

## Twentieth 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, or to judge a brother, or to envy, or to greed. These things sound insignificant compared to far more horrible things like pornography, prostitution, murder, theft or false beliefs, but they are sins, nonetheless and evil in God's eyes. And do I forgive relentlessly? Hardly. I, like most of us, fall into that old bag of jokes (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 my faith in God. And, 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 other Americans.



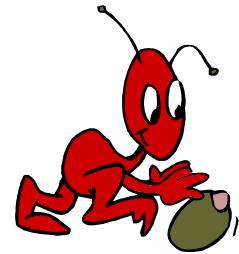
So, what is the answer to our dilemma? It seems that we fall so short of what God expects of us and what Jesus commands. Yet, we, like Paul, can say with all assurance, "Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 7:25) That is not to say, "Great, we're forgiven, so let's just go on being who we are." Jesus makes it clear that we are to strive to be what He wants us to be; to strive to serve; to strive to be servants in His name. His forgiveness toward us is part of the message, but His power at work in us can change us and make us new servants in His kingdom.

*Bible study inspires renewal—are you attending one?*  
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

## Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 17:1-10

1. Jesus summarizes vs. 1-2 with the warning "So watch yourselves." What's the warning?
2. Who are the "little ones" (vs. 2)? What is Jesus concern for the "little ones?" Do you share His concern?
3. What message caused the disciples to ask "increase our faith" (vs. 5)?
4. What does it mean to have faith "as small as a mustard seed" (vs. 6). You might want to also review Matthew 13:31-32; Matthew 17:20; Mark 4:31.
5. Instead of avoiding or complaining about our opportunities to serve in God's kingdom what should be our response according to vs. 10?
6. Read vs. 3-4 again. Is there anyone you need to forgive again?



## Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 5:1-7

God's people were coming to the temple each week and offering their sacrifices. Then they went home and ran their lives and businesses without much thought of God. In fact, they rarely bothered to act as though they knew God at all. In this passage Isaiah relates to the people God's view of their "faithfulness." He had loved them and showered blessings upon them. He expected a result.



I don't really like to hear that God expects anything from His people. Life is so much easier if I don't have to think about living out my faith. If I begin to run my everyday activities as though God expected special behavior from me, people will think that I'm a religious fanatic. Or worse, what if people think that I'm trying to work my way to heaven? "God, I don't think I can handle being a Christian for more than an hour a week!" That's an exaggeration, but don't we fail to give God glory in our everyday lives? Don't we forget that while God is gracious and merciful, He is also expectant?

A great thinker and pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed that we too often take God's love, mercy, grace, and salvation for granted. He said that we too easily forget that God calls us for a purpose and He calls us to obedience. Bonhoeffer believed that we enjoy salvation while forgetting the great price that Jesus paid through His death on the cross.

Living out our faith in our actions and words is so important that the failure of God's people to do so in the Old Testament resulted in their destruction—but not in their separation from God's love. His love for them never ended. His ultimate restoration of them came in the birth, death, and resurrection of His Son.

God's love for us in Christ can never end, but His expectation of us is real. Jesus said that we are to follow Him; we are to imitate Him. Is it scary? Yeah, it can be. But God Himself is at our side and living within us, guiding us and enabling us. Through Him, we can glorify Him every day by our actions and words.

***Bible study inspires renewal—are you attending one?***

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

## Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 5:1-7

1. Isaiah shares a prophecy in a story. Who is the "loved one" who owned a vineyard? Who is the "vineyard"?

2. What happened to the unproductive vineyard?



3. How did the story apply to Israel (see vs. 7)?

4. How does the story apply to us?

5. How does Jesus build on this story in Matthew 21:33-44?

6. According to John 15:1-8 how do we stay productive?

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4

J. Ronald Blue says in his opening sentence on Habakkuk, “Planet Earth may look marvelous from a satellite, but for those who live on the dusty globe things tend to look rather grim.” Habakkuk was a faithful man, but he had major questions for God. He wanted to know why bad things happened. Specifically, there was a nation, an enemy of God, advancing through the whole region with its cruelty and godlessness seemingly unstoppable.

We hear our own questions in Habakkuk’s. Our world differs little from his. We see injustice, terrorism, false religions thriving, God being denied and ridiculed, the poor cheated out of what little they have, houses built to flaunt wealth while many have no home at all. We want to see God step in and change things! God answers the prophet and us with an assurance. To us it is a disappointment. It is hard to hear God tell His faithful to “wait.”

We know many nations and individuals who believe that their own strength cannot fail, but God says of them in 1:11, “...they will be held guilty; They whose strength is their god.” In 2:3, God says that His will and plan are assured; that though it takes longer than we (or Habakkuk) might wish, justice will come to the world.

God says that while the world lives by its arrogance, the righteous live by faith. That’s us! We are the “righteous” because Jesus has made us righteous by His blood. We are the ones who are to live by faith. Jesus said to have faith in Him and Paul said that faith is a gift from God. It isn’t something that we generate within ourselves. God gives us faith and we practice it every day.

Faith is the gift that allows us to believe that Jesus is our Savior confirming in our hearts that we will spend eternity with Him. That faith moves into action (James 2:14-20). It is faith that enables us to walk out of the church doors and work against poverty and evil in our communities. It is the gift from God that enables us to work for change, assured that God is pleased with our work, and that He will bring ultimate goodness and justice to our world, in His most perfect timing.

Learn more about faith in a Bible study this week.

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

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4

1. Using the Concordia Self-study Bible or another reference find out about this little known prophet. When did he live? Who was his audience? What was his major message?
2. What are the prophet’s questions as he begins his oracle? Read chapter 1:12-17 for additional questions. Have there been times in your life when you have asked similar questions?
3. What was God’s promise to Habakkuk and God’s people in 2:1-3? Can we always be assured that God will provide answers?
4. What powerful assurance concludes vs. 4 of chapter 2? What was the faith of the Old Testament believers?
5. How does the Apostle Paul build on Habakkuk’s prophecy in Romans 1:7; Galatians 3:11; and Ephesians 2:8? What is the Good News for us?
6. Habakkuk “wrestles” with God (skim chapters 1 and 2). Is it okay to ask God questions and to struggle with His workings? What intense dialogs have you had with God? How did He answer you?

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Philippians 3:12-21

Today Paul approaches the end of the theme that he has been pursuing in his letter to the church of Philippi. God's grace enables us to remain faithful to Him and to remain like-minded, patient, kind, loving, helpful, and all of the other things that reflect our role as God's children. God will see us through this life and bring us home to heaven. However, why is Paul's message so important? Why is it important to us today?

Christians in Paul's time faced attack. Some violently persecuted the Christian faith, but there were also more subtle and dangerous enemies. Some unbelievers claimed to worship God, but did not accept Jesus as His Son. Others did not accept God's grace, believing that they could make themselves worthy of eternal life. Some believed that there was no God and that Christians were ignorant and uneducated. Some even believed that Christians practiced anti-social and dangerous rites. Does some of this begin to sound familiar?

Christians of all times need to be well-grounded in their beliefs. They need to study His Word, support one another, and follow Jesus faithfully. There is an old saying that was true in Paul's time and in our own—loner Christians are living dangerously. Christ gathers us as the church for our protection and for service according to His plan. The Philippi church was an ancestor of ours, trying to live out God's purpose for them.

The church at Philippi, or in any Iowa town, is not a building. The paint on the walls or the size of the altar has nothing to do with the body of the church. The church is the family of God. We are here to support one another in difficult times, to be a refuge of love in an unloving world. As Christ's body on earth the church family stands strong in the face of evil. It supports its members and strengthens them with God's love, God's Word, and the sacraments established by Him. We do these things for one another for a purpose—in order to go out to serve in the world. We are the beacon of Christ in a world that hates God because God wants those in the world to become His children.

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

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Philippians 3:12-21

1. What does it mean to “press on”? (vs. 12,14) What is Paul's goal?
2. What does it mean to be “mature”? (vs. 15)
3. Is it prideful of Paul to say “follow my example” (vs. 17)? Who was Paul's Example?
4. How do the enemies of the cross (vs. 18) live? How do friends of the cross live?

### For Family Reflection

5. Who are examples of faith for your family? Give thanks to God for them. For whom could you be an example of faith?
6. We are citizens of the \_\_\_\_\_ community in the state of \_\_\_\_\_ in the country of \_\_\_\_\_. According to vs. 20 we are also citizens of \_\_\_\_\_. What will it be like when we take up permanent residence there?

## 20th Sunday after Pentecost

Hebrews 2:9-18

In chapter one, the author of Hebrews began his teaching with a wonderful description and proclamation of the uniqueness of Christ. Unlike the claim of many today—that Christ was a great teacher, or politician with ideas too far ahead of His time, or even that He was God (though only one of the true gods), this author calmly and persuasively brings us back to the basic truth. Christ was not just a man, nor one of many ways to salvation. Christ stated it Himself—He is the only way to the Father. He said firmly that “Before Abraham was, I am.” He was and is the true and eternal Son of God, God himself, and only Savior. As the writer says in 2:1, *“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard....”* We must not take Christ lightly, relegating our worship of Him to a once-a-week pill assuring salvation.

Reading the first chapter of Hebrews intensifies the wonder of the truth revealed in today’s passage. Verse 9 begins, *“But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels...”* We have been privileged to see our God.

John reminds us in the beginning of his gospel account that Christ the Son is co-eternal with His Father. Christ did not begin His existence in the womb of Mary. He was present at the creation and He participated in it. He willingly left the realm of perfection and His ruling position in order to join us, His creatures. He became one of us to show us exactly what God is like, and exactly what people can be. Jesus demonstrated to us that to be human is a marvelous thing. He laughed, cried, desperately prayed, spent time alone and time with friends, and, even though He was God as well as Man, He was willing to call us His siblings. (vs. 11)

Christ was born among us and lived life perfectly so that He could be the final and complete sacrifice, dying to pay for the sin that had cursed each of us. He allowed Himself to be killed in order to give His murderers access to the God who loved them. We must never lessen His gift by denying its uniqueness or underestimating its cost.

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

## 20th Sunday after Pentecost

Hebrews 2:9-18

1. The writer of Hebrews compares Jesus to angels. How was Jesus lower than angels (vs. 9)? How is Jesus greater than angels?
2. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be fully human? (vs. 14-15) What did Jesus do that angels couldn’t do?
3. Is Jesus our brother? How did we become members of the same family?
4. Some religions would suggest that Jesus was just another holy being? How does this text address that false teaching?

### For Family Reflection

5. What does it mean for you to be a member of your family? When did you become a member of God’s family? What does it mean for you to be a member of His family?
6. Talk about angels. How do we know they exist? What is their purpose?

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Timothy 2:1-13

We often picture early Christians in our minds, marching to death with smiles on their faces and singing hymns. It's a great picture, but not all Christians had that gift of strength. Many, among them strong supporters of Paul, disappeared when the theologian was arrested in Rome for the last time. Paul was in chains this time, lonely, and sometimes discouraged, yet still strong in his message to Timothy, and to us.

Paul says, "I suffer hardship...endure all things...". He says that he does these things so that the gospel will spread. He is convinced, even in prison, that "the word of God is not imprisoned."

For what are we willing to endure hardship and suffering? Who among us can honestly say that we are more willing to endure hardship, suffering, and even persecution for the truth of Christ, than we are for much more mundane things or ideas. We seem more apt to adhere to the old adage, "Never discuss politics or religion." I'm sure that Paul would agree that politics is rarely worth chancing suffering or persecution, but I suspect that he would loudly challenge the idea that we not discuss Christ Jesus and His place in our lives.

Who has encountered Jesus in your life through your actions or words this week? What Christian friend has found strength in your witness?

We attempt to illustrate the Holy Spirit through the symbol of flame. The message inspired in him by the Holy Spirit set Paul's heart, mind, and spirit on fire. He could not contain God's love in himself—he had to share it. All other things, including embarrassment, job endangerment, or laughter made no difference. Is our Lord Jesus a fire in your life? Is that fire uncontainable?

Like some who ran when Paul was arrested, we often leave Sunday morning worship feeling guilty, embarrassed, or frustrated at our failure to let the world know how much we love Jesus and how much He loves us. But, it's not hopeless. The Holy Spirit lives in every one of us, challenging us to give it another try today.

Learn more about **grace** in a Bible study this week.

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

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Timothy 2:1-13

1. What does it mean to be a "soldier" of Christ Jesus (vs. 3-4)? Where's the battleground?
2. How do the vocations of "athlete" (vs. 5) and "farmer" (vs. 6) apply to the role of a Christian? What other comparisons might we make to illustrate our connection and commitment to Christ?
3. According to vs. 9 what is never bound? Why is this good news to the preacher in the pulpit, the missionary in the field, the parent in a Christian family, or any other witness for Jesus?

### For Family Reflection

4. When did we "die with him" (Romans 6:3)? When will we live with Him?
5. What is the good news in Paul's statement "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful" (vs. 13).
6. Read (or sing!) "Onward Christian Soldiers." (LW #518; LSB #662)

## Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 21:23-32

For half of the twentieth century, most depictions of Jesus showed a man with a halo behind his head and a quiet, gentle, almost weak expression in His features. Then in the 1970s a newer picture of Jesus began to emerge: illustrations that perhaps better represented Jesus, the One who was both Man and God; Jesus laughing, playing with children, and enjoying life; Jesus who was challengingly intelligent, not just omniscient.

When angry, Jesus' anger was just and fair—as He drove the money changers from the temple, for instance. His sadness was real as He wept over Jerusalem and the disaster that she would face, or at Lazarus' death. His love for us was overwhelming as He left the Garden of Gethsemane to go to His arrest and to the cross.

Jesus never lost an argument with His enemies. He was not a “wimpy” guy. His ability to best His opponents in debate is something that too many theologians have overlooked in years past. In today's lesson Jesus confronts his enemies at the Temple. They were using their favorite ploy against Jesus—asking Him questions that we would describe today as the “Have you stopped beating your wife—yes or no?” questions. The point being that no matter how Jesus answered He would either find Himself condemned by Rome or hated by His followers. Jesus *always* gave an answer that left His enemies in bewildering embarrassment. In today's account Jesus adds to their embarrassment by stating, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you” (vs.31).

The Lord that we serve, this Jesus of Nazareth—God's Son, is a Lord of strength, intelligence, logic, power, and courage. He is also the God that the Bible says He is. He is the God that we learned about in Sunday school and confirmation classes.

It is important to understand Jesus as true Man; the One who has faced all of the enemies and frustrations that we face in our lives. It is important to understand that He has been there; He has handled the same problems as we. He can be trusted with our most frustrating questions and situations, and He will have answers for us. He is the Answer to our salvation.

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

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

## Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 21:23-32

1. Why was the question of authority (vs. 23) important to Jesus' critics? How did Jesus answer their question?
2. How did each of the two sons (vs. 28-30) respond to the father's request to work in his vineyard? What is the point of Jesus' story?
3. Why were “the tax collectors and the prostitutes entering the kingdom of God” (vs. 31) ahead of others?

### For Family Reflection

4. What work is Jesus asking you to do in His kingdom? Which son in Jesus' story do you model in your response?
5. How do you give Jesus authority in your personal life? In your family?
6. Why is it good news for you that Jesus wants the unlikely and the seemingly unrighteous in His kingdom? How and when did Jesus welcome you into His kingdom?

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 10:23 – 31

Perhaps we have here a glimpse of the pervasive class system of Jesus' time. The idea that a rich man would find it nearly impossible to enter the kingdom of God astounded the disciples, who replied to Jesus, "Who then can be saved?" We should not be too quick to criticize their question.

The disciples had grown up with the Pharisees' teaching that one gained heaven by totally obeying every law, including those added to the original Law given by God in the Old Testament. Who could accomplish this better than a rich man? But Jesus assures them, "...all things are possible with God." It would be later that they would come to understand God's grace. Of course, the real tragedy of the young man was not his wealth, but his dependence upon it.

Mark tells us that after the young man left, Peter once again let his mouth do his thinking. His statement (vs.28) implied that since the disciples had given up everything to follow Jesus, there must be a special reward for them. Jesus' answer to Peter was not only a gentle chiding, but an assurance for every Christian who has unbelieving family members.

It can be lonely to follow Jesus away from the security of family, but these believers find a new family in their Christian brothers and sisters. For Christian Jews of Jesus' time and today, the need for a new and loving family is truly great, for they may be totally rejected by their families because of their Christianity. Some are even symbolically buried and mourned by their unbelieving relatives.

Most of us do not suffer the complete family rejection that some "Messianic Jews" do, but we can still mourn when our families refuse to take Jesus seriously as Savior and Son of God. Our world's attitude of, "Whatever you choose to be true is true for you, but that doesn't make it true for me" makes it more difficult than ever to talk to a loved one about Jesus. When that happens, it is a joy to know that Jesus has promised us peace. We can also rejoice in the truth that the Holy Spirit will not give up on His quest to reach the hearts of those we love.

*Jesus comforts us as we fellowship in God's Word with friends each week.*

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

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 10:23 – 31

1. Explain the camel and "the eye of a needle" comparison (vs. 25). Use a study Bible, commentary or other reference to help you.
2. What's the answer to the disciples' question "Who then can be saved" (vs. 26)? Who is the only source of salvation?
3. Why are riches such a stumbling block to righteousness?

### For Family Reflection

4. Do you like to be last or first? Which position does Jesus suggest is the most honorable (vs. 31)? Why?
5. What have you left behind (vs. 29-30) to follow Jesus? What blessings does Jesus promise to those who follow Him?
6. It is wrong to be rich? How can those who are rich be a special blessing in the kingdom of God?



## Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 17:11-19

What is Jesus' purpose in this miraculous healing of ten lepers? First, there is Jesus' compassion. As German or Scandinavian Lutherans we sometimes fall into the trap of feeling that showing emotion is somehow un-Christ-like. We are hesitant to shout "Hallelujah" or "Amen" because we are used to seeing paintings of Jesus with a halo around His head, serious, and without a hair out of place. Or, we see Him suffering on the cross for our sin—not a happy scene. Our Savior, however, laughed, cried, chatted with friends, felt the sun on His face, rejoiced with His disciples and His other friends. Even beyond that, He felt great compassion for the poor, the sick, the rejects of society, even tax collectors.

Leprosy was believed to be a punishment from God. A leper had to shout "Unclean" as he walked down the road to warn others of his presence. He, or she, could not worship, could not fellowship with others, and was truly thought cursed by God for some horrible sin. Jesus could not look at these ten and pass silently by. His compassion compelled Him to grant them life.

In addition to His compassion, Jesus had three other applications to make in this event. First, the Jews believed that only God could heal leprosy. Jesus' clear statement was that He was indeed the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. Second, when only one of the men returned to thank Jesus, the Lord pointed out to the gathering crowd that this man was a Samaritan, hated by the Jews—who assumed that God hated them, too. Jesus' grace and power reaches out to all! Third, our response to God's workings is one of gratitude. Because we are cleansed we return to worship our Lord and give Him thanks.

How about us? What is the "leprosy" that plagues your life, the insurmountable, unsolvable problem? We have a compassionate and powerful Savior waiting for you to let Him help.

***Is Bible study on your "to do" list this week?***

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

## Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 17:11-19

1. Using a Bible dictionary or other reference find out more about the dynamics of leprosy. (Review Leviticus chapters 13-14.) Why were there so many laws associated with the disease?
2. What is Jesus' response to the diseased lepers? How do we see His compassion and power?
3. What is the response of the lepers to the miracle in their lives? Why did so few return to give thanks?
4. Did the lepers deserve Jesus' healing? How is God's grace emphasized in vs. 19?

### For Family Reflection

5. Have you ever been ill? What means did God use to bring healing to you? Did you give Him thanks?
6. The lepers came to Jesus saying, "Have mercy on us" (vs. 13). Where and when do we make a similar plea? What do we call this cry in our worship together? Has God had mercy on us?