

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 14:25-33

How committed are you to Christ? That is a question guaranteed to offend most people. After all, the level of my commitment is a personal matter between myself and Christ, isn't it? Or is it perhaps not so personal after all? Jesus seems to think that it is a major question that will impact many of the people around us—our families, friends, and even co-workers. Jesus' description of what it may mean to follow Him reminds us plainly that *nothing* can take precedence over His lordship.

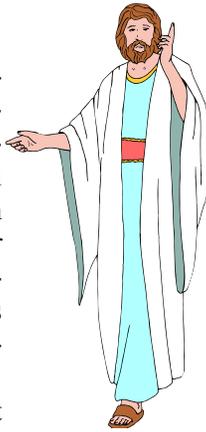
Bible study discussion often centers on the idea that Jesus may talk tough but in reality He was just using a strong example to make a point. He would not really ask us to leave behind family and friends on account of faith in Him. Comfortable thought, but it isn't true. Early Christians were shunned by former family members and friends. Worse yet, entire families sometimes walked into the arena to be killed by wild animals. In the former Soviet Union, Christians were unable to pursue higher positions in business or government. Hasidic Jews hold funeral services for any family member who converts to Christianity. In some countries today, sharing the Gospel is a capital offense! Those are unpleasant thoughts, but they are the reality. If Jesus loves us so much, why would He demand such things of His followers?

We sometimes lose track of the importance of the Gospel of Jesus the Christ. We live in a world that insists that all paths to God are equal; a world that believes that we are all empowered to create God in our own image; a world in which everybody turns out okay in the end. It's a lie. No one can spend eternity with God except through the Son. Anyone who is without the Son will spend eternity in Hell. Satan will use any method to keep any person from salvation. If he can pull us aside from sharing the Gospel; if he can pull us aside from our own salvation, he has accomplished his purpose. There can be no exceptions when it comes to being faithful to Christ and sharing His love with others.

We are saved by grace through faith alone, but *living* out our life in Christ is a daily commitment to make Him the sole Lord of our lives. It is a difficult command, but it can be obeyed through His power and grace.

Now is the best time to join a Bible study.

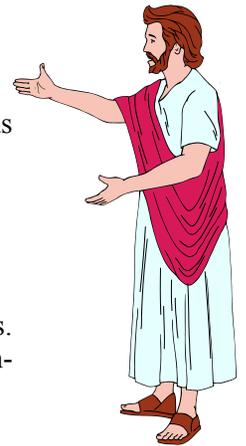
(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee.)



Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 14:25-33

1. Jesus shares an illustration of construction (vs. 28-30). What is Jesus' point?
2. Jesus shares another illustration from war (vs. 31-33). What is Jesus' point?
3. What does it mean to give up everything for Jesus (vs. 33)?
4. Is Jesus really asking us to hate our family (vs. 26)? Note the Concordia Self-study Bible or another commentary on this passage.
5. What does it mean to carry a cross as we follow Jesus? (vs. 27) Who is the only One who carried the cross of salvation?
6. What crosses are you carrying as a disciple of Jesus? What are you giving up to follow Jesus? What promises of Jesus are sustaining and directing you?



Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Are we still called, as was Ezekiel, to be “watchmen”? When we see sin around us, are we called to proclaim God’s opposition? Is it only valid to proclaim Jesus’ love, or is it also valid to proclaim Jesus’ coming judgment? These are hard questions with which we wrestle. Our comfort zone says to just tell everyone that Jesus loves them. (The world isn’t even too sure we should do that.) Maybe part of the answer to our quandary lies in attitude.

Ezekiel preached the coming judgment until the fall of Jerusalem. He did not love his message of judgment, but he knew that it had to be preached in the hope that people would come to their senses and return to God. After the city’s fall, he preached God’s coming restoration! His compassion poured out as readily as his message of judgment. Where did he get this attitude? Verse 11 says, “‘As I live!’ declares the Lord God, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.’” God did not appoint His watchman to condemn, but to warn; to call back from the brink of destruction to safety.

In our own lives we often more reflect Jonah than Ezekiel. Jonah preached to Nineveh (under protest) and the people turned from evil and to God. Jonah’s response was to sit and pout because God had saved people whom Jonah wanted condemned. Do we sometimes warn of sin but hold a feeling inside of us that wants the “bad guys” to reject God and get the punishment they deserve so that we can have the satisfaction of knowing that “We tried to warn them, but they just wouldn’t listen!” Do we sometimes even have those feelings toward other Christians?



God still wants watchmen to warn and inform the people of our nation and of our communities, but watchmen with compassion; watchmen who will know heartfelt joy when sin-controlled people begin to seek God. By the love and power of our Lord it really is possible (pardon the cliché) to truly love the unlovable.

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

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 33:7-9

1. What did it mean to be a “watchman” in Ezekiel’s time? (The Concordia Self-study Bible has an explanation in the notes on Ezekiel 3:17)



2. Compare this text with Ezekiel 3:17-19. Why is the message repeated? Is there any difference in the messages?
3. According to vs. 8, in what ways was Ezekiel held accountable to God?
4. According to vs. 9 was Ezekiel held accountable for every response to his message?
5. Ezekiel was to deliver a “life and death” message. Do we address the wickedness of our time with the same boldness? Should we? Does God hold us accountable in similar ways?
6. The mission hymn “Hark, The Voice of Jesus Calling” (LW#318) also refers to a “watchman” (vs. 3). In what ways can we still be “watchmen” for Jesus?

16th Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 35:4-7

A central part of Isaiah's message to God's people was one of impending trouble. Because of their sin the nation would be punished, and it would be horrible. The enemy would destroy Jerusalem and devastate the countryside.

Along with those words God also sent a prophecy of restoration to His people. No, the enemies of God would not be victorious forever, nor would God's love for His people be dissolved. When Jerusalem fell, they would know that Isaiah had been proclaiming the truth of God. That realization would assure them that his words of restoration also came from the Lord. God's chastisement for their rebellion was a certainty, but no less a certainty than their restoration.



Isaiah prophesied around 700 years before Jesus quoted him, according to Matthew's gospel (11:5). Jesus sent Isaiah's words to John the Baptist in prison. They were meant to assure him that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Some of the people who listened to Isaiah in and around Jerusalem understood what he was talking about. They knew from Isaiah's words that God was faithful to them; that He would save them; that He would bring back the joy of life in Judah; that He would have victory over the very enemies that He had used in their punishment. They understood the words as wonderful news for their national history, but the message meant much more than that.

Jesus assured John that those things foresaw by Isaiah were happening, and they were happening in more than one way. People were being healed of deafness, blindness, lameness, and even death. It was happening not only physically, but eternally! Those who had lost the hope that they might ever see God were assured that they would be with Him forever, and those who had never heard the truth were able to receive it. It's overused these days, but you just gotta say it—Awesome!!

Try out a Bible study with your friends!

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

16th Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 35:4-7

1. According to vs. 4a to whom are these words especially addressed? What might be some of the fears of Isaiah and his audience?
2. Where do we find the Law in vs. 4? Where do we find the Gospel in this verse?
3. Jesus quotes vs. 5-6 in Matthew 11:5. How did Jesus fulfill these words?
4. What poetic contrasts do we find in vs. 5, 6 and 7? What seemingly impossible rescue would take place when Jesus came?
5. Vs. 6b and 7a describe life-giving waters. What life-giving water runs in our lives? How does your baptism continue to refresh you?
6. Can you think of a time(s) when you have been fearful? How did God bring calm to your life? How did He rescue you?



Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Proverbs 9:8-12

How well do you take “constructive criticism”? In today’s workplace many find themselves in the “team” realm, “peer” reviews, and “peer” conferences where our ego interprets our peers’ advice as “I’m telling you this because we are a team and you are an idiot.” We may endure it, but few of us enjoy it. Even when we know it’s correct, we have to “chew” on constructive criticism for a time before we can appreciate it.

As poor as we are at hearing correction, we are better than the “mocker” in Proverbs. That person totally rejects the idea that they might be less than perfect in their actions or opinions. Trying to teach such a person will only build his animosity toward the one offering help. It’s a bit like teaching your cat to swim, which wastes your time and irritates the cat. The mocker has little hope of growing in life or relationship. On the other hand, a wise person will gladly learn when corrected and become better at his task or wiser in his thought.

Most of us probably fall somewhere between the mocker and the wise man. Even as our faces heat up at hearing correction, there is a nagging feeling reminding us that there is probably something here that we have to admit is true. We manage to stifle our angry reply and stalk away to think about it. How can we become more like the wise man and less like the mocker?

Verse 10 of today’s reading tells us the answer. When we learn to hold our almighty, eternal, creating and redeeming God in awe (“fear” in most translations), our pride and self confidence begin to take on a more humble attitude. Knowledge of God doesn’t just grow in our heads, but in our hearts. It is centered in a heart that believes that we become wise to salvation through Jesus Christ. Wisdom begins to mature as we shift our priorities from self to God. We cannot get closer to God on our own, but the Holy Spirit is always guiding us closer to Him through a lifelong process called sanctification. As we grow closer to God, we also grow in our day to day life, and begin to see that we really can learn from the knowledge and wisdom of others.

Learn more about wisdom and knowledge in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Proverbs 9:8-12

1. Why does a “mocker” hate rebuke? (vs. 8a.)
2. Why does a “wise man” welcome rebuke? (vs. 8b)
3. Who is the “Holy One” (vs. 10)? What constitutes “knowledge” of the Holy One? It is only an intellectual understanding?
4. What does it mean to “fear” the Lord (vs. 10)? Notice the same use of “fear” in the explanation to the commandments in the Small Catechism.
5. What is the meaning of vs. 11? Does obedience always mean a greater life expectancy? (See the note for Proverbs 3:2 in the Concordia Self-study Bible.)
6. See 1 Corinthians 1:30. Who is Wisdom? Where do we find complete and eternal wisdom?

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 13:1-10

There are a number of groups in our country today that heavily arm themselves, move into guarded encampments, and preach a litany of hate against the United States government. They eagerly await an attack and prepare to kill anyone who might try to steal their supplies of food if a time of breakdown and anarchy should overtake our society. Amazingly, some of these groups describe themselves as Christian.

Paul explains the Christian's relationship to civil government in a very different way. In his time, as in our own, there were those who wanted the government swept away by any means possible, including violence. Part of the reason that the Jews rejected Jesus was that the Messiah, in their eyes, would be a great military leader who would drive Rome from Palestine and restore the power to Israel that she had once known.

Contrary to the belief of some, Paul says that the true Christian witness to civil government is obedience. However, this does not mean that some churches in Germany were faithful to God when, during the reign of Hitler, they replaced the church crosses with swastikas. We know this because Peter and John in Acts 5 told those in power over them that they (the apostles) had to "obey God rather than men." (vs. 29)

So that is our dilemma. How do we obey and yet disobey when and if our government commands us to disobey God? We find some truths to follow in the second part of today's lesson in which Paul returns to a favored theme of his, "Love."

As we strive to live our lives in peace with ourselves and with others, God's love in the cross of Christ is the guiding force that drives us. If we live on God's love and function in constant awareness of His love for us, His love for all people, and His command that we also love, then we will not fail to do what is right in our relationship with our rulers and leaders, whether they be in the civil government or in our churches.

Learn more about God's command to love in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 13:1-10

1. What word dominates the Christian's response in these verses? In what other context is this word used? (Ephesians 5:22-24)
2. How did Jesus show His respect for government? (See Luke 20:20-25)
3. How is the government described in vs. 4? In what contexts is government an agent for good? For wrath?
4. What directive does God's Word give for a situation in which a government may act contrary to God's clear Word? (Acts 5:29)

For Family Reflection

5. List the blessings that you receive from local, state, and national governments. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving.
6. The words of this text are included in the "Table of Duties" in Luther's Small Catechism. What other servants are noted in this section? Include the "Table of Duties" in your family devotion.

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

James 1:17-27

Martin Luther didn't really like James' letter because James wrote strongly about the importance of living out our faith. It wasn't that Luther didn't believe in doing good works, but in his time Roman Catholic doctrine taught men and women to help work their salvation through what they did—penance, confession, devotion to the saints, and even payment to the Church for a shorter time in Purgatory, the “half-way house” where a Christian supposedly remained after death until he finished paying for his sins. To Luther, James' teaching on works and faith could lead those who had accepted grace and faith back into trying to work out their salvation. Today, however, in a world where Christian faith is often all too invisible we can identify more clearly with James' inspired insight.

This James, who headed the early Jerusalem church, was the half-brother of Jesus. However, he was apparently not a follower of Jesus before the latter's crucifixion. Perhaps he did not really believe until Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection. Having come to faith later than many, James truly understood sin, forgiveness, and the good news that salvation is a free gift that we cannot earn or deserve. Knowing that, we must look past the surface of some of his more difficult words for James' full message.

What is a person who does not express any visible sign of their faith? What is a person who hates his brothers? What is a person who never talks about Jesus? What is a person who only has time to serve himself. And, what is a person who believes that Jesus died for his or her sin? All of these can be Christians who will join Christ in paradise. James, however, knew that a Christian who cannot be recognized as a Christian cannot show others Christ; cannot be a witness of God's love to others. James knew that a Christian who does not try to live as Christ lived is missing out on an abundant and productive life.

Our task in this world is to tell others about Jesus and demonstrate His love to our world. James recognized the tragedy of a Christianity that does not feel the joy of serving Christ or understand the great commission given to us all.

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

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

James 1:17-27

1. We will be blessed by the readings for four Sundays from the book of James. Using the Concordia Self-study Bible or another reference find out about this book. Who wrote this book? Why was it written? What is the theme of the book?
2. How does our faith affect our ears? (vs. 19-22)
3. How does our faith affect our tongue? (vs. 26)
4. Why did God choose us to be His? (vs. 18) What unique role do Christians have in the world?

For Family Reflection

5. Where do we see filth (vs. 21) in our world? Where do we see filth in our own homes and coming from our own lips? Who cleans up our filth?
6. Verse 27 challenges us to take care of those in need. Who in your community or church needs your special care? Find out about Lutheran World Relief, Orphan Grain Train and other agencies that assist those in need.

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost

1 Timothy 1:5-17

Whenever the day's passage begins with "but" or "therefore" we must back up a few verses to see what words have preceded the message. In this case we find that there were false teachers and false ideas troubling Timothy's congregation and ministry. Paul is adamant that while these promote man's flawed knowledge, all who preach the real truth, do so in "*love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*" Depending on one's own mind and losing sight of the truth and love of Christ will lead to fruitless speculation and pride.

People have always wanted to be their own god. Perhaps they would word it differently, expressing it as the desire to "fully understand God." Many who have identified themselves as "theologians" over the centuries have fallen into believing that man can understand everything. They come to deny whatever they do not understand. The Jews of Jesus' time, for instance, held to their false belief that man had to save himself in God's eyes. Many Greek philosophers clung to the idea that knowing how all of the aspects of the physical and spiritual universe fit together would raise them to a higher plane. Today, some deny Jesus because His gift of salvation just doesn't make sense to them. Many "Christians" deny the supernatural events cited in God's word, simply because they can't figure out how He did the things He did.

In today's lesson Paul speaks to the false teachers' view of the Law. They were demanding that Christians keep the Law in order to remain saved. It just made sense to them. Paul says, "NO! The Law was given as a tool by which sinners might come to know their need for grace."

We also must remain true to the truth—that only by Jesus' death on the cross are we saved. That may seem obvious to those of us who believe it, but it is one of the major truths of our faith that is being attacked today. It is only by Jesus that we may be saved. What a wonderful truth; a truth to be defended by our works and our words. Paul, one whom Jesus rescued from the deepest rebellion against God, truly understood this.

Learn more about Jesus as the one way to God in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost

1 Timothy 1:5-17

1. The lessons for the next seven weeks will focus on Paul's letters to Timothy. Using the Concordia Self-study Bible or another reference review the Apostle's relationship with Timothy and his family. What was the context of the letters?
2. According to vs. 13a and 15b, what was Paul's condition before his conversion? How do these verses describe our condition before Christ came to us?
3. How does Paul explain the change (vs. 13b, 16)? How do we explain the changes in our relationship with Christ?

For Family Reflection

4. There is a spiritual father-son relationship between Paul and Timothy? Is there someone whom you consider a spiritual father or mother? Is there someone whom you consider to be a son or daughter in the family of the church? How did your relationship develop? What do you celebrate about the relationship?
5. Review the difference between Law and Gospel (Explanation to Luther's Small Catechism, question #85). Find the Law and Gospel message in this text.
6. Paul offers a doxology of praise (vs. 17). Read the doxology as a family. Perhaps sing the "common doxology"—"Praise God from whom all blessings flow . . ."

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 16:21-28

Have you ever thought of truly giving up your own life in service to Christ? Perhaps a better way to express it would be to ask if you have ever thought of giving control of your life to Christ and whatever He might have in mind for you to do. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a German anti-Nazi pastor in World War II) once said that many Christians enjoy what Bonhoeffer called “cheap grace.” By that, he meant that we grow to love the free gift of salvation so much that we forget what an expensive price Jesus paid in our behalf. We forget that He now owns us; that He wants us to live in Him.

In this passage Jesus calls upon any who would follow Him to “take up his cross.” Truly living for Jesus, acknowledging Him as not only Savior, but Lord, is a challenge that God presents to the Christian every day. As sojourners in this world, we are surrounded by the temptation to achieve success in the eyes of the world. How expensive is your car; what position do you hold in the company; what school do your children attend; who do you know? The world rarely asks which ministries you serve in or whether you were able to attend worship this week. The world never asks the Christian to take time to sit with God or witness to a neighbor.

In spite of the world’s enmity against a life lived as His servant, Jesus still says that, “...whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.” Are you willing to lose control of your life to Jesus? He is our Savior and the One who seeks to empower our actions. Jesus invites us to live for Him and by His power. Serving Him as Lord is the most abundant lifestyle of all, and He is even willing to grant us the will and courage to do it.

Is Bible study a part of your Christian walk?

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

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 16:21-28

1. Recent texts have emphasized the power and person of Jesus. According to these verses what was the essence of His mission?
2. Did Peter and the disciples understand Jesus’ mission at this time? What hindered their understanding?
3. What does it mean to “take up his cross and follow me” (vs. 24)? Are we to carry a real cross? What “crosses” are you carrying for Jesus?
4. Verse 27 seems to imply that we will be rewarded for our good actions. Can we earn heaven? (See Romans 3:24) In what sense is heaven a “reward”?

For Family Reflection

5. Do we (like Peter) ever get in the way of the truth of Jesus? How do we get out of Jesus’ way and let His truth be seen?
6. How do you see many trying to “gain the whole world” (vs. 26)? Do we sometimes seek the good things of the world and forget about Jesus?

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 9:30-37

All of Jesus' followers expected Him to throw off His gentleness and take up a sword against Rome; to restore Israel to the prominence she enjoyed in Old Testament times. That was their sincere belief about the Messiah. So being "greater" in this political messiah's entourage would bring a higher position in his government and more power and honor. Only later did they begin to understand that the Messiah's mission was to save people; restore them to His Father; grant them eternal and abundant life. Jesus' teaching about servanthood was essential if they were to ever understand the true nature of His kingdom.

Many in today's churches still act as though our Master's church is political. We treat the "least" of her servants as though they were of little importance, when Jesus taught that being a servant of all was the most valuable character trait of all. While we may treat the janitor as though we can command and demand without appreciation, we may virtually bow to the council president. We treat the pastor as though he were a much greater servant of God than the women serving in the nursery.

Jesus in fact uses children in this passage to make His point. How often do we disregard the importance of children in the church; in the kingdom? How often do we tell parents that they will have to provide their own child care for a Bible study because we can't find anyone to man the nursery? What would Jesus' reply be to that problem? He would sit them all around Himself while teaching.

Pastors are wonderful and important servants in the church. They are called to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments. Also worthy or honor and respect are the people bringing food for a funeral luncheon. Christ's church is not about politics and power and impressing the "right people." It is about serving one another and the community where we live.

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

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

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 9:30-37

1. What prophecy does Jesus share in vs. 31? Why couldn't the disciples understand His words at this time? When did they understand?
2. What were the disciples arguing about? Do we ever argue about the same issue?
3. What's the point of Jesus' action with a little child?

For Family Reflection

4. How does the world define greatness? How does Jesus define greatness?
5. To whom has God called you to be the servant? How can you serve them?
6. How are you welcoming the children in your family? Your church? Your community?

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 15:1-10

The Pharisees and scribes began to “grumble” against Jesus for eating with sinners and receiving them into His presence. Now, before we get all indignant about the Pharisees, let’s admit that we often feel a little anger at the idea that a murderer or rapist can be saved through faith in Christ as Savior. We may even get a little annoyed at the thought that we will have to spend eternity in Heaven with another Christian whom we just plain don’t like.

Anyway, Jesus answered the Pharisees and scribes with two parables illustrating the joy of finding something that we have lost. When a shepherd searches for a sheep or a woman searches for a coin, they are actually hoping to restore their own wealth. Of course the shepherd has love and compassion for the sheep that he has raised from a lamb, but that compassion pales in comparison to what is in God’s heart for the lost soul. We cannot really understand God’s love for the sinner. It is beyond our imagination.

Even more than the shepherd owns the sheep or the woman owns the coin, God owns all of us (even those who reject Him) because we are literally His creation. Those who do not know Jesus are lost from their Owner, but when the Owner seeks them out, He does not do so to restore His own wealth, but to give of His wealth to them. The Owner seeks them out to give them of Himself. It is a far greater love than the shepherd or the coin-owner can conceive, even when their hearts care as greatly as human hearts can.

The Pharisees and scribes could not fully understand the comparison Jesus presented them. They had already rejected Jesus’ love. Perhaps Jesus was chiding and challenging them to reconsider their own hearts when He said that “...there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine *who need no repentance.*” There is after all no person, even among those made righteous in Christ, who does not need to daily confess his or her sin to God and receive His forgiveness. Caught up in their self-righteousness, the Pharisees and scribes could not understand that their Owner was seeking them so that He could give to them of His own wealth.

Invite a friend to Bible study!

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

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 15:1-10

1. What type of audience was Jesus attracting as He was teaching? What objections were raised as to the company Jesus kept?
2. Jesus shares three parables in this chapter. What’s lost in vss. 3-7? Who does the seeking? What’s the response to the rescued lamb? What’s heaven’s response to a sinner saved?
3. What’s lost in vss.8-10? What’s the response when the coin is found? What’s Jesus’ application of this parable?
4. Review the next parable (vs. 11-32). Who’s found? What’s the response of the Father? Of the brother?

For Family Reflection

5. Why do we rejoice when a child is baptized, when a new member is welcomed to the church, when a wandering sinner returns to God’s family, when an in-active member returns to church? How can we show and share our joy?
6. Do we sometimes think that we are better than others or deserve God’s grace more than others? How might we be like the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus’ day? (vs. 1-2)