

13th Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 12:49-53

Over the last couple of weeks, we have been reading of God's great love, yet in these verses, almost immediately after those conversations of love, we find talk of "fire" and "division." More perplexingly, it is Jesus who says of the fire, "...how I wish it were already kindled!" Can it be that a God of love looked forward to fire and division? As foreign as that sounds in our "feel good" culture, it can be very loving for Jesus to look forward to these things.

In Jesus the world met God. His presence caused a tumult of contrast. His fiery judgment of Satan's work brought evil into the light of Jesus' presence. Now man had a way to God! Jesus provided the payment for sin and brought reconciliation with His Father. The fire was good! What about the division?

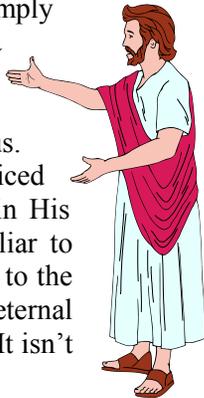
Jesus didn't say that families dividing into factions would be good or would, in itself, make God happy. Jesus simply stated to those around Him that division would be a reality. How could He "look forward" to it?

Friends and families that were on their way to hell together found themselves separated over Jesus. Some would believe and some would not. Jesus rejoiced over those who would believe and live eternally in His kingdom. This picture of family division is familiar to thousands of Christians today, especially those new to the kingdom. How many of us have been brought to eternal life, but have loved ones who chose to stay behind? It isn't easy.

The picture that Jesus presents is very serious. It includes His own death, the "baptism" to which He refers. When we think of these verses they bring to mind the importance of what we have from God. Without the struggle that Jesus willingly endured; without His horrible death on the cross, we would have nothing in our futures except eternal death. The world is wrong when it presents hundreds of paths to God. That is a message from Satan that he fondly hopes we will believe, for then his hell will be full of those who have known no division, no struggle, no gospel.

Have you invited a friend to Bible study?

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee



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Luke 12:49-53

1. What "fire" (vs. 49) is Jesus bringing? (The Concordia Self-study Bible has a helpful note for this verse.)
2. Obviously Jesus is not talking about a baptism of water in vs. 50. What "baptism" is He referring to?
3. In what sense did Jesus come to bring peace? (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:14; John 14:27; John 20:19)
4. In what sense did Jesus come to bring division?
5. Also read Matthew 10:34-36. The Concordia Self-Study Bible note on this text is most helpful to our understanding of division.
6. Has your confession of Christ brought any division in your relationships? Do you know of families or other relationships where it has? What promises sustain us in those difficulties?



Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

God said, “Maintain justice and do what is right, for My salvation is close at hand...” Why maintain justice and do what is right? “For” or because “My salvation is close at hand.” God then said through the prophet that all people would be welcome in His kingdom. In other Scripture verses God says that He wants all people to be saved and none lost to damnation. Is there an implication in these words that our actions can affect the coming of God’s salvation?

Surveys of unchurched people reveal some troubling, confused thinking. People answering the surveys say that they love Jesus but can’t stand Christians. Many “unchurched” people read the Bible more than church members, but hate churches. How can people love Jesus and reject His Church?

Do we sometimes forget that because Jesus has freed us from the power of sin by His gift of salvation, we are free to be more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions? By His grace, Jesus has brought us into to the unending process of sanctification, or becoming more like He is. We can now live our lives more like Jesus lived His life here on earth. But do we sometimes let the temptation to be more like the world overcome our desire to be more like Jesus?

Unbelieving, unchurched people complain that Christians swear at them on Friday and then worship Jesus on Sunday; that Christians worship the dollar more than they cling to Christ; that church members look at them like they don’t belong if they visit. Some would like to come to church but have never been asked and think that church looks like a very exclusive club. In short the unchurched complain that they just don’t see Jesus in the Christians that surround them.

Can we begin to see some ways that our attitudes and actions really can affect the coming of God’s salvation into the lives of unbelievers? If unbelievers cannot see the power of Jesus in our lives, then what is there to draw them in? God can empower us to be living invitations to others to come and know Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.



Studying God’s word is easier with friends. Join a Bible study group!
A message from your District Education Committee

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

1. Isaiah offers a prophecy of hope: “salvation is close at hand,” “my righteousness will soon be revealed.” How and when was the prophecy fulfilled?
2. According to vs. 6, who also was to receive the blessings of salvation? (also note vs. 3)
3. The description “house of prayer” is used twice in vs. 7. Why is it significant that foreigners would also have a place of worship and prayer?
4. In what context does Jesus repeat the words of vs. 7 in Mark 11:17?
5. All three lessons for this Sunday (also Romans 11:13-15, 29-32 and Matthew 15:21-28) have a mission emphasis. How do the Epistle and Gospel reading relate to the Old Testament reading?
6. How is verse 8 still being fulfilled? How is God using you and your congregation to gather others into His kingdom?



13th Sunday After Pentecost

Proverbs 9:1-6

1 Corinthians 3:19 says that the wisdom of men is just foolishness to God. So we know that if we seek to be wise, there is only one place to go—to God. In Him we find the wisdom for living.

If that is true, and it is, why do people fail to seek God? It seems that we have this very large part of our being that thinks we can out-think God, out-reason God, and even be God. Many of us, even Christians, believe that there is no absolute in life, and even that there are many ways to God. A “churched” adult commented, “Christianity is just a philosophy that I choose to live by because it works for me.” Most adults in our country today have traveled through a childhood in which they were taught to live without God, except on Sunday, and only then if they keep religion in perspective.

What is the greatest request for wisdom that we can have today? “Lord, grant us the wisdom to be able to share you with our friends and neighbors.”

It is only God’s wisdom that leads us closer to Him, teaching us to share His reality with one another and with the unbelievers surrounding us. The world’s wisdom tells us that we need to keep our religion to ourselves because it can be painful and even embarrassing to try to share it. God’s wisdom tells us that Jesus is the only way to the Father, but the wisdom of the world says that we should allow everyone to believe that his own path to God is right, since only a fool would go against popular, peer opinion. God’s wisdom leads us to speak out against injustices that no one else seems to care about, but the wisdom of the world tells us to be silent because everyone knows that it is unwise to slam your head into an unyielding wall.

When we seek the wisdom of God, we walk away from the folly of the world and are led to the path that God has for us in His Word. We seek His wisdom in discovering new ways of telling others about our joy in Christ.



13th Sunday After Pentecost

Proverbs 9:1-6

1. Who is the inspired author of most of Proverbs? (See Proverbs 1:1). What is the purpose of the book? (See Proverbs 1:2-6)

2. Proverbs 9 offer a contrast between “_____” (vs. 1) and “_____” (vs. 13).

3. What is the cry of “Wisdom”? (vs. 4-6)



4. What is the cry of “folly”? (vs. 16-17)

5. In this text the ways of the simple are condemned. In other texts (Psalm 116:6) the ways of the simple are commended. What’s the difference?

6. Where do we find perfect Wisdom? (1 Corinthians 1:18-24)

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Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 23:23-29

In this part of Jeremiah, God describes Himself as astonished at the wickedness of the false prophets deceiving His people. He paints a picture of Himself standing before a jury and incredulous at the arrogance of evil men. Of course, God is different from us, but uses these pictures so that we can understand what He has to say. In this picture He may also be letting us know that He understands why we are often astonished at the arrogant evil that can rise up in people who think they can avoid God.

In contrast, God tells us, “Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?” God is with us wherever we are. Though it is beyond our understanding, He knows the thoughts of every person on earth. He is surely not the little old man on a throne in the great by-and-by that some seem to imagine Him. Because we are God’s children through our Lord Jesus this is comforting and not frightening. It is as though a loving, protecting Dad walks with us every moment. However, God says that there are also false prophets trying to lead us away. How can we know them? In those days prophets like Jeremiah helped guide the way. In today’s lesson, God used Jeremiah to warn the people that charlatans were in their midst.

We live a couple of millennia plus in the future and our instruments of discernment are a little different. We have pastors (who are like modern prophets) who share God’s Word with us through their teaching, but we have something to guide us in addition to them, and with which to support their teaching. We have God’s Word. In it there are many guidelines for recognizing what is of God and what is not. By His life, recorded in the gospels, the Son of God showed us how to follow God. He prayed—we should pray; He knew the Word of God—we should know the Word of God; He granted the disciples discernment—we should seek discernment. We waded in a pool of ducklings, bluegills, pollywogs, lily pads, crocodiles, snakes, and sharks. God’s Word helps us recognize each.

Learn more about discernment in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

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Jeremiah 23:23-29

1. According to vs. 23-24, where is God?
2. What was the prophet’s warning about the “dreamers?” Where there any Biblical dreams that were Godly and Spirit-driven?
3. Why was there concern about forgetting God’s name? (vs. 27) (See Exodus 3:13-15; Exodus 20:7)
4. How is God’s Word like grain? Like fire? Like a hammer?
5. Following the fall into sin, Adam and Eve tried to hide from God. Jeremiah warns Israel (vs. 24) about hiding from God. When might we try to hide from God? Why can’t we play hiding games with God?
6. Vs. 28 and 29 gives three similes of God’s Word (“like a...”) What other comparisons might we make? “God’s Word is like” Explain your comparisons.

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 11:13-15; 29-32

Today's lesson is difficult to understand in detail. Its theology is pretty complicated for most of us. So much so that we sometimes miss the simple message that Paul is communicating.

Paul says that the Jews, by rejecting Christ, are lost, but their loss is not irrevocable. Just as we Gentiles have been grafted into the Vine, so the Jews can be re-grafted into the Vine by God.

It's easy to assume that we are so special that God chose us for His kingdom, but Paul warns his readers not to place too high a value on their own worthiness. It is God that grants worthiness out of His underserved love for us.

The Gentiles of Paul's time sometimes thought of the Jews as unworthy of salvation. It's hard not to think of the unkind, unsaved, and unrepentant as more deserving of hell than we, but Paul warns that this is not God's way of love.

We witness easily to our Christian siblings who will agree with our praise of Christ in our lives. Paul once wrote that he would be willing to lose his own salvation if that could somehow save the Jews. Those who cursed him and wanted his death were as important to Paul as the Gentiles who loved him.

In our current war against terror, it is tempting to think of the Muslim world as unworthy of Christ's love. Likewise it is easy to look at those in our own nation who reject God for false religions, as people to be ignored--if they want to go to hell, so what! But, like Paul we are called to carry a different message.

Our witness to the unbeliever is both difficult and glorious. On the one hand we must stand against evil and evil people. On the other hand, we are called to proclaim that no sinner is so lost that he cannot become a child of Christ. Not many unbelievers want to hear that Christ loves them, but the Holy Spirit can take that unwelcome message and use it in the hearts of non-believers, evildoers, and even terrorists. He can use our words to work miracles in those we consider hopeless. Christians have a unique role in today's world. We fight against evil in all of its ugly forms, while we also proclaim that even the most evil can know salvation from his or her sin through Christ.

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

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 11:13-15; 29-32

1. What title does Paul give himself in vs. 13? See Acts 9:15 and Romans 1:13 for more background on this title.
2. Who is Paul referring to in his reference to "my own people" (vs. 14)? What grieved Paul about his people?
3. The verses between the text sections (vs. 16-28) include a horticulture illustration. Who were the branches broken off? Who were the branches grafted on? See John 15:1-8. Who is the Vine? How are we grafted onto Christ?
4. What does it mean that God's gifts and God's call are "irrevocable"? (v. 29) Check other versions for other descriptive phrases of this verse?

For Family Reflection:

5. What acts of disobedience (vs. 29) are part of your life? What good news does God have for the disobedient?
6. Paul wishes that everyone in His family knew Jesus. Are there members of your family who do not know and worship Jesus? Continue to pray for them. Discuss how you might witness to them.

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 5:15-20

"...Understand what the Lord's will is." Along with this command, Paul gives us some how-to-live instructions, but no how-to-know directions. He seems to think that everyone should understand what he means. But, isn't the most perplexing question facing us every day that of determining what God's will may be?

As we struggle with ever more complex questions concerning our lives (family, job, church, and world) how can we know our part in their solutions? How can we know what God wants us to say and do in His world? How can we perceive, at least in part, God's will in the ever quickening pace of events in our world?

Paul's first readers also lived in a world that was rushing past them at breakneck speed. Rome was in turmoil, volcanoes and earthquakes threatened (in a few years Vesuvius would bury Pompeii). Rebellion was infiltrating the Empire and in less than a decade a great Jewish rebellion would begin, ending in the mass suicide of hundreds of Jews. The Roman rulers and wealthy aristocrats lived lives of total decadence while other citizens nearly starved. Merely being a Christian was a growing concern. The world's stand against Christ was gathering strength. About six years after Paul's letter arrived in Ephesus, much of Rome would burn and the emperor blame the Christians in order to squelch the thought that he may have ordered the fire himself. In that horrible time, hundreds of Christians would be martyred, including Peter and Paul. Added to this craziness in their world, the early readers faced the everyday problems of family relationships, taxes, jobs, church needs, and health.

We also struggle with the question of how to live out our commitment to God. What is our proper response to His great love? Christian fellowship, prayer, and Bible study all help us find the answers, as does our simple willingness to seek Him. But, we will rarely be absolutely certain of God's will. As we wrestle out our part in His will, however, there are some uncontestable certainties—He wants us to keep on struggling with the question. He wants us to keep seeking His will in our lives. And, most assuredly, He has loved us in Christ, He will always love us and enable us to live our love for Him each day.

Learn more about discernment in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 5:15-20

1. Using the verses of this text (and other texts or experiences) what does it mean to live unwisely?
2. What does it mean to live wisely? Who is the source of all spiritual wisdom?
3. What's the difference between being filled with wine and filled with the Holy Spirit?
4. According to vs. 20 when are we to give thanks to God? For what are we to give thanks to God?

For Family Reflection

5. What is your favorite musical means of giving thanks to God (vs. 19) What is your favorite psalm? What is your favorite hymn? Why is music such a powerful means of praise?
6. How would you respond to the person that says "it's nobody's business how I live my life?"

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hebrews 12:4-29

There is a false notion that is unfortunately promoted by some in the Christian community—that being God’s child will protect you from all harm turmoil. Our texts from the last few weeks debunk that idea. We don’t worship our God in order to get something in return. We worship Him because He is God. Three friends of Daniel who defied King Nebuchadnezzar exemplify that kind of allegiance to God. When ordered to worship a golden image or die in fiery agony, they replied, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire...But even if He does not...we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image...” (Daniel 3:17-18).

After citing the lives of the faithful in chapter eleven, God’s word proclaims, “*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us...*” The strong message is, “Don’t give up just because living in Christ is hard!”

“Faith” dominated the message in chapter 11. Now we are challenged to live our faith without wavering or complaining about the discipline demanded by God. The texts reminds us (perhaps especially us Americans) “*In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*”

In our witnessing we often become discouraged: it’s embarrassing; it’s frustrating; it can even cost us respect and position. But, resisting the temptation to remain silent will lead us into a growing joy and confidence that we are doing God’s work. We will find the discipline of obedience well worth the struggle.

In the church it is easier to backbite and condemn than it is to work together and really listen to what the other person has to say. Working *together* is a discipline from God that will teach us how to love and how to witness through our relationships.

In our personal struggles it is easier to give up on God than it is to give up our own control. God’s discipline teaches us to let go and trust Him. Only that will bring us peace in all situations.

So often we wonder why God allows our struggles. We might as well ask parents why they refuse to allow their children chocolate for every meal.

Learn more about discipline in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hebrews 12:4-29

1. How is God’s discipline like the discipline of an earthly parent? How is God’s discipline different?
2. Review Esau’s actions in Genesis 25:29-34. Why are Esau’s actions condemned (vs. 16-17)?
3. What is the difference between the mountain of the law (vs. 18-21) and the “Mount Zion” (vs. 22) that we will experience? Where is our “Mount Zion”? When will we see this mountain?

For Family Reflection

4. Read vs. 4 of the Lenten hymn “Glory Be To Jesus” (LW#98; LSB#433). What’s the difference between Abel’s blood and Jesus’ blood (vs. 24)?
5. Read Hebrews 12:29. Do we need to be scared of God?
6. How and when do we offer “acceptable worship” (vs. 28) to God in our personal life, in our family, and in our church?

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 14:22-33

As dawn comes the fishing boat is in choppy seas and the fishermen/disciples are fighting the weather. After overcoming his initial fear at seeing someone walking toward them through the wind-sprayed water, Peter (ever the spur-of-the-moment guy) decides to set out on a project to serve Jesus, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”

Some think that Peter acted unwisely on this occasion, but Jesus did grant him permission to proceed, so we must assume that He approved of Peter’s action. Jesus knew that Peter would lose heart and sink, yet He invited him into the water anyway. It would seem that Jesus should have warned him to stay in the boat! But, Jesus knew that in failing, Peter would learn more about leaning on his Lord.

Often when we tackle a project, job or duty, whether it is at church, within the family, or at the office, we believe that we are doing it all for Jesus and under His direction. But, in reality, we rarely depend upon God when we think that we have everything under control, just as Peter momentarily forgot Who really had the power to keep him on top of the water.

How often does prayer enter into our daily endeavors? Most of us find that eager, prayerful communication with our Father begins only when our day starts to unravel—when our own wisdom proves woefully inadequate.

Jesus encourages us to jump out of the boat to do those neat things that are part of our lives here and part of our service to God. If we remember to stay in constant contact with our Lord, our endeavors may even glide as smoothly as a boat on a glassy sea. But when, in our immature eagerness, we forget to talk to God in the midst of every day, Jesus will still reach out His hand and rescue us from our own wisdom.

Been to Bible study lately? It’s never too late to start.

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

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 14:22-33

1. Several times in His early ministry Jesus went off to be alone. What needs did He have that necessitated this retreat? What did Jesus do when He was alone?
2. What situations heightened the fears of the disciples? What was Jesus’ response to them?
3. Did Peter walk on water? When did he start sinking? How did Jesus respond?
4. What was the disciples’ response? What other setting elicited a similar response to Jesus? (Luke 23:47) What has convinced you of Jesus deity?

For Family Reflection

5. When do you need time alone? Do you include God in those retreat times? Are those times also a time for prayer?
6. When have you been afraid? How has Jesus assured you of His presence in those times?

Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Mark 7:14-23

First, we need to understand the question that Jesus is answering in these verses, or we might be led into thinking that whatever we do is okay and cannot harm us. Jesus taught us how to behave by His life. Paul taught us to avoid evil so that it could not corrupt our hearts. Even an old adage of the world still holds true: “Garbage in—Garbage out.” Keeping that in mind, we can concentrate on Jesus’ real message.

In Jesus’ time the dietary laws of the Jews were very important. Unfortunately, the Jewish leaders had made the laws of God more important than the love of God. They had developed a system by which one could force the doors of Heaven open by being perfectly obedient to all of God’s law and the additional laws that the religious leaders had developed over the years. For instance, the theologians of the time argued as to whether a tailor who slid a needle into his cloak for storage on the Sabbath had done labor and therefore broken God’s law. At the same time, the Pharisees had figured out numerous “loopholes” that they could use in order to accomplish their goals in spite of God’s law.

Jesus was teaching the people specifically about their concentration on the dietary laws and other laws, which had led to a lack of spiritual understanding in His hearers.

What about us? Do we ever neglect what dwells in our hearts or comes out of our mouths, while at the same time claiming to be godly and dedicated to our Lord?

Another way to look at this might be to ask the question of what defines a Christian in the minds of others. Are we different? Are we attracting others to Jesus by demonstrating His life to them through our own? Or, are we just like everyone else? Christ’s presence in us cleanses our hearts so that we might serve and adore Him with our whole being.

Have you invited a friend to attend a regular Bible study with you?

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

Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Mark 7:14-23

1. What is the source of our uncleanness? Is everything about us unclean? Is everyone unclean? Since when?
2. What are the some of the signs of uncleanness (vs. 21-22)? What examples might we add from our own culture and communities?
3. Who makes us clean? How did God first cleanse you?

For Family Reflection

4. Have you ever had a “dirty” thought? Have you ever said a “dirty” word? Have your hands touched anything that’s “dirty”? How do we get clean again? Confess: “Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and UNCLEAN.”
5. Read Psalm 51:7-9. Who was unclean? What’s the Good News of these verses?
6. We regularly wash or shower to stay physically clean. How do we stay spiritually clean?

Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 13:22-30

In this passage Jesus speaks to those who know about Him. They have watched Him in their streets. Some have scoffed at His miracles; some have figured out that He is not going to drive Rome out of Palestine and so rejected Him; some actively seek His death; some are using His fame to lift up their own reputation—the old name dropping game; some have followed Him, but would fall away at His death.

When Jesus returns, these will call to Him and will receive His answer. Many Pharisees will be among them (vs. 28), but also many of today's church members who have hidden reasons for coming to church—family habit, good business contacts, a good philosophy to follow, or they just like the fellowship, but they do not accept Jesus as the Savior who can erase their sin and lift them up to a better life.

Jesus' message also fits the prevailing view of the world today that all religions lead to the same God, or the idea that good deeds (even done in the name of Jesus) lead to salvation. More than once in the gospels Jesus specifically states that He (His person) is the only way to the Father. Only He could pay the price of salvation.

Some say that this makes Christianity too exclusive or too restrictive in its belief. When confronted with these charges, Christians should answer with boldness and love: "Salvation is a free gift from God through the blood of His Son on the Cross." Far from being exclusive, Christ is profoundly inclusive. There is no work to do for salvation. Jesus has done it all. No human being, regardless of religious upbringing, race, past, mental or physical condition, or whatever terrible crime or sin they may have committed, will be denied. As Jesus says in this passage, "They will come from east and west and from north and south..." (vs. 29) Social position cannot affect salvation in Christ—slave and free, man or woman, child or adult are all welcomed *as equals*. We are children of the God of mercy, grace and love, whose Son is the *only* path to the Father.

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

Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 13:22-30

1. Who is the "narrow door" (vs. 24) that leads to salvation? (See John 14:6)
2. To whom will the door of salvation be closed (vs. 24-28)? What will be the response of those on the outside?
3. To whom will the door of salvation be opened (vs. 29-30)? What surprises will we find in heaven?
4. Jesus responds to the question, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" How would you summarize Jesus' answer?

For Family Reflection

5. On several occasions heaven is compared to a banquet (vs. 29; Isaiah 25:6-9). What kind of banquet do you imagine? What foods will be served? Who will be serving us?
6. How do we know that we will go through the "door" and into Jesus' banquet hall?