

## Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 14:1; 7-14

If there is a sin that we all share, it is the desire to be recompensed or acknowledged. Even when we try to express our humility (already having lost the battle of being humble), it usually comes out something like, “I don’t care if I get paid for what I do, but I would like to be appreciated.” This statement is meant to reassure our hearers that we really are being more than faithful to our duties. Jesus, however, rarely lets us sneak in such comparisons meant to make us feel just a little bit more worthy than the average person.

The story in today’s passage brings to mind any typical dinner held at the home of a prominent citizen. There is always a private little contest going on among the guests. Who will arrive first? Will there be placeholders? What table will I be seated at? Do I dare sit at the boss’s table without being invited? Jesus warns that while such ego-centric behavior is always distasteful, it is especially foul in the kingdom of God. Not only is it absurd to place our sinful selves in an elevated position in the presence of God, it can be harmful to our ability to serve effectively. Is there even one of us who has never looked at a visitor in our midst on Sunday morning and wondered, “What’s he doing here?” That is especially true if the person is not of the same economical, social, or racial background as we. At that moment, we are guilty of elevating ourselves to a higher position than we ought. In such situations, we are not to think of ourselves as guests, but as servants! A true servant has a very different attitude. A servant welcomes the visitor and makes him comfortable in the home of the Master. The servant meets the immediate needs of the visitor and is available to do whatever the Master may ask.



How can we overcome this ego of ours and become truly servant-minded? We can’t. The need to have a “comfort” zone among our peers is part of our sinful nature, yet God calls us to have the heart of a true servant in everything we say and do. We won’t be perfect servants. We are forgiven and renewed servants. When we ask God to grow us up in His Son’s image, He will answer our desire and He will use us, in spite of our sin.

***Learn more about following Christ. Join a Bible study!***

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

## Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 14:1; 7-14

1. What observation of Jesus initiated the parable of the text? (vs. 7)



2. Where will an arrogant, prideful guest look for a seat? What will be the result of that action?
3. What will be the tendency of the arrogant, prideful host in selecting guests? (vs. 12)
4. Explain vs. 11. Who humbled Himself for us? (Philippians 2:5-8) When will the humble in Christ be exalted? (Matthew 25:34-40)
5. How did Jesus demonstrate vs. 13 in His ministry?
6. Apply vs. 13 to your personal witnessing or to your church outreach. Who could you be inviting to the banquet of God’s grace?

## Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 15:15-21

Jeremiah brought very bad news to God's people. In the verses prior to this passage, we see some of the details of their coming doom at the hands of their enemies. God was about to punish them for their constant rejection and defiance of Him. Jeremiah's message was ridiculed, and he was scorned. After all, times were good! God would never let His people fall, and there were many prophets around who prophesied more good times to come. Jeremiah's words were uncomfortable and unwelcome. The people wanted him to just go away!

Jeremiah sat down to talk with God about the whole mess. Let's take Jeremiah's part of the conversation and bring it up to 2002 by creating a broad paraphrase (restatement of the thoughts he expressed). "Lord, I heard Your word and it moved me, and my heart became excited over You. You called me and showed me things that were wrong in my world. I have been obedient and not accepted what the world says is right. I haven't fallen in with the world's attitudes about a lot of things. In response my friends left me and I sit lonely in a world filled with people who think I'm crazy because I told them what You told me to say. You have given me a passion for You that keeps me faithful, but Lord, I sometimes fear that You will never lift me up; that I will be hated and frustrated and burdened forever. Are those that hate me right? Am I crazy?"



In our world today, have you ever had feelings like these? Jeremiah lived 2,600 years ago, but God's message to us is the same as it was to him. Don't give up, don't give in, because "...though they fight against you, they will not prevail...; For I am with you to save you and deliver you..."(vs.20)

We are part of an entire history of people who struggled to follow God faithfully in a difficult, sinful world. Some times are very good; some times are very bad. Through all of the times, God is faithful. He will lift us up and bless our walk with Him!

***Experience the stories of others like you—join a Bible study!***

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

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Jeremiah 15:15-21

1. The text is a dialog between Jeremiah and the Lord. Who's speaking in vs. 10? In vs. 11-14? In vs. 15-18? In 19-21?

2. According to vs. 16 how had Jeremiah faithfully responded to God's call?

3. How was Jeremiah's ministry a lonely ministry? (see vs. 17)

4. Describe Jeremiah's struggle in vs. 18?

5. What reassurance does God give Jeremiah in vs. 20-21?

6. Describe a time of a personal faith or calling struggle. How did God give you reassurance?



## St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

Ezekiel 2:8-3:11

There is a word that we don't use too much anymore, but it seems to fit well as we think about this passage. The word is *constancy*. It comes to mind because it can refer not only to loyalty or trustworthiness, but also brings to mind a determination to remain loyal and trustworthy. So, God says to the prophet that He will make his forehead hard.

Ezekiel was in exile in Babylon, along with many leaders of Judah, when he was called by God. Jerusalem had been subdued but the destruction of the city and the temple was still about seven years away. As if emphasizing that Ezekiel was no superman, God refers to him as "son of man" 93 times in this book. It was God who would provide the constancy, the words, and the wisdom.

Ezekiel proclaimed two primary messages to Judah, God's chosen house from which Jesus would be born. First he proclaimed the coming destruction of Jerusalem, but no one would believe him. They all thought that God would step in, as He always had, and save them regardless of their rebellion. They were wrong. Second, after Jerusalem fell in a terrible siege by Babylon, the prophet proclaimed the coming restoration of Judah. He did both because God's message is never just law or just gospel—it's always both. One doesn't work without the other.

We also are called to deliver both law and gospel to our world, our country, our community, and our family and friends. But we must remember that hearing only law brings hopelessness. Only hearing gospel brings complacency and sin becomes a game at which God chuckles, as we sometimes do at a joke we shouldn't be funny. As in Ezekiel's time, God's wisdom and the Spirit's direction allows us to know which message should come first in each encounter in which we find ourselves.

What about the hard forehead? It seems that which ever message is proclaimed, there are many people who just don't want to hear. That hard forehead constancy is also a gift from God—our own strength and "anger management" just won't do.

*Try out a Bible study with your friends!*

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



## St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

Ezekiel 2:8-3:11

1. How many different senses (sight, taste, etc.) can you find in this text? Why might God reveal Himself to Ezekiel in such a multi-sensory way?
2. To whom was prophet Ezekiel sent? (3:4-5)
3. How would Ezekiel's message be received by his audience?
4. According to vs. 8 and 9 what would be the character of this prophet?
5. What makes God's word sweet (3:3; also Psalm 19:10; Psalm 119:103)? What taste does God's Word leave in your heart?
6. This Old Testament text is appointed for this Sunday—St. Matthew, Apostle, and Evangelist. Read the Gospel lesson (Matthew 9:9-13). What do Ezekiel and Matthew have in common?



## **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Proverbs 25:6-7

Proverbs is filled with common sense wisdom. Today's passage is not only reminiscent of Jesus' words in Luke 14 but also confronts today's attitudes. What is it about us that we want to be honored and are even jealous of another's praise? In our sinful nature, we always want to live by another old "adage"—"me first!"

We are constantly bombarded with demands to buy the right cars, the right make-up, the right homes, or the right anything so that we will have the very best for ourselves. Mr. Jones expands his two-car garage to a four-car garage just to insure that people driving by think that his home is better than Mr. Smith's next door, who happens to have only a three-car garage. Sound silly? Or do you know people just like Mr. Jones?

Wanting to be recognized as best extends beyond what we have and into the workplace and even into personal time. Doing our jobs well or enjoying our time off often fails to satisfy because we think that we haven't gotten the recognition or award that we think we deserve.

Both today's proverb and Jesus' teaching chide that attitude. We ought to be satisfied doing well what is asked of us and not worry about who may receive greater reward than we. As Christians we assume the role of servant. Jesus taught that serving means seeking tasks that the arrogant consider beneath them; helping people that can not pay us back; loving when no love is returned; working without the expectation of praise or a higher place than others.

That is indeed as hard as it sounds. We live in a reward culture; a culture where a popular tee-shirt carried the printed sentiment "Second Place is the First Loser."

How do we turn the corner, becoming people who applaud the success of others; who work for the welfare of the "other guy" with true humility that finds joy in serving others? We confess our selfishness, receive again the heart of Christ, and renewed by the Holy Spirit we serve humbly.

Learn more about true humility in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Proverbs 25:6-7

1. What is the context of the proverb? What is the wise action?
2. Read today's Gospel lesson (Luke 14:7-14). Summarize Jesus' story. How does His story relate to the proverb?
3. What is the point of Jesus' story (Luke 14:11)?
4. In what ways do you seek honor or seek to be among the powerful or influential?
5. How did Jesus set an example of humility? (Matthew 20:25-28; Philippians 2:3-8)
6. In what ways have you been blessed as you served humbly?

## **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Romans 12:1-8

The construction company lays the foundation for the building. The foundation is deep and solid for the building will be only as sound as its base. In the first eleven chapters of Romans, the Apostle Paul has laid a faith foundation. It too is deep and solid. Everything is built on the fact that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and that salvation is by grace through faith.

With the foundation laid, the building then is constructed. The walls go up, the rafters of the roof are in place, and the other building parts are added—roofing, siding, flooring, etc. With a theological foundation laid, Paul now focuses on building the Christian life. What does this Good News mean for each of us? How does it affect who we are and what we do?

Today's lesson begins a more practical section of Romans. The analogy around which Paul builds is not a building but a body. With Christ at the heart, the whole body is affected. Christ affects what we think in our minds and what we do with our voice, our hands, our feet, our eyes, and our ears. Not only does He affect our individual bodies, but He affects the corporate body that we call the church.

Is Christ the true foundation of your life? Is that foundation deep and solid? If our response is affirmative to those questions, we then examine the practical responses in our everyday life. Do others see in all aspects of my life that Jesus is in my heart? Do I serve Him in everything I do?

May Christ through His Spirit fill your heart and direct your life.

Learn more about faith in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Romans 12:1-8

1. What types of sacrifices dominated the Old Testament? (Genesis 9:20) What Sacrifice demonstrated God's mercy to us? (Romans 3:24-25) What sacrifice was Paul encouraging (Romans 12:1)?
  2. In what ways do we conform to the ways of the world? How does God transform us?
  3. How is the church like a body? (vs. 4-5) See I Corinthians 12:12-27.
  4. What spiritual gifts are listed in vs. 6-7? Compare this listing with I Corinthians 12:28-31).
- ### **For Family Reflection**
5. Who is the Giver of all spiritual gifts? As a family discuss what spiritual gifts each family member has been given. Share how God can use those gifts in your family and in His church.
  6. In what ways is your family tempted to conform to the ways of the world? Join in a time of confession. How can you help each other be transformed?

## Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 6:10-20

The obvious dangers that we face each day—accidents while working, really rotten drivers, illness, or even wars—are not the greatest danger to us. The true danger lies in the spiritual battle that surrounds us. God is determined that we be His for eternity. Satan, however, still believes that he can have us, or at least prevent anyone else from joining us in God’s kingdom.

So Paul tells us, in fact commands us, to put on the armor of God. It is a commitment that we make daily. God is protector, provider, and creator of every part of our armor, yet it is we who choose whether to lean on Him and make use of our spiritual armor. Paul says, “Stand firm then, with the belt of *truth* buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of *righteousness* in place,<sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the *readiness that comes from the gospel of peace*.<sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of *faith*, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.<sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of *salvation* and the sword of the Spirit, which is *the word of God*.”

Like the soldiers with whom Paul was familiar, we have only one offensive weapon—for the Roman soldier this was often a sword. In our case, the sword is the word of God. This is the weapon with which we stand against evil. We are tellers of truth, mercy, grace, and forgiveness—tellers of the Gospel message. We invite people to know salvation and join us in the family of God. As Paul’s request for prayer demonstrates, the task is not always easy. But, it is the task with which we are charged.

Paul ends this section with an encouragement to constantly and persistently pray for him, and for all Christians as we strive together to live as soldiers of Christ. Though Paul was in prison, he wanted more than anything else to be able to be bold and persuasive as he was given opportunity to share the Gospel with those around him. We live in an entire culture that does not understand who Jesus is. We, like Paul, have many opportunities to share the truth. If we choose to do so on our own, without our armor, we will fail. But, with the armor of God as our defense and the Gospel as our sword, we really can change our world for Jesus’ sake.

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

## Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 6:10-20

1. Why do we need to be fully armored? (vs. 11-13)
2. Draw a human figure with the pieces of armor described in vs. 14-17. Label the spiritual armor.
  - Belt—
  - Breastplate—
  - Shoes—
  - Shield—
  - Helmet—
3. What is the place of prayer in spiritual battles? (vs. 18)
4. Paul requests their prayers so that he may declare the Gospel \_\_\_\_\_ . What did Paul have to fear? What fears do we have as we think about sharing the Gospel today?

### For Family Reflection

5. As a family read vs. 10 (and perhaps memorize it together). At what times do we feel weak? From where does our strength come? How does God give us His power?
6. For eight weeks the church has heard sections from the book of Ephesians. Look back over the six chapters. Have each family member share a favorite section or verse.

## **Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost**

Philemon 1-21

Paul's letter to Philemon shows us some ways of relating to one another as Christian peers, especially when we are attempting to persuade a Christian friend to adopt a new attitude or idea.

As to the specific situation on Paul's mind, it seems that Onesimus was a runaway slave who had belonged to Philemon, a Christian and leader of some importance. While slavery itself is wrong, Paul does not write to either support the practice or to condemn it, but to remind Philemon, and us, that in Christ there are no tiers of importance, no caste system, no gender subordinates. No one is more worthy of Christ due to wealth, position, or any other human qualifier. So, knowing that Christ would have the two men, Philemon and Onesimus, joined together as equal brothers in Christ, Paul begins his message to the former.

Paul was a loving Christian and a powerful leader. Both of these attributes contributed to his ability to help out. Because of Paul's position and character, he could urge Philemon toward the right action without resorting to making it a command, and without fear of the old "who are you to say..." response. Paul gave Philemon, himself a man of power and reputation, the opportunity to do the right thing, to change, without embarrassment. Approaching Philemon with the attitude that he was indeed a man of faith and understanding was just the right approach in this potential battle. Condemnation of Philemon's actions as a slave owner, on the other hand, would have only caused more conflict.

How do we approach a friend or co-worker with a new idea, or the need for a change in action or attitude? Do we pray first, or speak first? How do we approach those whom we suspect may have a "bad attitude"? Do we begin with anger or understanding? Demands or persuasion? Do we present Christ's love or condemnation? When confronted with difficult situations, we could do worse than consult Paul's letters. The Holy Spirit inspired him to be an effective communicator of Christ's love—a gift that God desires to give to us all.

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

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

## **Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost**

Philemon 1-21

1. Using the Concordia Self-study Bible or another resource explore the background of this one-chapter book. Who is the author? To whom was it written? Why was it written?
2. What thanksgivings (vs. 4-7) does Paul share with Philemon? What is Paul's relationship with Philemon?
3. What appeal does Paul make to Philemon? What is Paul's relationship with Onesimus? Why is he so bold in making the appeal?
4. What does Paul infer with the request "Refresh my heart in Christ"? How are we refreshed with Christ? How do we refresh others with Christ?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. Several times in his letters (Philemon 4, Philippians 1:3) Paul thanks God for faith partners. For which faith examples or ministry partners do you thank God?
6. Paul challenges Philemon for a faith response. In what ways might you challenge yourself for a specific faith response? In what ways might you challenge others in your family or in your congregation?

## **Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost**

Matthew 16:13-20

“Who do you say that I am?” How many sermons have been written on this one sentence? It really is the question, isn’t it?

In the world’s easy-belief system, it doesn’t really matter what you think of Jesus. Many professing to be Christians believe that Jesus was a great teacher like Buddah or Mohammed. He was an originator of a true philosophy of God. Others profess Jesus as the greatest man who ever lived, one who did the best that he could. He wasn’t sinless, but he was adopted by God and God spoke to him clearly. Many who profess Christianity do not know enough about Jesus to understand who He is. They are in church, but they are there for the fellowship or the children’s programs. Perhaps most tragically of all, millions of American Christians believe that Jesus is only one of many paths to God.

“Who do you say that I am?” There is only one answer for the Christian, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” as Peter said. We could also say, “You are immortal, sinless, True Man and True God. You are the only way to the Father; Your death on the cross paid for all of my sin. You were raised from the dead and appeared again among us. You rule at the right hand of God the Father. You will come again on the last day.” If any part of what the Bible says about Jesus is not true, then it is all suspect. The great news is that it is all indeed true. The Bible is God’s word, written by eyewitnesses of the Gospel, inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Do you stand in the world as a beacon proclaiming the true Jesus? Our friends (unbelievers and believers alike) need to hear about the true Jesus, not the watered down version that the world prefers to promote. God provides the faith, the courage and the words that enable us to invite others to share in His marvelous kingdom.

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

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

## **Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost**

Matthew 16:13-20

1. What were some of the opinions that the people of His day had about Jesus? How do you think they had come to those opinions?
2. What was the belief of Peter? How do you think Peter had come to his conclusions about Jesus?
3. What is the “rock” (vs. 18) on which the church is built? Using the Concordia Self-study Bible or another reference explore this statement.
4. Verse 19 introduces the “Office of the Keys”. What are the “keys of the kingdom”? Review the “Office of the Keys” in Luther’s Small Catechism. Who holds the keys today?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. What are some opinions about Jesus in today’s culture? Where do people learn the truth about Jesus?
6. Was Peter always a “rock”? When did he crumble? What is the Good News for us when we are not always solid in our confession of Jesus?

## **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Mark 9:14-29

Modern Americans often dismiss this story, assuming that the boy was “obviously a victim of some sort of epilepsy.” However, Jesus makes it clear that the boy was possessed by a demon. Lutheran missionaries have reported many instances of demon possession. It is real.

Demon possession, however, is rarely portrayed in novels or movies as it really is. They especially fail to accurately portray God’s power in the arena of demon possession. Generally, in novels and movies, people of God are portrayed as terrified, arrogant, or just plain evil themselves. God is portrayed as ineffective and powerless in the face of evil. Only the human “hero” of the story can prevail over true evil. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In today’s verses, Jesus demonstrates the real truth of God versus evil. Contrary to movie story claims, the men in the story—Jesus’ disciples—could not force the demon to obey. Only Jesus, the Son of God, the “God-Man” if you will, could command the spirit to leave.

In this story Jesus implies that the disciples’ lack of faith was the reason they failed. However, it was not a lack of faith in their own power that failed them; it was their lack of faith in God’s power to bring evil down.

We need not fear that we might be possessed by a demon. As Christians, we are protected and held close by the One from whom evil flees. The father of the possessed boy makes a statement that is one of my favorites in Scripture, and I use it often, “I do believe; help my unbelief.” The Holy Spirit lives within us. He protects our faith, strengthens it, and keeps us pointed to Jesus. We are protected from Satan’s demons because Christ has died and risen. The power of Satan and his minions over us is crushed.

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

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

## **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Mark 9:14-29

1. What issue gets the attention of the disciples, crowd and Jesus?
2. Why couldn’t the disciples perform the miracle?
3. Why could Jesus do the miracle? When did Jesus finally conquer the devil forever? Can we conquer the devil?

### **For Family Reflection**

4. How does Jesus emphasize the power of prayer? (vs. 29)  
Why is prayer important to your family?
5. Reflect on vs. 23. What does it mean to truly believe? Do we ever limit God’s power and presence in our lives?
6. What unbeliefs do you struggle with? What promises of God do you believe?

## **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Luke 14:25-35

How committed are you to Christ? Jesus thinks that this is a major question; that how we answer will impact everyone around us. The answer to the question will also impact us, and radically change our lives. Jesus' description of what it may mean to follow Him reminds us plainly that nothing can take precedence over His Lordship.

Bible studies often end with the thought that Jesus was just using a strong example to make a point. He would not really ask us to give up so much on account of Him. Comfortable thought, but not true.

Early Christians often suffered rejection by family and friends. Entire families sometimes died in the Roman arenas—only because they would not deny Christ. Of the apostles apparently only St. John died of “old age.” Reformation leaders were persecuted for proclaiming the truths of Scripture and the heresies of the church. Christians trying to protect their Jewish neighbors in Nazi-occupied Europe endangered their own lives. In the former Soviet Union, Christians were unable to advance in business or government. Hasidic Jews hold funeral services for family members who convert to Christianity. Converting to, or witnessing for, Christianity in a conservative Muslim country today is a capital offence. In China Christians are always in danger of arrest. Even in America a quiet persecution of Christians has begun. Europe has proclaimed itself a “post-Christian” culture.

Living in our culture, that insists all paths lead to God; that whatever each person believes is valid; that all will have a joyous afterlife, we forget the importance of the Gospel. Satan is lying to the world, and the world likes it. The truth is that anyone not approaching the Father through the Son will spend eternity in hell. When we weaken our witness in order to avoid turmoil, we assist Satan.

Remaining strong in our faith in the face of persecution and pain is possible only because the Holy Spirit fills us with His strength. We do not waste time worrying about what we might lose. As Jesus promised His disciples, the Holy Spirit will give us the words and courage to stand against lies and for Christ.

***Have you invited a friend to attend worship with you?***

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

## **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Luke 14:25-35

1. God's word directs us to honor father and mother and love our family and neighbor. How do we explain Jesus' words to hate father and mother and brother and sister (vs. 26)?
2. Only Jesus can bear the cross for our redemption. In what sense does Jesus ask us to bear our own cross (vs. 27)?
3. What two illustrations does Jesus share (vs. 28-31) to emphasize the cost and commitment of discipleship?

### **For Family Reflection**

4. How are we to be like salt? (See also Matthew 5:13)
5. God has given us ears (vs. 35). What does He want us to hear?
6. What might you or your family renounce (vs. 33) for Jesus' sake?