

## Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 16:19-31

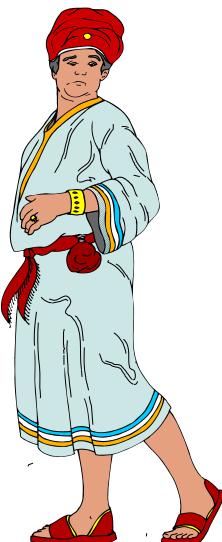
At the end of today's passage Jesus said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead." Who are "they"? "They would not have been persuaded by the resurrection of a poor beggar, or the resurrection of our Son of God. What was the sin of the rich man that would prevent him from seeing the truth of the gospel, even in light of the resurrection?

The rich man's trouble was his attitude, not his money. He lacked any compassion for Lazarus, the sick beggar who longed to be fed crumbs, but was not. Even in the torment of Hades, the rich man shows no remorse for his treatment of the starving man at his door. Even after his death he pleads not for forgiveness but for mercy toward his plight, and there is no recognition that his plight is well deserved. The rich man still sees Lazarus as a lower class than himself. He calls upon Abraham to "send Lazarus" to comfort his suffering "for I am in agony...". When that cannot be done, he pleads that Lazarus be sent to warn his brothers. Lazarus was forever the servant in the eyes of the rich man.

Self indulgence, self trust, and self centeredness may be some of the most dangerous traits in mankind, for they keep us from recognizing the truth. If I have no need, how can I see Jesus? If I cannot see Jesus, how can I see the plight of those around me? Even more importantly, in my self-dependence I may not recognize that I am still a sinner in need of forgiveness. The Pharisees, "they" who were always listening to Jesus' stories in hope of finding ways to discredit Him, heard Him say through this parable, "In your arrogance you have failed God and condemned yourselves to eternal separation from Him, and even My resurrection will fail to penetrate your hearts."

*Find your wealth in Christ through a Bible study this week!*

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee



## Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 16:19-31

1. Describe the earthly life of the rich man. Describe the earthly life of Lazarus.
2. Describe the eternal situation of Lazarus. Describe the eternal situation of the rich man. Why were their situations suddenly reversed?
3. Where is "Abraham's side" (vs. 22)? Explore this description in the Concordia Self-study Bible or another commentary.
4. Why couldn't Lazarus come to bring relief to the rich man or bring a message of salvation to the rich man's brothers?
5. To what does "Moses and the Prophets" refer (vs. 29, 31)?
6. How does this parable teach us of the urgency of sharing the message of salvation?



## Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Why was the saying that, “The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge” becoming popular among God’s people? They were in rebellion against God, and had been for many years. As a result, the great kingdom of Babylon was poised to take control of Jerusalem. Ezekiel was probably already exiled in Babylon when he penned these verses. How had it happened?

After the time of Solomon, the land of Israel had split. The northern half of the country rebelled against God and had been annihilated by her enemies over a hundred years before Ezekiel wrote. In another few years Jerusalem, also in rebellion against God, would be conquered. Times were getting pretty bad. God’s very stubborn and rebellious people wanted to blame anyone but themselves for their predicament. In their popular proverb they were saying, “It’s somebody else’s fault.” We see this attitude all around us every day among nations and, more importantly, among individuals.

Our world claims that we are merely animals conditioned by our parentage, our genes, our environment, our circumstances, or our peers. There isn’t anything we can do about it. Sin and responsibility are pretty unpopular words in our world. We really are very much like the people of Jerusalem in our efforts to claim innocence.

God says, “NO”. God says that we are not doomed by our past or our circumstances. His people then and people now cry that this is an unfair judgment. How can God claim such a thing?

God says, “...all souls are Mine.” To the unbeliever this means that God can forgive and heal all of life’s hurts. He can grant eternal life *and abundant life* to anyone, no matter what. To the believer this means that since God lives within us nothing can overcome His will to enable us to do good except us. We can’t say that our bad behavior is because we are victims of our past or our genes or our surroundings because, as St. Paul said, “If Christ is for us, who can be against us?”



## Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

1. What is the harsh judgment of vs. 4?

2. According to vs. 25 and 29 what was the complaint of Israel? What was God’s response?



3. In one word what is Ezekiel’s message (vs. 30)? What New Testament voice makes the same plea? (Matthew 3:2)

4. How do we hear of God’s grace in vs. 32?

5. How and when did you get a “new heart and a new spirit” (vs. 31)?

6. What message of this text speaks most directly to you? Is God addressing your arrogance? Is He calling you to repentance? Is it His promise of life?

**Get to know Jesus better through a Bible study this week!**

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

## 19th Sunday After Pentecost

Numbers 11:4-6,10-16,24-29

The people of God had barely left Mt. Sinai when they began to complain, and their complaint was rooted in an all too common disorder of the human spirit. Both people and leader succumbed to a disorder of the “I.”

The people wanted the promised land immediately. God’s timing was of little importance in comparison to their comfort! The desert was harsh and it was obvious that other nations (like Egypt) lived in luxury. What good was God if He did not guarantee health, wealth, and prosperity?

Moses wanted followers who were cooperative, friendly, and obedient to his commands. This was not the treatment that he signed on for! Besides that, his predicament was all God’s idea anyway. If God wanted these people led, He might at least keep them happy!

Both of these complainers had a disorder of the “I.” God was no longer at the top of the priority list. “I” was there instead. My comfort, my worry, my frustration, my schedule suddenly came before seeking God’s will and God’s path.

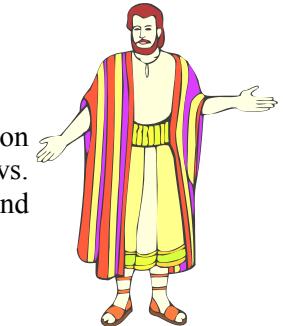
The complaints are familiar to us. We complain about God’s gifts to us from time to time ourselves. The amazing part of this event is that in His anger God did not obliterate the whole group, including their leader, and go find some Edomites and start all over again. Instead, God saw through their sin to its root and granted them the grace of a God-conceived solution to the stress and worry suffered by Moses. This also provided more availability of Spirit-led men to help the people overcome their complaining ways. It didn’t eliminate the sin; sin always sneaks in again as soon as it senses an unguarded moment in a person’s heart, but what God did demonstrated His undying love for a rebellious people. He has the same love for us, even when we go to Him complaining, frustrated, and wrapped up in our own disorder of the “I.” Through Christ, God wants to enable us to overcome the “I” and place Him at the top of our list for living.



## 19th Sunday After Pentecost

Numbers 11:4-6,10-16,24-29

1. The children of Israel romanticize their days in Egypt (Numbers 11:4-6). What had life really been like there? (Exodus 1:11-16; Exodus 5:6-18)



2. Summarize Moses’ feelings about the situation and about his leadership responsibilities? (vs. 10-15) Have you ever feel over-burdened and unappreciated?

3. According to vs. 16-17 what was one of God’s solutions for Moses? What applications are there for our personal lives and for life in the church?

4. How did God affirm and empower Moses’ assistants? How does God affirm and empower us?

5. Why was the prophecy of Eldad and Medad questioned? Were their words Spirit given?

6. “The Lord became exceedingly angry.” (vs. 10) In what other places in Scripture do we witness God’s anger? Is God always just in His anger? Do we deserve His anger? Why is God no longer angry with us?

*Get to know Jesus better through a Bible study this week!*

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

## Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Amos 6:1-7

Amos had been more than a shepherd before becoming a prophet. He was also a sheep breeder and a farmer of sycamore figs. In other words he was a successful businessman who was respected in the community, but God's call changed the minds of most of his fellow businessmen and farmer/ranchers. Amos began to see things from God's perspective instead of the world's.

In those days God's people were divided into a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. They were called Israel and Judah respectively. Both the North and the South were in the midst of a booming economy and apparent political success. Amos suddenly began preaching repentance to both, but who wants to hear bad news when things are looking so good?

In today's lesson, Amos launches against that good feeling in both Zion (Jerusalem in the South) and Samaria (capital city of the North). He begins "Woe to those..." Why was it bad to feel good? Why was it bad to enjoy prosperity? "Lounge on" in verse 4 is best translated "sprawl" as in drunken, uncaring, excess, as though found unconscious and satiated. The people of both nations were concerned only with their own comfort and luxury. They were blind to the false religions filling their land and blind to the judgment that their greed and false faith would demand. Elsewhere in the prophets we find that in addition to this, those who were the most needy in both the North and South were those most likely to be misused, cheated, or neglected. The great "I" of self was loose and consuming both societies.

What can we say but "Ouch!" Obviously our nation falls under Amos' words of warning, but what about our churches? Do we attend to our own comforts and needs, keeping our pews comfortable and warm while allowing the rest of the community to care for itself? Do we as Christ's church also fall under Amos' chastisement?

If we don't, the praise goes to God! If we do, we can change! God says that we can make a difference. God says that He has the resources, the ideas, and the gift of faith to donate to the cause! Christ's love compels us to make a difference in our world.

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

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

## Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Amos 6:1-7

1. What two kingdoms (vs. 2) was Prophet Amos addressing? (Using the Concordia Self-study Bible or another reference review the historical setting of this book.)
2. Reviewing verses 4-6, describe the life-style of Amos' audience. What was the problem with that life style? In what ways is the warning appropriate for our time?
3. How would the kingdoms experience God's judgment (vs.7)? Did Amos' prophecy become reality?
4. Review all three lessons of this day (also I Timothy 6:6-16 and Luke 16:19-31). What common theme do we have in all three lessons? What is the danger of luxury and prosperity?
5. The lesson begins with "Woe to you." To whom does Jesus address a similar warning in Matthew chapter 23?
6. Prophet Amos challenges the complacency (vs.1) of Israel. Examine your own life and your own church. Are there ways in which you have become complacent? What activates and inspires us again?

## Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Philippians 2:1-11

Paul is writing this letter from prison. Many other Christians in Philippi were also undergoing some sort of persecution, or at least discomfort due to their faith. Especially in difficult times Paul's encouragement in chapter two is important. It is more than important; it is imperative.

The word "if" occurs several times in the first verse of chapter two in relation to a kind of "if-then" statement. However Paul is here using a particularly Greek form of this common writing tool. Paul's "if" could very correctly be translated "since." He is presenting his readers, and us, with an unarguable premise. Since verse one is a series of known truths, there is no reason not to comply with Paul's "then..."

Chapter one expressed Paul's confidence in God's grace and in His ability to enable the Christian heart to follow His own. Therefore the commands and encouragement that are shared in chapter two are a joy for us to contemplate! We can be what God wants us to be because He is our Guide and Mentor.

As a reminder to his readers and to us that we ought not to think too highly of ourselves and our own agendas, Paul reminds us that Jesus became a servant and "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped..." If JESUS considered Himself a servant to all, then how could we set ourselves in a higher position?

Cooperation, love, servant-attitude, humility, caring, and supporting, are all character traits of the church and all who fellowship in that body. Paul knew that for the church to not only survive but to thrive, they must center their life and future on Christ. Do we do the same?

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

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Philippians 2:1-11

1. What was the attitude (vs. 5) of Jesus? What affect did His attitude have on His actions?
2. The "Explanation to Luther's Small Catechism" (questions 133 -159) discusses Christ's state of humiliation and state of exaltation. What part of this text described His humiliation? What part of this text describes His exaltation?
3. This text is assigned for Palm/Passion Sunday. Why is it appropriate for the theme of that day?

### For Family Reflection

4. What is the attitude of members of your family? How could it be more Christ-like?
5. In what ways do you look out for your own interests? How can you "look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (vs. 4)?
6. What does it mean to be "like minded" (vs. 2)? What are some of the characteristics of the mind of Christ?

## 19th Sunday after Pentecost

James 4:7-5:6

Remember last week? James put us to the test of remembering times when we have been envious and arrogant, voicing hurtful words. Well, he's at it again.

In the verses preceding today's lesson, James has reminded his readers that their anger, quarrelling, and envy are the result of being too in tune with the world. Certainly this is a problem for American Christians. We live in the world's wealthiest country. Every ad we absorb from television or at the movies reminds us that the world owes us a living and that we should spend our lives devoted to the accumulation of "stuff." In many cases, we don't even know what we would do with the latest convenience offered, but somehow we feel cheated if we don't have it.

Our culture confirms the lies that our sinful nature applauds—that our ideas are always right, our thoughts the most important, and that things should always go our way. By nature we are ruled by our selfish desire to be more respected, more wealthy, more powerful, or more intelligent than those around us. Any or all of these aspects of our personal world can contribute to an argumentative, unkind, self-absorbed Christian person.

While much of James' thought in today's passage follows 4:8, it is here that James presents the essential choice demanded of us. As good Lutherans, we cringe when he says, "Come near to God and He will come near to you." As Lutherans we respond, "What does this mean?" James is not speaking about our salvation. As far as our salvation is concerned, only God can initiate this miracle of grace. However, James isn't speaking to unbelievers—he is speaking to you and me. As children of God we can approach Him daily, asking Him to guide and strengthen us. As our Father, He always desires to not only assist, but to change our lives and attitudes in marvelous ways, but He will not be our puppeteer. He will not stop our feet from turning away from Him and into our own path. We make the daily choice of leaning on Him or not.

It is verse 8 that allows James to challenge his readers and us. We cannot change on our own, but because we can draw near to our Father, all things are possible.

Learn about God's almighty power to renew in a Bible study this week.  
*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## 19th Sunday after Pentecost

James 4:7-5:6

1. James encourages "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (4:7) What evidence do we have of the effectiveness of these words? (Matthew 4:1-11)
2. When don't we have the right to judge another person? (4:11-12) What are the dangers of our human judgment? Are there times when we as citizens or as Christians have the right to be in judgment? When might some of those times be?
3. What perspective on time do verses 13-15 offer? How should we use our time?
4. What are the temptations of wealth? (4:1-6) How can wealth be used for Godly ends?

### For Family Reflection

5. A family followed up their schedule discussions by saying "God-willing." Why is this a helpful way to schedule our personal and family life? In what aspect of our life do we know for certain what God's will for us is?
6. This is the last of a series of readings from the book of James. Discuss what you have learned from this book. Have you discovered a favorite personal or family passage?

## Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Timothy 1:1-14

As he began this letter to Timothy, Paul was in prison. This time he would not leave a free man. Historians and other experts who have studied Paul's writings and the history of his time have generally concluded that when we left Paul in prison at the end of Acts, it was a temporary situation. It is strongly believed that Paul really did get to travel more, spreading the gospel possibly even to the area of Spain. What a book those travels would make! A few years later, however, the mood in Rome was different. Christians were under serious threat, and Paul knew that his second arrest would probably lead to his execution. This time he does not teach from a rented home, nor does he welcome guests. This time he is in chains as he writes to the one he loves as a son.

Even in his current circumstance, Paul writes, "I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience...." The world so often tries to tell us that we have somehow committed a terrible error if we talk too loudly about Jesus, tell people that we are praying for them, or even take God's word into consideration as we enter the voting booth. But, Paul confidently maintains that he has done only what God would have him do. His imprisonment is an honor; he feels no embarrassment over preaching God's love to anyone who would listen; and he encourages Timothy to do the same, regardless of the dangers.

In verse 12, Paul says that he is confident that God can take care of all that he has entrusted to Him. What was it that Paul had given to God? What is it that we have given to God? Life itself. Paul could focus on encouraging Timothy to stay strong in his faith and teaching because there were no other concerns filling the great pastor's mind. He could focus on continuing his life moment by moment because the end of his life was in God's hand.

That sounds a bit rosy, and Paul did have times of frustration and loneliness, as we will see in next week's reading, but the deep truth for Paul is the same in our own lives. God calls us to spread His love, even when the world tells us to keep quiet. We can trust Him to take care of our lives, our families, and our eternity.

Learn more about **being a living witness** in a Bible study this week.

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

## Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Timothy 1:1-14

1. Using the Concordia Self-study Bible or another reference explore the background to this letter. What is different about the time and place of this letter (in comparison to I Timothy)? What is the Apostle Paul's motivation and situation? How does this affect the message of the letter?
2. According to vs. 5 what is the "history" of Timothy's faith?
3. What does it mean to "fan into flame" the gift of faith? When was the "flame" lit in your life? What wind is the Spirit using to "fan" your faith?
4. How does Paul emphasize and celebrate God's grace in his life? In Timothy's life?

### For family reflection

5. Trace your faith "history." Who in your family (or otherwise) first shared the Good news of Jesus with you? How was the faith passed on from generation to generation in your family?
6. Have there been times when you have been timid (vs. 7) or ashamed (vs. 12) about being a Christian? Where we do get our courage?

## Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 20:1-16

Have you ever tried to tell God who is worthy? All of us have. In our prayers, especially in an election year, most of us have our favorites. Most are praying that one candidate or the other be defeated or elected. After all, we know what God would want. How often do we simply pray, "God please make Your will known in the hearts of all the voters this fall?"

This effort on our part to convince God that we know all there is to know about those around us isn't limited to politics. Sometimes a new family will visit the church, and perhaps they just don't dress quite correctly, sit in the wrong place, or have trouble communicating in English. Somehow we just know that they really stumbled into the wrong church. The one they want must be down the street.

When we know for sure that someone is not quite as close to God as we are, or we just know that they won't ever fit in, that's when we need to back up and take a closer look at the situation.

I have a friend—yes, she is a Baptist, but I suspect we see some of the same reactions in our Lutheran churches. Anyway, she told me one day that she was very embarrassed. When I asked why, she told me that she had always thought of herself as a good Christian and one who welcomed new people into the church and into God's love. However, she was shocked at herself the previous Sunday. It seems that there were new visitors to the church, and her first thought was not, "How great—I'll go introduce myself." Instead, her first thought was, "What are those people doing in *my* pew?" God immediately tapped her conscience and she was embarrassed that she could have been that petty.

How about the rest of us. Haven't we all judged people in God's behalf, assuming that He would naturally agree with us? There is a better way.

As Jesus reminds us in today's lesson, choosing and judging people's value is God's business. His challenge to us is to find a way of seeing all people as Jesus sees them—people needing God; looking for friendship; seeking salvation; needing to be helped along the way.

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

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

## Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 20:1-16

1. How long did the land owner recruit workers? How long does God seek "workers" for His kingdom field?
2. What payment did the land owner offer to each worker? What payment is offered to each "worker" in Jesus' kingdom?
3. Why did some grumble (vs. 11) about the payment they received? Did they have a right to complain?
4. Explain "So the last will be first, and the first will be last" (vs. 16).

### For Family Reflection

5. In what ways was and is God "generous" (vs. 15) to you? How do you respond to His generosity?
6. Have you ever said "It's not fair"? Is God always fair?

## Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 10:17-22

Beginning in verse seventeen, Jesus faces down the legalism of the time. The young man believed that he had done all of the things that Jesus listed. But, when Jesus challenged him to give up his wealth and truly follow Christ, the young man left. He could not give up his true treasure.

Today, we Christians take pride in our understanding of God's grace and our rejection of legalism. However we still find ourselves unwillingly giving up much of our worldly treasure—today more than ever. We are experiencing what, in America, is considered financial hardship. Depleted retirement accounts, jobs lost, and the inability to buy what we want and vacation where and when we please leave us almost in shock. We have discovered that the wealth and solid economy on which we were depending for so much wasn't so dependable after all.

Some want revenge; wanting to find the one person to blame; wanting to just plain run away. We look at the rich young man and chide him in our minds for walking away from Jesus in favor of his wealthy lifestyle, but what have our own reactions to financial disaster said about our own priorities? Do we still praise God for His presence in our lives? Do we still find ways to give to the work of His kingdom? Or, do we mourn our loss and forget Jesus' call to let Him worry about tomorrow as we seek His kingdom today?

God does have a plan for each of us, even though I, like you, sometimes wish He would let me in on it. He is still in control, and we must each decide if we are going to spend our days mourning our losses or praising our Lord. Are our priorities reflecting discipleship to Christ, or the rich young man's dependence on wealth for happiness?

*Get to know God through His Word this week!*

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

## Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 10:17-22

1. How could the man claim that he had kept all the commandments of God (vs. 20)? Had he kept them? Can anyone keep them?
2. What does it say about Jesus when "Jesus looked at him and loved him (vs. 21)?"
3. What are the treasures of heaven (vs. 21)? Are those treasures yours?

### For Family Reflection

4. The man's wealth kept him from a relationship with God. What keeps you from a close relationship with God?
5. If someone asked you "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" what would you say?
6. Can you think of instances in your own life (or others) where wealth and possessions have distracted people from God and His church? How do we help people see what's really valuable?

## Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 17:1-10

Today's passage seems to consist of several ideas somehow linked together. Verses 1 and 2: Never cause another to sin; 3 and 4: Relentlessly forgive one another; 5 and 6: Have faith; 7-9: Recognize who you are.

Whole books have been written on each of these concepts, but one simple thought comes to mind concerning each—I can't do it.

All of us, even as Christians, have caused others to sin, perhaps by tempting them to gossip, to judge a brother, to envy, or to become greedy. These things sound insignificant compared to far more horrible things like pornography, prostitution, murder, theft or false worship, but they are sins nonetheless and evil in God's eyes.

Do I forgive relentlessly? Hardly. I, like most of us, fall into that old bag of nervous jokes about how we may forgive, but hardly ever forget.

Do I have faith? Not even as a mustard seed, one of the smallest seeds in the world. I have never seen a mulberry tree move at my direction. In fact, I have hardly ever seen me move in response to God's direction.

Who am I? While sometimes I recognize my need for God, His authority over me, and some modicum of humility and obedience in serving Him, my general attitude is far more self-concerned. Rather than serving, I find that I generally prefer being served, like most Americans.

So, what is the answer to our dilemma? It seems that we fall so short of what God expects of us and what Jesus commands. Yet, like Paul, we can say with assurance, "Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:25). That is not to say, "Great! We're forgiven; let's just keep being who we are."

Jesus makes it clear that we are to strive to be what He wants us to be; to persevere in serving; to serve others in His name. His forgiveness freely given to us is part of the story, but His power at work within us can change us; make us new and useful servants in His kingdom.

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

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

## Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 17:1-10

1. Who is Jesus especially interested in protecting from temptations (vs. 2)? Why are they worthy of special concern and spiritual protection?
2. Are we to forgive another person only seven times (vs. 4)? What point is Jesus trying to make? Why "must" we forgive others?
3. What does it mean to have faith like a mustard seed? Where have you seen this illustration and application used before?
4. Are we worthy of salvation? Are we worthy of serving Jesus in the contexts of our lives? Who makes us worthy?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. When is it hard for you to forgive others? Are there individuals that you are having difficulty forgiving now? What is God's will for you? What is God's power for you?
6. When have you said, "Increase our faith"? How does God strengthen our faith?