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Colossians 2:6-19

Paul tells the Colossians that since they are “firmly rooted” (NASB), “being built up,” “established” in their faith, “instructed,” and “overflowing with gratitude,” they are able to “walk in” Christ. They are able to live their faith.

Being able to live one’s faith, however, doesn’t mean that it is an easy journey. Paul adds “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men...” Whether the traditions and ideas of men be those of false doctrine or the false claims of the secular world, they create temptations that enter our lives and minds daily.

So, Paul goes on to assure the Colossians and us that Jesus is all that He claimed to be, and that He proved Himself to be. In verses 9 and 10 of today’s lesson Paul, who persecuted the church until being personally confronted by Jesus, states that “in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,...and He is the head over all rule and authority.”

The strength of Paul’s words that follow in verses 11 through 19 is palpable as one reads them. What we have become in Christ is valid! What we are is not an ideal created by the mind of man. It is not pie-in-the-sky wishfulness. Our path is not just one of many religious paths to God. As forceful as the world’s denial has become, it is still a false denial; a desperate denial from a world of unbelievers who refuse to hear the truth. Those who deny Christ’s unique character and mission as the Son of God are lost and will spend eternity separated from God! Unless....

Unless what? What could save such a “crooked and perverse generation” (Phil. 2:15)? Only Christ, the One whom it denies. When we make the time in our lives to become firmly rooted, built up, established in our faith, instructed, and overflowing with gratitude to our Lord, then we can be His tools to reach into lost lives with the truth of salvation, and with the love of the only One who can change our lives. That is our calling. It is why God has blessed us with such an array of assurances in His word. He wants us to be sure not only for our own joy and peace, but so that we can demonstrate the truth of the gospel.

Learn more about who we are in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Colossians 2:6-19

1. Why do verses 9-10 prove that Jesus is true God?
2. “Dead and Alive” summarizes this text. When were we dead? When did we become alive?
3. What does our new life mean for our daily living? What does it mean for the perceptions others have of us? What does it mean for our self identity?

For Family Reflection

4. What familiar picture of the church (vs. 19) does this text include? If Christ is the Head, what parts are we? (See also 1 Corinthians 12.)
5. What does it mean to “abound in thankfulness” (vs. 7)? How do you demonstrate your thankfulness to God? To others?
6. What are some of the traditions in your church? Reflecting on this text, when are traditions helpful? When are traditions a hindrance?

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

In this passage Jesus tells a tragic story. It is the story of people who hear the Gospel, rejoice in the Gospel, but fail to grow in Christ. Each of them gives up for the same reason. Wait, didn't Jesus cite three reasons?

In the first instance, Jesus says the hearer of the Word does not understand and, "the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown..." In the second person the Word takes no root and, "when affliction or persecution arises because of the word..." he falls away. The third person hears the Word, but "the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches..."

Each person in the parable failed for one reason, they gave up. They chose to follow Satan's temptations; the same temptations that beat upon us. Satan doesn't pay much attention to a lost sinner—no need to. But, when the Gospel begins to wake up a sleeping heart, Satan panics. Temptations begin to overwhelm whomever God is pulling near. How people respond to temptations is crucial. Do they devote more and more time to knowing Christ? Or do they give in to the various deceptions that Satan creates? The Holy Spirit takes up residence within us when we believe. Why is it that many choose to listen to Satan instead of God?

Read Luke 10:38-42. It is the story of one of Jesus' visits with Mary and Martha. As Mary sat at Jesus' feet, listening to His words, Martha became quite angry and complained to Jesus, charging, basically, that Mary was wasting her time instead of helping with more important things. Read Jesus' answer to Martha. Sitting at the feet of Jesus – or spending time in study and prayer is the best answer to all temptations. Do you know a "new" Christian? Does it seem that you yourself are battling more temptations than usual? Set aside time for sitting at the feet of Jesus. Do it with a friend. Jesus still has all the answers. He still loves you beyond understanding. He still wants you to know Him better.

Is Bible study part of your Christian walk?

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

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

1. What happened to the seed sown on the path (vs.4)? What happens to the Word when it is not understood? (vs. 19)
2. What happened to the seed sown on the rocky places (vs. 5-6)? What happens to the Word when it does not take root in a person's life (vs. 20-21)?
3. What happened to the seed that fell among the thorns (vs. 7)? What happens to the Word when worries and wealth choke it (vs. 22)?
4. What happened to the seed that fell on good soil (vs. 8)? What happens when the Word is heard and understood? (vs. 23)

For Family Reflection

5. What's happening to the Word that you hear? What kind of "soil" is your heart? What kind of "soil" is found in your family?
6. What do Jesus' words "He who has ears, let him hear" (vs. 9) mean to you? Are your ears working?

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

John 6:22-35

The crowds in this passage sound like teens at a rock concert or fans running after a famous movie star. They were looking for the latest star performer, the one who could give them some trick of magic, like feeding thousands with almost nothing. In our culture today, we don't often follow a celebrity in order to get food or to be healed of diseases. We tend to be shallower, seeking the latest thrill ride, most shocking movie, or more "stuff" that might make us happier people.

Jesus showed great compassion for the people who chased across the lake to see Him, but He also warned them, "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you...." He went on to say that the "work" that His Father required was, "that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

Jesus' message to them and to us might be worded like this—"Don't work so hard to find peace within yourselves. It is a free gift from Me."

Those who are wrapped up in our American culture seem to work harder and harder each year to find a fulfilling life. They've tried everything. They often even know about Jesus. In fact, they love Him as one of the greatest philosophers of all time. They think that He lived a great lifestyle, and they want to be like Him. The only problem is that they are following Him for the wrong reasons, much like the crowds in today's passage.

Jesus (and Christianity) doesn't present a method to use toward acquiring peace with self and with God. Rather, He freely gives us peace with God and within ourselves from Himself. As He said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

Jesus speaks to us as we fellowship in God's Word with friends each week.
(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

John 6:22-35

1. What miracle of Jesus (vs. 1-13) sets the stage for Jesus' teaching in this chapter? What affect did the miracle have on the people's perception of Jesus (vs. 14-15)?
2. What kind of savior were most of the people looking for (vs. 26)? What kind of "food" did the Savior come to provide?
3. According to vs. 28 what is the human inclination towards a relationship with God? According to vs. 29 how do we enter into a relationship with God?
4. What was the comparison between Jesus and Moses (vs. 31-32)? How is Jesus greater than Moses?

For Family Reflection

5. How is Jesus like bread? How is Jesus greater than any earthly bread?
6. The people came looking for Jesus. Where do we find Him today? Where can we bring others to meet Him? What kind of meal does He have for them?

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 11:1-13

Do we need to pray? God knows our prayer before we begin, but He tells us to share with Him our praise and petitions. It isn't something that we fully understand, but it is part of being His children. He says that our prayers affect what happens in our lives and in the lives of our friends, family, and our world. Incomprehensible.

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. That wasn't an unusual request. In those days many teachers composed prayers for their disciples to learn and recite. We still recite the prayer in this passage when we worship each week.

Prayer is so important that Jesus gave the disciples two illustrations of our relationship to God through prayer. In one example even an irritated friend comes to the aid of a visitor who is in need. In the other, even parents who are evil people do their best to give what is good to their children. In contrast, then, how much more will our perfect heavenly Father grant our desires?

Repeatedly Jesus used the terms "shall" and "will" in connection with prayer. Never did He say "maybe." Prayer *shall* be answered.

So, is the good news that we can have anything that we want? No, the good news is that we can have anything that is in God's will for us. In his gospel, Matthew records that Jesus included in the prayer, "Your will be done" (Matt.6:10). Our prayers first center on God and what He would have done in our lives. That's the hard part of prayer.

When we pray, and we should be praying many times a day, God calls us to turn our desires over to Him and trust Him to answer according to His will and not our own. We are called to give up control—to place our children, parents, plans, and lives, into His care. We are called to praise Him for His answers, even when we don't get what we want.

Unbelievers think that prayer is an easy way out; a method for weak people to avoid responsibility. It isn't. Prayer is hard because it is in prayer that we give all that we hold dear into God's control.

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

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

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 11:1-13

1. Jesus' lesson on prayer first of all includes "The Lord's Prayer." How does this text compare with Jesus' similar lesson in Matthew 6:9-13? How does this text compare with the Lord's Prayer we typically say in worship and other setting?
2. What lesson does Jesus teach in vs. 5-8? Why does the friend provide bread even at an inconvenient time? Are our prayers ever inconvenient to God?
3. How is God our Father's response even greater than the response of earthly parents (vs. 11-13)?
4. Jesus says "Ask and it will be given to you . . ." (vs. 9). Do we always get from God what we ask for?

For Family Reflection

5. Review Martin Luther's explanations to the petitions of the Lord's Prayer (LSB p. 323). Do you have a petition that is especially meaningful to you?
6. Read or sing "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" (LSB #770). Why do we have the privilege to "take it to the Lord in prayer"? What is your favorite time and place to pray?