

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost—August 12

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

When we pray, and we should be praying many times each 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. It isn't—Prayer is hard because it is in prayer that we give all that we hold dear into God's control.

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

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 11:1-13

1. What activity does Jesus model in vs.1? Can you think of other times and places in which Jesus prayed?
2. Read (and pray) the Lord's Prayer (vs. 2-4). What new thought or insight comes to you as you offer this Prayer again?
3. What lesson about prayer does Jesus give through the illustration in vs. 5-10?
4. What lesson about prayer does Jesus give through His illustration in vs. 11-13?
5. What assurance and confidence do vs. 9-10 give to you as you pray?
6. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. What "lessons" about prayer do you still have to learn? What questions about prayer do you have?



Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

I Kings 3:5-12

Solomon asked God for wisdom. That in itself seems a wise choice. How many of us would ask for the same? Sunday school classes have discussed that question for a hundred years. Another question to ponder is whether Solomon was always wise.

Solomon loved God and wanted to follow Him faithfully, but just before asking for wisdom, he had formed a political alliance through a marriage with the daughter of the king of Egypt. In doing so, he was inviting false religion into his family and his nation, an action that God had warned against. It wasn't the only time that he would do this. Solomon also failed as a father, leaving the nation to a son that managed to split God's people into two warring factions (a story for another time).

Like Solomon, we ask God for wisdom, but though God has promised that He will honor our request, we just don't seem to be wise, at least most of the time. We pray. We wait for wisdom to fall on our heads. We assume that we have it all together, only to see it all fall apart. Why?

Could it be that wisdom is hard work? Becoming wise is part of our sanctification. Exercising the gift that God gives to us is the only way to see it grow. I may ask God to grant me a healthy body, but if I continue to eat my meals at fast food restaurants, it will be pretty hard for my body to stay healthy. All of God's gifts need to be practiced in order to grow. Wisdom, like faith, is something that only God can give. But He then challenges us to use our gifts and grow. As an example, we all know that we cannot grow enough faith to be saved. It is only by the gift of God that we can have faith unto salvation. Yet, Jesus said to the disciples that if their faith was that of a mustard seed, they could tell a mountain to move and it would. Our Lord was not condemning them, but challenging them and us to grow in our gifts! Solomon loved God and accepted His wonderful gifts, but often failed to use them. God's gifts are meant to be cherished and also exercised, through prayer to our Lord and through practice.



Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

I Kings 3:5-12

1. Who is Solomon? Who is his father? Who is his mother? What was to be his role?
2. How does God appear to Solomon (vs. 5)? Can you think of other individuals who were visited by God in this way?
3. Why does an adult Solomon see himself as “only a little child”?
4. What does Solomon ask for from God? Read I Kings 3:13-14. In what other ways did God bless Solomon?
5. What evidences of Solomon's wisdom do we read in I Kings 3:16-28 and 4:29-34?
6. If God were to come to you and say “Ask for whatever you want me to give you,” what would you ask for?



Practicing our gifts is easier with friends. Join a Bible study group!

A message from your District Education Committee

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 18:20-32

In the verses prior to today's lesson God says that Abraham will be the leader of His people: "For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children to keep the way of the Lord" (vs. 19). Was Abraham a leader? His first words upon hearing God's plan tell us the most.

Abraham's compassion for the cities of the plain demonstrate his second strongest leadership quality. He did not say "Yea, Lord. Zap them into eternal darkness!" Leaders see potential in hopeless situations. They see the possible in the impossible, not because of the power of man to overcome his weaknesses, but because of God's power to build men and women into new creatures.

God said that there was great evil in Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham said that there were also righteous children of the kingdom living there. Abraham did not argue that the idolatrous be spared, but that the righteous be allowed to live and influence the city. The leader "negotiated" God into promising not to destroy the cities if even ten righteous men could be found. He must have had great faith to believe that leaving only ten righteous men in that swamp of sin could make a difference.

Something doesn't sound quite right here. How could Abraham barter God into changing His mind? That's a little scary! Of course, God did not dialogue with Abraham for His own edification; it was for Abraham's growth that God discussed the situation with him. God allowed Abraham to practice and experience his own leadership quality of compassion.

Compassion was Abraham's second strongest leadership quality. What was his first? He believed and trusted his God and sought His will in all things.

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

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 18:20-32

1. What was the "outcry" (vs. 20,21) of Sodom and Gomorrah? Who heard the cry?
2. The Lord said "I will go down and see." Didn't the all-knowing Lord already know the situation? What was the purpose of His visit?
3. At what number did Abraham begin the negotiation with God? At what number did the barter end?
4. What eventually happened to Sodom and Gomorrah? (See chapter 19) How many were rescued? Who was rescued?
5. Where do we see God's mercy in the dialog and in the destruction?
6. What can we learn about prayer from Abraham's conversation with God? Have you ever tried to negotiate with God? How did God bless and direct your dialog?

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 8:28-30

We know and Paul knew that salvation is a free gift from God, due to no deserving qualities of our own. We know that Jesus made this gift possible through His own death and separation from the Father while on the Cross. He suffered the condemnation that we deserve.

However, even in Paul's time there were many who just couldn't accept the simplicity of salvation, but had to somehow account for our acceptance by God in intellectual terms. Paul heard many conflicting opinions on the part that man played in his own path to righteousness. Romans is known as Paul's great theological treatise. One of the things that he explains in Romans is our position as God's children, and how we came to that place.

Some have said that if man (both men and women, of course) does not choose God, then all men must be saved because God wants all to be saved. Others have said that God chooses to save some and condemn others—in other words, some are born to go to hell and some are born to go to heaven.

Paul challenges both of these views. Note that a primary point about today's passage is that man loving God is mentioned only once. Paul says that no matter what our circumstances, those who love God will find that He chooses to cause something good to come out of everything we experience.

However, everything about that loving relationship with God begins with God's love for us, not with our love for Him. Our love for Him is in response to His mighty love for us. One theologian explained it this way: God knows us from before the womb; knows our lives; knows which of us will not reject Him. Because of His enabling, these who do not reject Him are predestined to be like His Son. That likeness is the result of the ongoing process of sanctification, by which the Holy Spirit leads us and guides us into lives that reflect Jesus.

We are foreknown and predestined; we are called God's children and called to be His workers in His world; we are loved and loving; we are justified and will be glorified, all according to God's great plan.

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

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 8:28-30

1. How inclusive is God's providence and direction (vs. 28)?
2. Note the sequence of God workings (vs. 30): predestined, _____, _____, and _____.
3. What is the ultimate demonstration of God's love for us (vs. 32-34)?
4. For what has God predestined us (vs. 29)? See the Concordia Self-study Bible notes or another Lutheran commentary for an explanation of predestination.

For Family Reflection

5. What does it mean to be in the "likeness" of Jesus (vs. 29)?
6. Have there been times where you have wondered about the good that will come out of a seemingly bad situation? What promise does God have for us (vs. 28)?

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

The first three verses of today's lesson present what is perhaps the most difficult task for today's Christians—making our walk a worthy one, conducting ourselves *“with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

Each of us has a gift (or talent) from God. How we use our gifts demonstrates our Christian maturity. The cumulative use of all the gifts among the saints of each church demonstrates the spiritual maturity of the congregation. While all of us should be child-like in our faith, Paul is warning us not to be childish in our relationships with one another or in our service to God.

It isn't easy to be tolerant when a fellow Christian is just plain wrong and won't admit it. It is especially hard not to gossip when we are angry over the stupidity of a co-worker. It is hard to function in our own area of concern when other areas seem more important or more interesting. It is difficult to refrain from anger when things just aren't going the way that we think they should. It is frustrating when people seem to be trying to force us out of our comfort zone for no good reason. It is hard to let someone do the job that God has called them to do without our advice.

That is not to say that we should never assist or advise one another. It is not even to say that rousing discussion should never be part of a church meeting. Paul does say, however, that we must be wise enough—mature enough—to realize when our words and actions are building up the body and when there is danger that they may be tearing it down.

Paul challenges us to be mature, not in age, but in the sense of being Christ-like, knowing our faith, trusting one another, and persevering as a unified body in a very dangerous world. Like the Ephesian church, our faith is also under attack from the world. Paul's words are very much for us—that we be lovers of one another, builders of unity in the church, and mature in our understanding of what we believe.

Learn more about one another at a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

1. Why does Paul call himself a “prisoner” (vs. 1)? Using the Concordia self-study Bible or another reference see the notes on Ephesians 3:1 and Acts 28:16,30.
2. How many “ones” do we find in verses 4-6. How many Saviors are there? How many Gods are there?
3. How many different offices or positions of service do we find in verse 11? According to vs. 12 and 13 what is the purpose of those positions?

For Family Reflection

4. Has anyone ever told you “Don't be such a baby!”? What does Paul mean when he says in vs. 14 that we should “no longer be infants”?
5. Does a Christian ever stop growing? How does vs. 15 answer does question?
6. How is the church pictured in vs. 16? Read 1 Corinthians 12 to learn more about this illustration of the church.

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Colossians 3:1-11

Experts in solving difficulties tell us to remove the “root problem” that is causing disastrous “symptoms.” They know that most of us focus on the symptoms of our dilemmas instead of finding the root problem and fixing it. For example, the reluctance to tithe is a frustration for many Christians. We often blame this on inadequate income, but that is usually only a symptom of the root problem of setting proper priorities. Or, how about the mom who is angry at her daughter for not helping out in the kitchen? Is the root problem the daughter’s disobedience? Or, is the root problem the mom who never had the time to include her in the tasks when she was younger—and less capable? As we strive to overcome the evil traits that Paul lists, seeking the root problem instead of focusing on the symptoms seems sound. As we battle our sinful nature, is there one basic problem that we can find and solve? Would that make the symptoms easier to overcome?

There is a way to resist anger, malice, slander, lying, evil desire, greed, etc. (Of course, we will never totally eliminate these traits—these symptoms—from our lives, but we can defeat them far more often than we do.) Paul says that we do it by putting on the “new self,” the self created and given to us by Jesus. But, if the old self is the root problem that creates our symptoms, *how* do we move away from it and live the life of our new self?

You may think, “But, I can do nothing for it is all up to God. Isn’t He the One that makes me new?” Absolutely! But as His children who are changed and new, He expects us to participate in the process of growing in Him (our sanctification). We don’t automatically demonstrate our new self. Often the new self that God has created in us is pretty invisible to those around us.

So, what is the problem that we can solve? Focus! Paul says that our part in solving the problem is simple— “...*set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*” As you may have concluded, *simple* isn’t always *easy*, but “all things are possible...” (Mark 10:27)

Learn more about becoming your new self in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Colossians 3:1-11

1. When did we die (vs. 3) and when were we “raised with Christ” (vs. 1)? (Refer to Colossians 2:12-13)
2. What characterizes the “earthly” (vs. 5) or the “old” (vs. 9)?
3. What characterizes “things that are above” (vs. 1,2) or the “new self” (vs. 10)?
4. What unites all nations, cultures, customs, and anything else that might divide? (vs. 11)

For Family Reflection

5. When did your thoughts and behaviors today still reveal the “old nature”? Ask for (and rejoice in) God’s forgiveness. When did your thoughts and behavior today display the newness that God has given you? Praise God for His grace!
6. Apply vs. 11 to your connections. Think of the Christians you know (in your church or in other contexts). What differences do you notice (skin color, background, etc.)? What joys do we share in our oneness in Christ?

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

Bible commentators tell us that there was a common weed in New Testament times that resembled wheat. When it was in the fields, it couldn't be distinguished from the real thing until almost ripe.

Our world is like Jesus' wheat field. People all look pretty much alike. Some of us are wealthy, some are poor. We are many different races, but we all have the same kinds of loves and trials. What distinguishes us is internal, not external. Many of us know the love of Christ in our lives and hearts. Knowing Him makes us new persons, dedicated to, and owned by, Jesus. He has given us the gift of abundant and eternal life.

Did you know that many of the people with whom you have contact every day are really dead? They are spiritually dead because sin still separates them from God. If they are "nice," it's hard to tell that they are dead, just like it's often hard to tell that you and I are alive because of our relationship with Jesus. Like the wheat and weeds, we are very different inside, but we stand together and look very much alike. When Jesus returns, the dead "weeds" that surround us will be bound up and cast away from God. Some of them will be our friends.

Perhaps the reason that God does not "weed" His world is that He loves the weeds, as well as the wheat. He does not look forward to casting them away. Perhaps God expects you and me to make a difference in the lives of the people who surround us. If we share the good news of salvation in Christ, many of the weeds whom we love will come to belong to Jesus just as we do. Wouldn't it be great if our arrival in Heaven were a true reunion with all the people we love? You and I can make a difference in the lives of our friends and co-workers. God will give us the words and the heart to tell and show them about Jesus.

Invite a friend to Bible study!

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

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

1. What is a parable? What was the subject matter of Jesus' stories? Why did Jesus teach using parables?
2. Who was the Sower in Jesus' story (vs. 37)? What were the seeds? What was the field? When did the harvest take place?
3. What is the bad news for the weeds of the "evil one"? What is good news for the seeds of the faithful ones?

For Family Reflection

4. Do we need to be afraid of the final "harvest"? Why not?
5. What does it mean to "shine like the sun" (vs. 43)? How can we shine now? When will we shine in full and perfect brilliance?
6. Did the disciples always understand Jesus' stories (vs. 36)? Do we always understand Jesus' words to us? What helps us understand His word better?

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

John 6:35-51

In this passage Jesus brought a new teaching to His followers and to those who opposed Him. Everyone knew that one should learn from a teacher, follow a teacher's example, build on the words of a teacher, love a teacher, but this Jesus talked about consuming the person of a teacher. His enemies now were convinced that He was either a madman or a demon.

We often fail to comprehend the deep relationship with Jesus that is available for each of us. Jesus comes to us, lifts us up even in our sinfulness and makes us His own. Our response is to pursue our lives as though He was just a distant cousin whom we see from time to time. In worship we consider the busy day before us and wonder if the service will go too long, and we might have to wait for a seat at the restaurant for breakfast or lunch. Even at Holy Communion our minds are elsewhere. During the week, we think about praying and reading the Bible, but we rarely get around to it—too many urgent things to be taken care of. Through it all Jesus stays with us holding us close and refusing to let us go off on our own. Though our love for Him is, at times, almost invisible, His love for us is unending and unflagging.

How can we overcome this apathy about Jesus that plagues us? While we cannot choose to be saved, each day we do choose whether Jesus will to be the Lord of all that we say and do; Lord of all the decisions we make and the relationships in our lives. Will He be Savior or will He be Savior and Lord?

We don't have the strength or wisdom to allow Jesus to fill our lives with His love and power every day, but the Holy Spirit lives within us to be our Helper. Luther said it in fancy words—that the Holy Spirit “calls, gathers, sanctifies and enlightens.” What he meant was that the Holy Spirit nudges us, reminds us, and sometimes yells at us, all in order to help us place Jesus at the center of our existence.

Are you meeting with friends to study the Bible?

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

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

John 6:35-51

1. Does Jesus promise that Christians will never be physically hungry or thirsty? What does He mean in vs. 35?
2. What did it mean for Jesus to do His Father's will (vs. 38)? What does it mean for us to do our Heavenly Father's will?
3. How did many in Jesus' day limit His presence in their lives (vs. 42)? How may we limit the influence of Jesus in our lives?
4. What's the blessing of belief (vs. 47)?

For Family Reflection

5. Can we be confident that we will be in heaven? Why? (see vs. 39)
6. How many of the “I am” statements in the Gospel of John do you remember? Compile a listing.

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:13-21

Several things come to mind reading this parable of the rich and satisfied man who missed the point of life. How many of us had “many goods laid up” in investments, ready to enjoy the “good” life within a few years when we retire? What happened to all that we had worked so hard to save when the market crashed? Then there is the song, “Cat’s in the Cradle,” that brings tears to the eyes of empty-nesters when they hear it. It brings to mind the times we told our kids “just a minute. I’m busy” or “One of these days we’ll....” Now the kids are grown and those opportunities are gone.

As Americans we are very proud of what we have. The old joke, “Whoever dies with the most toys wins!” has tragically become a model many in our country follow—people who have been buried in their cars; children fighting over who will get the farm after Dad dies; and parents who give their kids everything but time and real love because they believe that giving them lots of “stuff” is *love*.

And now we come to the most important thing that we neglect for the sake of prestige, greed, and popularity. Jesus’ parable concerns a man who concentrated on building his own security at the expense of trusting or acknowledging his God.

The man who approached Jesus with an inheritance complaint had not come to listen. He merely sought a rabbi who could settle his problem in his favor. He did not understand that his real need was God as the Director of his life. But Jesus used the opportunity to tell a story of what really matters in life.

In it Jesus does not condemn wealth. He condemns greed, and cautions those with wealth to be on guard against letting wealth take the place of God.

Going back to the parable, Jesus calls the rich man a “fool,” yet who do we look up to today? Who do we place on our “people to meet” list? Who do we emulate in our dress and conduct? The very people who display the same values as the fool in the parable.

It is good to prepare for retirement; to give our children gifts; to want to be without financial worry, but when we let those things replace God in our hearts, we lose so very much. In Jesus we have eternity to gain.

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

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

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:13-21

1. What concerns about earthly possessions provided the opportunity for Jesus’ parable? In what scenarios do families today become distracted by earthly possessions?
2. Did the famer in the parable have earthly security? Did he have heavenly security?
3. Is it always sinful to “eat, drink, and be merry” (vs. 19)? How can the Christian also enjoy aspects of our earthly journey?
4. What does it mean to be “rich toward God” (21)? What does Jesus teach us in this parable about managing our possessions and our lives?

For Family Reflection

5. Read the explanations to the ninth and tenth commandments from Luther’s Small Catechism. How and when are you guilty of coveting? Toward Whom should all our desires be directed?
6. Are you rich? What riches has God given us in Christ?