

## 12th Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 12:32-40

At first these verses seem to present two very different and almost irreconcilable pictures. In the first, God is the Shepherd and we are the flock of sheep, and the Shepherd chooses to gladly give His kingdom to the flock. In the second example, God is the Master and we are the slaves. How can the example of the kind shepherd



in the first story fit with the example of the master of slaves in the second? Very simply, the Master and the Shepherd are the same God.

Though God calls us to be His slaves, or as Paul frequently referred to himself, “bondservants”, the role that He chooses for Himself is far different than the stereotypical slave owner of nineteenth century America. The difference is in the unfathomable love that God chooses to pour out upon us. The love of the Shepherd is equaled by the love of the slave Owner. Whether sheep or slave, the blessing of being owned by such love is beyond imagination.

As His children through Christ, God has given us the opportunity to choose to respond to His love, to be His slaves, His workers, His servants, His hands showing mercy in His creation. In a Bible study one time (surely many times in many Bible studies) a woman expressed a fear of God as Lord. “I’m not sure I trust Him with my life,” she said. Because of His great love for us, we need not fear what that it might mean to belong to God the Master.



In His parable, Jesus says that when the master returns and finds his slaves alert he will “gird *himself* to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them.” As the Shepherd becomes the Giver to the helpless sheep, the Master becomes the Servant of the powerless slave. Through the Master and Shepherd we have it all. Who could possibly think of a more blessed, exciting, or freedom-filled existence?

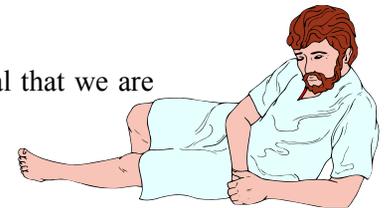
*Is God’s Word a daily part of your life?*

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

## 12th Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 12:32-40

1. Verses 32-34 continue Jesus response to the topic of \_\_\_\_\_ introduced in vs. 22.
2. What comfort and assurance is there in being referred to as God’s “little flock”? (vs. 32)
3. How did Jesus come dressed for service (vs. 37)? See also John 13:3-16.
4. According to vs. 40, why is it critical that we are always ready for Jesus’ coming?
5. Read vs. 34 again. Where is your treasure?
6. Are you dressed for service? How and where are you serving as you wait for Jesus’ return?



## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

I Kings 19:9-18

Jezebel was an infamously evil queen in Israel. She hadn't been born in Israel but married a king of Israel named Ahab. Along with the rest of her belongings, Jezebel brought to Israel her abiding devotion to the evil god, Baal. She proceeded to devote her life to converting the nation to Baal worship and to building her own evil power.

The prophet Elijah ran headlong into conflict with Jezebel. By God's power, he even confronted, defeated, and destroyed 450 of her chosen priests of Baal. Upon hearing of it, Jezebel pledged to kill Elijah within 24 hours.



And what was Elijah's reaction? Did he stand firm in the assurance of God's protection? Did he continue to proclaim the true God in the face of opposition? No, he ran like a rabbit to a cave in the mountains. God came to overpower the panic in Elijah by His presence in a soothing, comforting breeze. God chooses a unique way to speak to the fearful prophet. Elijah let his weariness and fear flood out. God listened and comforted, but did not excuse. Instead, God sent Elijah back into the fray, with renewed zeal and direction.

At one time it may have been easy for us to frown on Elijah for what we saw as weakness in the face of evil. It's not so easy today. Our witness of Christ is especially important now. Not only have we discovered that our nation is not impervious to violent attack, our faith is also still under attack, though not yet through violence (at least in America). At a time when the Koran is becoming required reading in some schools (though the Bible is still banned) and children in some schools are being rewarded for adopting Islam names and taking pretend Islamic pilgrimages (though angel-shaped cookies are not allowed at the "Winter Holiday" parties), are we standing up and proudly proclaiming our Lord? Or, are we shrinking into the cave for safety? Is the possibility of embarrassment or criticism keeping us from speaking out in behalf of Christ? Maybe we need to sit in the gentle breeze and talk it out with God. What does He want of us? What can HE do through us?

***Renew your walk with Christ through a Bible study this week!***

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

I Kings 19:9-18

1. What events had caused a frightened Elijah to hide in a cave? (Review the first 8 verses of I Kings 19).
2. What question does God direct to Elijah in vs. 9 and 13? How does the prophet answer the question?
3. God does not appear to Elijah in the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, or \_\_\_\_\_. Instead He unexpectedly comes in \_\_\_\_\_.
4. We begin to have a transition in the prophetic role. What new prophet is introduced in vs. 16?
5. Elijah felt that he was alone. What assurance does God give him in vs. 18?
6. Have you ever felt discouraged as a witness for Christ? How has God strengthened and encouraged you at those times?



## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 19:4-8

Fear and panic can sneak up on us when we least expect it. Elijah had just been on Mount Carmel in a face-to-face confrontation with 450 priests of the pagan god, Baal. He had watched as God defeated and destroyed them all. Queen Jezebel was a worshipper and promoter of Baal as the next god of Israel. She swore that Elijah would die for his actions on the mountain. Elijah, the prophet who had stood his ground just days before, ran for his life. In his fear Elijah ran toward the mountain of God until exhausted. (He had journeyed over sixty miles on foot.) Then he prayed that he might die. He was a tired and discouraged servant of the Lord.



We can suddenly become discouraged and fearful, too, even in the middle of living successful, happy lives. Stress has become a word in our culture with which just about everyone is familiar. Things can be going along fine, and we don't even notice the building tension within us. It is not surprising when we suddenly become tired and discouraged because part of our reaction to a busy schedule is usually to drift away from God. We just don't have time to pray or to read His Word, or to listen to what He might have to say. If Elijah, who had just witnessed miracles from God, could panic and run, how could we expect to do less during those times when we are probably least attentive to our Lord?

Elijah had to come to the point of complete physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion when God came to strengthen him. God also wants to supply our strength in times of fear and turmoil. Like Elijah we sometimes have to reach the end of a long and fearful run before we are forced by weariness to stop and allow our God's ministering hand of aid. The wonderful thing is that He is always there! Like Elijah, we are the ones who run away. Our gracious God, who came to us in the flesh, finds us. He touches us and strengthens us so that we might go on to serve Him.

*Find a peaceful time in God's Word today.*

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

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 19:4-8

1. Read 1 Kings 19:1-3 (and the latter verses of chapter 18). What circumstances had Elijah on the run?

2. What was Elijah's human response to his circumstances? (vs. 4)



3. In what special way did God visit and renew Elijah? Why is the second visit from the angel significant?

4. What is the significance of the destination of Horeb (vs. 8)? (See Exodus 3:1; 19:1-3)

5. Have you ever felt on the run and under attack? What can we learn from God's visit to Elijah?

6. Review other aspects of Elijah's ministry. What other crises did he face? What blessings did he enjoy? Where is he found in the New Testament? (Matthew 17:3)

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 15:1-6

God said to Abraham, “Do not be afraid,” or, as Jesus’ words in Luke can be literally translated, “Do not keep on being afraid.” That is God’s encouragement to us, but it seems so impossible.

A definition of faith is elusive. Is it belief? The demons believed Jesus was the Son of God. Is faith never doubting? Thomas would not believe that Jesus was risen unless he felt His wounds. Is faith assurance? The Pharisees were sure that their acts pleased God, but Jesus compared them to tombs—white on the outside and dead men’s bones inside. Does God choose who will have much faith and who will have little? If so, why did Jesus say to His disciples, “If you had the faith...” or “Oh, you of little faith...”? Faith seems to be more complicated than it first appears.

Faith in the secular world might be the guy willing to jump out of a plane and pull the ripcord of a parachute packed by someone other than himself. Perhaps that also is part of our faith in God. Abraham had no idea how it would be possible to have children so late in life, or why God would have waited so long. Yet Abraham believed God’s promise before Isaac’s birth. Today’s Gospel lesson is from Luke 12. Earlier in that chapter Jesus urges us to believe that God will provide our food, drink, and clothing. These we must have in order to live, so what is Jesus telling us?

The word that perhaps describes faith for the parachutist, Abraham, and ourselves is *trust*. The jumper trusts the chute packer to do a good job. Abraham trusted God’s promise. Jesus says to trust God more than ourselves to provide not only our salvation but our daily needs. Is God worthy of our trust? If Jesus sacrificed His life for ours even though we deserved only His anger, and if He has the power to assume His life again, how can we not trust Him, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all things?

Faith is indeed many things all entwined together, but all begin and center on trust.

**Learn more about faith in a Bible study this week.**

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 15:1-6

1. How did God appear to Abram? Can you think of other Biblical incidents where God came in the same way?
2. What was God’s lesson to Abram in the stars?
3. How did God fulfill this promise to Abram? (See Genesis 21:1-6) How did God ultimately fulfill His promise for Abram and for everyone?
4. Did Abram always fully believe and understand God’s promise? (See Genesis 16) Do we always believe God’s promises to us?
5. According to vs. 6, Abram’s only response was to \_\_\_\_\_. How is the faith of Abraham noted in today’s New Testament lessons (Hebrews 11:8-12)? What does it mean to have a faith like Abraham’s?
6. “Do not be afraid” is stated in today’s Old Testament lesson (Gen. 15:1) and Gospel lesson (Luke 12:32). What are you afraid of? How do these words help you?

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 9:1-5

From the cross, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” He said this even as His executioners laughed and gambled for His clothes at the foot of the cross. Later, Stephen called out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them,” as he fell under a shower of stones and died. Now we see Paul express his willingness to give up his own salvation if it would save his brother Jews, the enemies who would gladly stone him if the opportunity should arise.

Who among us has ever loved the unlovable with such sincerity? Paul insists that he is not just bantering, but is totally sincere. The love of Christ inspired Stephen and Paul. They showed the love that Christ demonstrated on the cross. If we compare our love for others with the love that Paul expresses in today’s lesson, how do we come out? Probably not especially well.

What is love, anyway? This is an area in which the world and the Christian are often at odds. “Love” to the world these days is pretty much confined to what the Greeks of Paul’s time called “*eros*.” From that word we get terms like “erotic.” Sexual love and lust often rank as the primary definitions of love in our culture today; at least that is what advertisers are finding. They tell us that “sex sells.” God certainly calls Christians to a joy-filled sexual relationship with their spouses, but there are more important “loves” in our lives. There is also the love that the Greeks called “*phileos*” or brotherly love for one another. And then there is the love that outshines all other loves. That love to the Greeks was “*agape*,” the love that expects nothing in return.

Paul and Stephen demonstrated *agape*. They could truly desire the salvation of their enemies because of Jesus’ love for themselves and for all of the unlovable people of the world. *Agape* is loving others because Christ loves them. It is the love that Christ demonstrated and that Christians are to emulate. *Agape* is not the result of our own will. Feeling *Agape* for those whom we do not even *like* comes only through the work of the Holy Spirit. He helps us see what He sees when He looks at the sinners and rebels who are part of our lives every day.

Learn more about love in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 9:1-5

1. What is Paul’s relationship with the people of Israel? (see also Philippians 3:4-6)
2. What breaks Paul’s heart? (vs 2-3)
3. What special blessings had the people of Israel received?
4. Review the ancestry of Jesus in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-37. How are the lists different? How are they the same?

### For Family Reflection

5. Who in your family or friendship may be separated from the love of God? How can you best share God’s love with them?
6. What does it mean to you that you belong to His family?

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 4:30-5:2

Paul spent much of his letter to the Ephesians exhorting them to understand that since they had been saved by grace through faith, and even that faith being a free gift from God, they had options! As do we.

Churches in those days were no less filled with turmoil than our own. People were struggling to figure out just who they were as Christians. Most outsiders considered them an offshoot of Judaism; some accused them of shameful practices behind closed doors. Those within the church frequently continued their old lives of sensuality, poor ethics, or even returned to their false gods.

Christians accused Christians of being charlatans or worse. Some protested that the apostles should work for free and not expect their flocks to support them. The unbelieving world and the believers' "flesh" as Paul liked to call our less noble urges, were constantly pushing members of the new faith to give up, leave the church, and return to their old ways. In this context we find Paul's strong words, and they apply to each of us even two thousand years later.

When we fall to the temptations surrounding us, whether they be as disastrous as adultery, or as supposedly harmless as slandering our neighbor through party gossip, we grieve the Holy Spirit. Paul unmercifully points us to the truth that we really can grieve God—we can break His heart by our thoughts, actions, and words.

That may sound like an impossibility. After all, God is not a human being, but a Spirit, as John the apostle pointed out. However, God has chosen to show us Himself in His Son. The Son who wept, laughed, felt frustration and anger—the Son who was often said to have "compassion" for those around Him. So, we are faced with Paul's challenge. We can continue to act out of our selfish passion, grieving our God, or we can act out of our God-guided compassion.

Paul says that we are able to be "imitators of God." We can imitate Jesus, the Son, not because we are that strong, but because our weakness, that has been forgiven, can now be under the control of the One who loves us best.

Learn more about faith in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 4:30-5:2

1. What grieves the Holy Spirit? (see vs. 29 and 31)
2. What power and example for kindness, compassion and forgiveness do we have (vs. 32)?
3. How was the "fragrant offering" part of the life of God's Old Testament people? (Genesis 8:21; Exodus 19:18,25,41; Leviticus 1:9,13,17) What was the purpose of those Old Testament sacrifices? Who is the sweetest smelling sacrifice of all?

### For Family Reflection

4. Is there someone you'd like to imitate? What does it mean to be "imitators of God"? (vs. 1)
5. In what contexts are we to "live a life of love?" (Glance ahead to chapter 5:22-33; 6:1-4; 6:5-9) Where or when is it hardest for you to live a life of love?
6. What does it mean to you to be a "dearly loved child" of God (vs. 1)

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Hebrews 11:17-12:3

On those “WHY ME!” days, faith becomes so important. For example, I remember a day that was very stressful. We had recently moved away from “home.” We were fighting financial troubles, getting used to new jobs, friends, state, city, and church, which can all build up a little stress. While wondering what could happen next, I drove out to a local park for an hour to relax with the kids. Then it happened—I drove over a steel post, ripped the car’s gas tank wide open, and faced the prospect of looking stupid, finding a phone to call a tow truck, paying for repairs, calling my spouse to explain this little error, ... And then I “freaked.” Was I thankful that the gas had not ignited and severely injured myself and my children? No! I was angry at God and let Him know that the end of my rope had been met! Yes, I still believed in God and I still wanted Him to be there, but that “trust” part of faith was in temporary meltdown. Ever been there, or somewhere like there?

Most of the troubles we face today are small. Years later we can shake our heads at many things that so stressed our faith at the moment. In those times, as well as in times of real danger and pain, God is there, feeding our faith with His strength. When we doubt, He is there. When we are angry with Him, He is there. As when Jeremiah sat in the hills bemoaning his life, God is always there, forgiving us, loving us, rescuing us by those many miracles that we fail to recognize until later. He restores our faith.

Faith—a gift from God stated in a little one-syllable word—is so imperative to us. As today’s lesson points out, faith does not keep frustration, danger, or doubt out of our lives. It is not a talisman. It is far more than that. It is our constant connection.

We will be okay (even victorious), no matter what happens. As Paul says in Romans, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... But in all these things we **overwhelmingly conquer** through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:35,37). Christ, no matter what the challenge, is the unmovable Rock of our faith.

**Learn more about faith in a Bible study this week.**

*A message from your Iowa West Christian Education Committee*

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Hebrews 11:17-12:3

1. How many times is “by faith” used in today’s text? Who are some of the faithful followers noted?
2. Review vs. 35-37. Was it easy to be faithful? Why were they able to persevere?
3. What race (12:1) are we running? Where are we running? Is the race easy? When will the race end?
4. What “joy” (12:2) did Jesus find in the cross?

### For Family Reflection

5. Is it always easy for us to be faithful? What persecutions do Christians today face? Are you ever ridiculed for your faith? How do you remain strong against challenges to your faith?
6. Hebrews 11 lists some major (and some minor) Bible faith heroes. Read more about one (or more) of them. Using a Bible dictionary find out the rest of God’s story in their life. Share the story with your family (or with others).

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 14:13-21

Mary and Elizabeth were related and each knew of the other's special child. So, John the Baptist and Jesus would have known each other as children and probably played with one another whenever possible. Now Jesus learned that Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great) had ordered John beheaded. As True God, Jesus knew that John had gone to paradise, but as True Man, He would be deeply saddened by John's death.

He withdrew from the public eye, but thousands found Jesus and followed along, hoping to hear His words or even see Him. He did not run away, but embraced the people who needed Him. The Bible says that He healed their sick. This must have been an exhausting day. His disciples encouraged Him to send the crowd away since it was nearing mealtime. Instead, Jesus provided the meal. Five thousand men ate (perhaps close to ten thousand people in all).

What is a true servant? A servant always places personal distress behind his concern for those who need assistance. Jesus consistently served those around Him, even though He was in reality their Master. In our world it seems that He should have had servants providing for Him. Instead, He taught of servanthood, and He lived it.

Jesus calls us to also serve others not in a prideful sense of working our way to Heaven, but as a natural response to those in need. Not only does it help others understand the love of Christ, but it will actually make our own burdens easier. A Bible teacher recently said, "Television teaches us what we don't have. Serving teaches us what we do have." We have the love of Jesus and His gift of salvation in our lives. What better way to respond to God's grace than to imitate our Master by serving others? The Holy Spirit has the power to make it possible!

*Is Bible study part of your Christian walk?*

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

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 14:13-21

1. The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 is recorded in all four gospels. Read the account also in Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; and John 6:1-13. What details are the same in each account? What details are different?
2. What were the reactions of the disciples to the situation? When have you limited Jesus' compassion and power?
3. What is the significance of twelve baskets full of leftovers?

### For Family Reflection

4. What good example does Jesus give us in vs. 19? Do you always remember to give thanks to God first?
5. Jesus had compassion on the crowds (vs. 14). Who can you think of that needs your compassion through the gift of food or some other caring response?
6. When has God surprised you by supplying you with plenty in a time of need?

## Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost

Mark 7:1-13

In this passage, Jesus speaks of the reality of being a Christian. The Pharisees had turned their faith into a set of rules to obey; a way to force God to accept them. In the process, they had set aside love, compassion, honesty, and God's word. Oh, they would have said that not only were they the "children of Abraham," but that they knew God's word better than anyone. That claim only made their sin greater.

How about us--not only today's Pharisees who reject any action that does not meet their own definition of Christianity, but also we who really don't understand God's compassion and love for us, or what it has cost Him?

We have received the greatest gift that has been given in the entire history of mankind. The gift of salvation brings us eternal and abundant life in Christ. He literally holds our spiritual and physical universe together. We hear and speak these truths during every worship service we attend, yet our mental response is often, "That's nice, I wonder where we're going for breakfast this morning?" Why have we become what Jesus says He cannot stand (Revelation 3:16)? Why have we become neutral, lukewarm Christians? Which is the greater sin—legalism or apathy?

In today's world, not just in our own country, Christians are told that they should be neutral about their faith unless at home or in church. In some European countries the world has even entered the church to demand that certain topics not be discussed from the pulpit. Christians must be neutral so that none can be offended by their Christianity. One administrator in a Christian college was astounded when told that there were no prayers in staff meetings out of a concern for unbelievers who might be present.

As a Christian community we have been lulled into the belief that we have nothing that other religions do not offer. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father *except through Me*." Will we one day stand in the presence of our Lord and say, "I didn't think that speaking of You would be appropriate?"

**Do you get together with friends for a regular time of Bible study?**

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

## Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost

Mark 7:1-13

1. What actions of Jesus' disciples "offended" the Pharisees? Did they have a right to be critical of the disciples?
2. What's a hypocrite? How were did Pharisees being hypocritical? (See Matthew chapter 23 for more comments from Jesus to the Pharisees) When are we hypocritical?
3. Which is more important: the commands of God or the traditions of men? Why?

### For Family Reflection

4. Who obeyed every command of God perfectly?
5. Should we take the commands of God seriously? Will keeping the commands of God gain our salvation?
6. What traditions are important to your family? What traditions are important in your church? When are traditions helpful and when are they harmful?

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:49-56

After many assurances of God's love, Jesus seems to really switch gears in this passage. He has come to "cast fire" on the earth; He has come to grant—not peace—but "division." Even families will be divided, all because of Him. Verse 49 seems to concern the eradication of sin in God's world. Jesus is not saying that He is anxious to destroy people, but the evil that has overtaken His creation. He wants the cleansing to begin.

Jesus also gives His followers a warning to prepare them for rejection, even by their families.

Any person's salvation enrages Satan. He will do anything to try to wrest that one from God, even using his family to force them from God's hand. There are Jewish families who disown one who becomes a Christian, even holding a funeral service for that person who has left Judaism. Islamic families of certain sects threaten, or even kill, a family member who confesses Christ. These things are happening today, not thousands of years ago.

Would you leave your family for Christ? Would you die rather than deny Him? Actually none of us can positively answer that question until we face the challenge. Like Peter, if we depend on our own assumptions who knows what we might do or say?

Jesus also gives notice to those who stand against Him. The ones present are most likely the religious leaders who wanted Him dead and gone from their lives. We can see this in His accusation that they are "hypocrites" who refuse to see the obvious. They judge the weather but they refuse to "analyze (vs. 56) this present time."

Those who refuse to use their own initiative to see the reality before them will perish. Their fate will be harsh. Like the man who refuses to make settlement in a court case that he cannot win, those who reject Christ will face the "judge" and spend eternity enduring the sentence brought about by their stubborn sin.

As we read these verses, we can be thankful that our own sinful rebellion against God is erased because Jesus shed His blood on the cross.

### *Is Bible study part of your Christian walk?*

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

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:49-56

1. What "baptism" (vs. 50) and "distress" (vs. 50) was Jesus going to face? What blessings would come to us because of His fulfillment?
2. In several other contexts (Luke 2:13; John 20:26) the Gospels mention that Jesus brings peace. Why does Jesus say in these verses that He brings divisions rather than peace?
3. Why could some in Jesus' audience interpret the weather but not interpret His messages to them?
4. Can you think of any situations where the confession of Jesus has divided families or friendships? How can we stay true to Jesus in those times?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. How can your family stay strong and united around Jesus and not become divided?
6. Pray that God gives us the wisdom to interpret His Word. Who or what helps us interpret the "signs" of His Word?