

## 17th 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. Jesus answered them with the truth that any of them who owned a sheep or a coin that was lost would search every possible place until the lost was found. How much more should God have the right to reclaim a lost person?

It is very difficult for us to comprehend the love that God has for the 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 develops a caring heart for each of his sheep, but that compassion pales in comparison to what is in God’s heart for the lost soul.

Even more than the shepherd owns the sheep that is lost and the woman owns the lost coin, God owns all of creation, even those who reject Him. 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 seeks to give of His wealth to His lost possession. In being drawn to repentance and salvation, the lost sheep of Christ come home as heirs to the kingdom of God. Their Owner has sought them out in order to give to them of Himself. It is a far greater love than the shepherd or the coin-owner can conceive, even though their hearts care as greatly as human hearts can.



The Pharisees and scribes could not understand the full importance of the comparison presented to 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 *righteous persons who need no repentance.*” There is, after all, no person, not even among those who are righteous through Christ, who does not need to daily repent and ask God’s forgiveness. Caught up in their self-righteousness, the Pharisees and scribes did not understand that their Shepherd and Owner was searching them out so that He could give to them of His own wealth.

**Now is the best time to join a Bible study.**

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

## 17th Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 15:1-10



1. What criticism of Jesus initiated the parable of this text? (vs. 2)
2. Out of the hundred sheep, which one was most important to the shepherd?
3. Jesus tells another parable about a lost coin (vs. 8-9). Why is the woman concerned about one coin when she has nine others?
4. What word (emotion) dominates the parables (vs. 5, 6, 7, 9, 10)? What brings joy to Jesus?
5. Does being found and forgiven by Jesus bring joy to you? How can you live and share that joy in your daily life?
6. Is this statement “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (vs. 2) true? What “sinners” is Jesus asking us to find for Him?

## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 50:15-21

Some of the most amazing situations in our world have to do with family relationships—brothers, parents, in-laws, sisters or grandparents, who haven't spoken to each other for decades. Many would excuse this behavior by saying, "I've done all I can do" or "All he has to do is apologize" or "I have forgiven her, but I just can't be in the same room with her." Sometimes people believe that the wrong done to them is just plain undeserving of forgiveness. These words and attitudes are not surprising when they come from unbelievers, but all too often they pour out of the mouths and hearts of Christians. They are voiced about relationships with their physical families and about relationships with their brothers and sisters in Christ. The second is more unimaginable than the first.

We have two wonderful examples in the Bible concerning how we are expected to treat one another. One is Jesus. This example is easy to sidestep. After all, Jesus was perfect and God knows we can't be perfect, so a little hatred mixed in from time to time is only to be expected. The second example, however, is harder to ignore, or talk around.

He is Joseph. Joseph the great leader; Joseph the abused; Joseph the falsely accused; Joseph the sinner. His brothers hated him for petty reasons. They wanted to murder him. They caused great distress to him and complete separation from his family for decades. Yet Joseph forgave them and, though he tested them, he never asked for an apology. Though he had the power to exact vengeance, he gave aid instead. And lest you think that his brothers had learned their lesson and had completely reformed from the callous hatred of their past and perhaps deserved his forgiveness, don't forget that they lied to him even in this final seeking of his friendship. Surely Joseph knew this.

Joseph's forgiveness was not one of silence, nor of forgiving but never forgetting. It was a forgiveness that showered love in the face of suspicion. Verse 21 says, "...he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."

We cannot imitate Joseph on our own, but God can help us, and we MUST try. Jesus *commanded* us to be kind to one another. He did not add the phrase, "...if they deserve it."

***Seek the Bible's teachings about families!***

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)



## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 50:15-21

1. Why might Joseph have held a grudge (vs. 15) against his brothers? (Review Genesis 37).
2. How do the brothers' actions (vs. 18) fulfill the dreams of Joseph (37:7,9)?
3. How could Joseph forgive his brothers? See Luke 23:34 for an even greater act of forgiveness.
4. According to vs. 20, what faith perspective does Joseph give to the trials of his life?
5. Is there someone that you, like Joseph, need to forgive?
6. How has God used the trials of your life to work His good purposes?



## 17th Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 50:4-10

Who is the servant? Only One man has fulfilled all of the description provided, and that man is Jesus. No one else could do it all.

The Servant focused only on His Father and on His service. He showed no resistance to His killers and He ministered as a servant to all. He was aware of His fate and understood His Father's plan clearly and chose to fulfill it. How many of us could do the same? Which of us would die for the unlovable and plead for our killers? Which of us would not have climbed down from the cross when challenged to do so? Which of us would not have had our revenge then and there? And which of us could have done all that the Servant did with all confidence in the face of a terrifying death? Jesus is indeed the One of whom the prophet ultimately spoke.



Sometimes we seem to think that what He did really wasn't such a big deal. We slight Jesus' great sacrifice not by what we do or do not do, but by our attitude. We praise Him on Sundays, when we have time to go to worship, but where is He on the importance list the rest of the week? Of course, He does not demand "thank-you" for His work. Good servants never do. But how often do we find ourselves not caring enough to pray daily, or skipping worship to catch an early practice, or thoughtlessly shouting His name in vain as we chase the dog across the vet's parking lot? How about the last time we struggled and sweated through a stressful week without thinking to ask Him to fill us with peace? It really is the little attitude habits that bring us closer to our Lord or lead us away.

The Servant has paid for our sin on the cross. He has freely granted us salvation and promises us that we will be with Him forever. We do nothing to accomplish that, but the Servant graciously wants to fellowship with us daily; to fill us with His love and enable us to consider Him the VIP in our lives. He wants us to enjoy this life that He has so freely given. He wants to be our Rock.

*Try out a Bible study with your friends!*

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

## 17th Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 50:4-10

1. This is the third of four "servant songs" in the book of Isaiah (see also Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; and Isaiah 52:13-53:12). Who is the "servant" that Isaiah prophesies?

2. How many times is the title "Sovereign Lord" used in this text? What does it mean that our Lord is "sovereign"?



3. How does verse 6 tell us about the suffering of the servant? How do we see that Jesus will suffer willingly?

4. How is this text helpful when we face ridicule and rejection for our faith?

5. What are some "dark" times of life? What encouragement is given in vs. 10?

6. Isaiah is given "the word that sustains the weary." (vs. 4) Read (or sing) the words of the Lenten hymn "Jesus, Refuge Of the Weary" (LW#90). How is Jesus the answer to our weariness?

## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 32:7-14

Does God really change His mind? Could Moses really be more patient than God? If not, then why did God approach Moses with such a strange proposal?

God is all-knowing. He knows every event in history not only after it happens, but before it happens. He tells us that He knows us personally when we are still in the womb. Perhaps His proposal to Moses was a learning experience for the great leader and for us. In other words, God was not learning patience in this confrontation with Moses, He was teaching patience to His chosen leader.

God's love for us is unending. His anger is real, but His love means that He knew even from the Garden of Eden that He would give anything to reclaim His creation as His own. Adam and Eve threw away their relationship with the Father, but the Father already had His plan for salvation in motion. Satan thought that he had won the day, but he was mistaken.

With God's help, Moses became a mediator between the Creator and His people. Through the Old Testament times God taught the people through their leaders over and over again how much He loved them. His patience was phenomenal. A thousand years after Moses' passing God sent His people into punishment by allowing their enemies to crush them, yet He also sent prophets to tell them that His love still continued. The whole history of God with His people in the Old Testament was to teach them that their only hope for salvation lay not in their own goodness, but in His grace.

Moses was a precursor of the true Mediator. Far from ready to give up on His creation, God was preparing His people to understand that He was willing to send His own Son to suffer the punishment for their sins; teaching them to understand that only through the Son could they have a restored relationship with their Creator.

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

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 32:7-14

1. What event (Exodus 32:1-6) preceded the dialog between God and Moses?
2. Why does God call the Israelites "your people" (vs. 7)? (See also vs. 8-9.) Do you think that there are times where God would like to distance Himself from us?
3. What was God's natural inclination toward the idolatrous Israelites? (vs. 10) What is God's reaction to our sin and disobedience?
4. Why does Moses give the "ownership" of the Israelites (vs. 11) back to God? How does Moses appeal to God's memory (vs. 13)?
5. What's the Good News of vs. 14? Why did God change His mind?
6. Moses serves as the mediator between God and the Israelites. Who is our Mediator? (See I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 9:15)

## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 14:5-9

At a time when the world is doing its best to convince Christians that it doesn't matter what you do with your life as long as it feels good to you, it's proper to be reminded that Paul's instructions in this passage apply to brothers and sisters in Christ.

I saw a bumper sticker the other day that said, "Jesus was the first liberal." This was a cultural, rather than political, statement. Other messages on the car called for continued abortion, gay and lesbian lifestyles, and neo-Paganism. One sticker remarked, "God is too big for one religion." Accepting these examples of the world's sin-sickness is not what Paul is referring to.

How many times have you or I remarked that a church member doesn't give enough of his or her time or money to the work of the church, or that one of the moms should volunteer for nursery duty far more than she does? How do we respond to the teen who comes to church with tattoos in view?

Paul knew many Gentile Christians. Some had come from pagan faiths in which eating meat sacrificed to the gods had a religious significance. To Paul, such meat was simply meat later sold cheaply at the market and very enjoyable, but to others such practice was too much like the paganism that they had left behind. Others wondered if they should continue to honor the hundreds of feasts of Rome, and should Sunday be honored above the Sabbath as a day of rest with God.

We too criticize other believers, even other Lutherans who don't choose to use the same hymnal or worship style as we, or perhaps dress too casually for Sunday worship. Sometimes we point an accusing finger at a fellow Christian denomination because they believe that Jesus does not approve of drinking alcohol, even in moderation.

When we do these things we are forgetting that these believers also serve Jesus. He is their Master, just as He is ours. Only He knows exactly what the Father desires in His children. That which we only see dimly, we sometimes follow foggily. However, Jesus covers us and our fellow believers with His grace and His forgiveness. He calls on us to also forgive and love as we seek to be obedient to His Word.

Learn more about Jesus' patient love for us in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 14:5-9

1. Read Romans 14:1-4. What is the context of today's lesson?
2. Had God designated a "sacred" day (see Exodus 20:8-11)? How had Jesus expanded on the teaching of the Sabbath (see Matthew 12:1-13)? What was the Apostle's Paul point on sacred days (vs. 5-6)?
3. What is the Gospel message of verse 9? What are the implications of the Gospel according to vs. 8?
4. According to vs. 8, what is the good news about life? What is the good news about death?

### For Family Reflection

5. "We belong to the Lord" (vs. 8). What do these words mean for your family? How do we show that we belong to the Lord?
6. We have just finished over 3 months of readings from the wonderful book of Romans. Glance back through the book. Share your favorite section or verse from this book. Pick a verse to memorize.

## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

James 2:1-18

At first James doesn't sound very Lutheran! This is another case in which we need to find the meaning of James in the context of the rest of the New Testament's gospel message. He, as a true believer and leader of Jesus' church in Jerusalem, was not saying that we must do works in order to be saved. So, what was James saying about the works of faith?

The church of James' time had all of the warts and flaws that churches do today. Every church from the beginning of Christianity has been fashioned of sinners—forgiven sinners, but sinners nonetheless. In the church we find examples of James' meaning.

We see one example in verses 2-3. Like us, the believers of James' time fell victim to classifying "visitors" to the church. We would like to deny it, but don't we often slot visitors as either those whom we want to be sure to meet or those whom we hope will be gone before we leave the pew? James would ask us how we can claim to be followers of Jesus the Servant when we do this.

To James, failing to live out one's faith with works meant a wasted life. For instance, those unbelievers who were treated with less than Christian love by Christians would probably die in their sin, convinced that Christians were no different than the rest of the world that had already rejected them.

James looked at some Christians (and in those days most adults had once been non-Christians) and noted that though their mouths said the right words, their lives did not reflect a person who had been made new by Jesus. James was amazed that a person saved out of damnation could continue to live life as though nothing had changed. He was saying, "How can you not respond to God's mercy and love by doing something?"

Like a more recent theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer, James struggled with a difficult question—can a Christian really live his or her faith without works? Or, is a life lived without works one that has placed faith in a box on a shelf, to be pulled out as a ticket to heaven at the end of this life? Are many Christians missing out on a satisfying life of peace and service today, thinking that faith can't make any difference in the here and now?

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

## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

James 2:1-18

1. Did Jesus show favoritism in His ministry? (Think of some examples of how Jesus connected with the lowly and unlikely.) What caution does James have about our tendencies toward favorites?
2. Will God condemn us for even one sin? (vs. 10) Why? What can we conclude about our own situation (before God) from this verse?
3. Does faith alone save us? (Romans 3:28). Are good deeds necessary? What is the relationship between the faith and deeds?

### For Family Reflection

4. If only one sin condemns us (vs.10), what hope do we have?
5. Do we sometimes play "favorites?" Does God play favorites? How should we treat others?
6. Do Christians need to be concerned about what they do or say?

## Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

1 Timothy 2:1-15

Paul instructs us on the importance of being obedient to authority and the importance of praying for all, especially our leaders. As our own 2008 political dialogs begin, it is good for us to be reminded that, as Christians, we pray for those who lead us. While we all make our political decisions by seeking God's will, we don't define our political stands as the only "Christian" way to vote. We are to pray that all who are in authority over us will be guided by God, and to God, by the power of the Holy Spirit who is at work in our world—even in our politics! In verse 8 Paul adds that we are to pray without anger or dissention. Quite a task.

Paul continues this theme of submissiveness to authority as he speaks of men and women and their roles in the church. His points concerning women are not as troublesome as they may at first seem to modern women readers.

It seems that the Ephesian women were pursuing their place, or value, by means of their looks, possessions, and power, while ignoring their position in Christ. Being a woman of beauty, wealth, or power isn't bad except when this replaces Christ as one's center of focus. As far as Paul's comment on "silence" goes, the word that he uses really refers to "*settled down, undisturbed, not unruly.*" In other words, it appears that the Ephesian women had become obstinate, demanding, and perhaps arrogant in their attitude commanding submission to authority—in this case the male authority of the church and family. Paul did not mean that all women should be silent in every context, or that they are less than men in God's eyes! Paul, after all, sent his letter to the Romans via a woman named Phoebe. As far as being "saved through child-birth," there are many ideas on that thought. What we know for sure is that God does not command women to maintain, or obtain, their salvation by being moms and wives! Perhaps our questions on this "Paulism" will have to wait until we meet Paul in heaven.

So, we are left today with a command from Paul to be men and women who equally submit to authority, who pray for those in authority, who are working in peace at the task of spreading the truth of God's love throughout the world!

Learn more about Jesus' patient love for us in a Bible study this week.

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

## Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

1 Timothy 2:1-15

1. According to vs. 2 why should our government leaders be included in our prayers? For which leaders might we pray for in our community, state, and nation?
2. According to vs. 4 whom does God want in heaven with Him? According to vs. 5-6, how is that salvation possible?
3. What does vs. 8 have to say about relationships in the church? Are these relationships evident in your church family?
4. Summarize Paul's direction for the role of women in the church.

### For Family Reflection

5. Reflect on your personal and family prayer life. Are your prayers offered in the name of Jesus (vs. 5-6)? Make a list of "supplications, intercessions, and thanksgivings." Set a time for focused prayer.
6. Reflect on the women of faith in your family and in your church. Through which women is God working in the contexts of your life? How are women using gifts in your home and in your church? How is their faith an example to you?

## Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 18:1-20

Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus says that it is the humble believer who is the “greatest” (vs.4). Yet, we see some churches claiming to be better at living the true faith than any other. That doesn’t sound like humble faith.

Jesus didn’t cite how well one lived out what they believed, though it is essential that as Christians we walk in the steps of our Lord. Jesus didn’t praise children because they could understand all of the intricacies of salvation, or because they belonged to the biggest congregation in the county. He held children up as examples of truly trusting in Him and understanding His care for them. They were willing to put their lives in His hands and listen to His guidance. It’s a very simple concept of who we are as Christians.

That doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t learn what the Bible says, or what Luther taught us about why we believe as we do. It is important to be able to share our faith accurately with others who need to hear the gospel.

Jesus, however, emphasized the simpler truth of the gospel: He has died for us and His promise of eternal life is trustworthy. He looks at a church’s love drawing in the unbeliever; sharing resources with the community; supporting one another in good times and bad, all in the name of our Savior. Jesus Himself said that the world would recognize us for the love that we had for one another. He extended that command of love even to our enemies.

Our belief, our doctrine, is essential in explaining what we believe. It marks us as Lutheran. We believe that it is the truest expression of God’s Word. However, as James would echo, we must step beyond what we believe into how well we demonstrate our trust and how humbly we accept Jesus’ lordship in all that we say and do. Trusting in Him, believing in His gift of salvation, and seeking His wisdom above our own in our actions and thoughts are how we show the world His love.

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

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

## Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 18:1-20

1. Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Why?
2. Are the directions of verses 8 and 9 to be taken literally? What point is Jesus making to us?
3. According to verses 12-14 how precious is each “little one” to Jesus? How precious are you to Jesus?
4. List the familiar steps (vs. 15-17) for confrontation and reconciliation with a fellow Christian. Why is this process so important?

### For Family Reflection

5. What does it mean to welcome a little child in Jesus’ name (vs. 5)? How are children welcomed in your home? In your church?
6. Jesus said “where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (vs. 20). How and when is Jesus present in your family?

## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 9:38-50

Have we forgotten that we have received the greatest gift of all time? The gift of salvation brings us eternal and abundant life in Christ. We declare this truth during every worship service, yet our mental response is often, “That’s nice, I wonder where we’re going for breakfast this morning?”

Today the world has reversed Jesus’ words in verse 40. The world shouts that it *is* against Christ. There are very few neutral positions in our culture. Unfortunately, the loudest voices are not those who are “not against us,” or those who are for Christ, but those who adamantly oppose Christ.

Jesus told John that He could not stand lukewarm Christians (Revelation 3:16). Why have we become neutral and lukewarm? Satan has pressured Christians into silence because he knows that if we remain silent all non-Christians will spend eternity in his fiery hell. By our silence do we fail to give a cup of water; do we fail to welcome God?

Today’s world demands that Christians be neutral about their faith except at home or in church (and working to stop that as well). Christian teachers, students, counselors, business leaders, and coaches must all be religiously neutral so that others cannot be offended by their Christianity. In more countries than you may think, sharing the Christian faith is a capital offence.

As a Christian community we have come to accept our culture’s adamant demand that Christ offers nothing that other religions do not. The truth is that Jesus said, “I am *the way, the truth and the life*. No one comes to the Father *except through Me*” (John 14:6). Will we one day stand in the presence of Christ and say, “I didn’t think that speaking of You would be appropriate?” As Christians we need to stand in a world that doesn’t know Christ and say, “I am a Christian. Christ is not only part of my life; He *is* my life. Don’t ask me to disregard Him, or deny His uniqueness.”

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

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

## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 9:38-50

1. Did Jesus discredit the mystery miracle worker (vs. 38-41)?
2. Does Jesus teach that hands and feet should be cut off? What is His point?
3. What does it mean to be “salty” (vs. 50)?

### For Family Reflection

4. What does it mean to give a cup of cold water (vs. 41; Matthew 25:35)?
5. How might we (as a society and perhaps as individuals) be responsible for the “sins” of little ones (vs. 42)?
6. “Be at peace with each other” (vs. 50). Is there peace in your home? In your church? Where does our peace come from?

## Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 16:1-15

The Jewish disciples hearing Jesus' parable of the shrewd steward better understood what He was talking about than we may. This is especially true of verse 9 which concludes the parable and often leads Bible study leaders to make educated comments like "Yeah...Okay."

Bible commentator William Barclay says that the Rabbis of Jesus' time would say, "The rich help the poor in this world, but the poor help the rich in the world to come." He adds, "It was a Jewish belief that charity given to poor people would stand to a man's credit in the world to come." So, the Jews hearing Jesus' words knew that He was challenging them to put their possessions to work for the kingdom of God rather than building up wealth in their own pockets.

As Christians we understand that we cannot use our wealth to purchase a place in heaven, but God does command us to use our earthly wealth in a wise manner. Do we see our gifts from our Father as a means of increasing our retirement fund, or buying the biggest house in the neighborhood? Or, do we see our gifts for what they really are—God's property trusted to us to use as good stewards?

Our culture still reserves its highest praise and attention to the "successful." We follow their every move on television and envy their position. We even honor and emulate those who reject Christ. The Ted Turners and Hugh Hefners of the world are not known for their faith in God or for helping build His kingdom. Tragically, many of us (especially in bad financial times) begin to become like them—placing financial stability above our faith in God's power to provide our needs.

Jesus' challenge to His followers of twenty centuries ago remains the same for us. *"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [worldly possessions]."*

Are you investing God's gifts in building His kingdom, or are you investing God's gifts in building your own? We rejoice that God has invested His Only Son in us! We respond generously!

***Have you been to a Bible study this month?***

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

## Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 16:1-15

1. Summarize the shrewd negotiations of the manager. What does Jesus compliment about the manager's actions? What does Jesus condemn?
2. Who are the "sons of this world" (vs. 8)? Who are the "sons of light"? Who is The Light?
3. What is "unrighteous wealth" (vs. 9, 11)? How do the righteous view their earthly wealth?
4. What two masters (vs. 13) seek our attention and servitude? Why can't one serve both masters?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. Is your family rich? Who is your greatest Treasure? How do you show that you value Jesus?
6. Jesus said "God knows your hearts" (vs. 15). Who has cleansed your heart? What does God see when He looks in your heart?