

21st Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 25:6-9

Do you ever wonder what the “banquet” will be like? Isaiah tells the people that it will provide the finest food of all time. People from all nations will be there. Imagine sitting with people of all colors and all nations, and watching them all rejoice together in the presence of the Lord. There will no longer be anything that separates them; there will only be the love of Jesus which has already made them one family. There will not even be anger or suspicion. There will not even be death. It’s almost beyond imagination, yet when Jesus came into our world, He made it all real. He has already brought us into His kingdom by His death and resurrection, but someday these words of Isaiah will be totally fulfilled. Jesus will return and the banquet celebration with God will continue forever.



Isaiah says that there will be great rejoicing by all believers, but what is our attitude while we await these things? Whether through our own departure from this world, or by Jesus’ return in glory, or both, each of us will come to the banquet. We are assured of this through His death and resurrection. What is important in the meanwhile is how we pass the time while we wait. Some choose to worry about what might come tomorrow in their lives. Others scoff at the world around them, feeling almost smug in their salvation. Some become depressed at the condition of God’s creation and the sinfulness abounding in it. How are you handling it?

Paul said that we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Eph.2:10) As the people of Christ, we really don’t have time to wonder or to worry or to judge. We only have time to tell others about Jesus, before it is too late for them. When our loved ones die, only to live again in Christ, we mourn deeply. Think what it must be like to lose a loved one when there is no hope, no assurance of the resurrection. We shall rejoice eternally at the wonderful banquet prepared for us, but until then we need to be inviting more and more people to become participants!

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

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

21st Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 25:6-9

1. What “mountain” is Isaiah referring to in vs. 6? Isaiah first mentions the mountain in chapter 2:2-3. The Concordia Self-study Bible notes or a commentary may help you.



2. What banquet (vs. 6) settings might come to mind to Isaiah’s original readers? What is the ultimate banquet which God’s people anticipate?

3. What shroud/sheet (vs. 7) will cover all of us? Will we stay under the shroud?

4. What is the response of God’s people (vs. 9) to the victory He has won for us?

5. This text is often used as one of the lessons at a Christian burial service. Why is this text appropriate to that setting?

6. Is there a time when you have grieved the death of a loved one? How did God comfort you?

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

Ruth 1:1-19

Ruth's famous words of commitment have been popular in our culture, but usually used to express the devoted love of a wife for her husband or a bride for her groom. However, many brides would hesitate to apply the same words to their mothers-in-law!

Naomi was a woman dedicated to God. That isn't to say that she was happy in her plight. She was a woman facing poverty in a land where a husbandless woman was pretty much without hope. But Naomi had a kind of contentment in God. She believed that she was where she was by His omniscient will. She prayed that He might bless her daughters-in-law in their new lives.

Ruth steps into the picture as a woman determined to stay with Naomi, this amazing woman of faith. Was it perhaps Naomi's faith that inspired Ruth's dedication?

This passage is about commitment. Though she could have remained in her own country and established a life there, Ruth chose to go to the unfamiliar in order to serve someone that she loved. She was willing to give up part of her life in order to take care of Naomi. It was not the easiest way for Ruth to continue her life, but it was a commitment that she entered with joy.

God blessed Ruth and Naomi with a home, husband for Ruth, and new joy. Ruth is even listed in the genealogy of Jesus in the gospels.

What are we dedicated to? What commitments do we make and why? Are some commitments more God-pleasing than others? Do we sometimes make commitments that keep us from serving God more effectively and faithfully? Do we decide our commitments or are they often dictated by others? Do our commitments reflect our faith in and service to God? Who can help us make wise commitments? These are important questions to contemplate as we decide where to commit our lives and our time. We rejoice that we live in the joy of God's commitment to us in Jesus Christ.

Learn more about God's commitment to us in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

Ruth 1:1-19

1. At what time in Israel's history did this story take place? How does this explain the placement of this book in the Old Testament sequence?
2. What tragedies happened in Naomi's life? Would it have been appropriate for Ruth to remain in her homeland?
3. Read again Ruth's familiar words of commitment (vs. 16-17). What amazes you about those words?
4. Most likely you know the rest of the story. Skim the rest of the book (it's only four chapters long!). How did God bless Ruth and Naomi?
5. God had something even more amazing planned. How does Ruth become part of the family tree of Jesus (Matthew 1:5-6)? What is the significance of Ruth's place in the salvation story?
6. In what contexts is God inviting your commitment? Is this a time of recommitment to your spouse, your children, your parents, your church . . . ? Are we able to keep our commitments under our own power? How does He help and bless us?

21st Sunday after Pentecost

Philippians 4:4-13

How many of us have read the first few verses of today's lesson and thought, "If only that could be me." We all long for the peace that surpasses human understanding and we want to be able to rejoice in the Lord at all times. But, it just doesn't seem to happen for us! Are we expecting too much, or what?

As Americans we want "peace" to be the absence of turmoil, the absence of danger, the absence of pain. We fear these things perhaps more than any other people in the world because we are nearly free of such things in our great land. Americans are also children of the culture of self-control. We want to be in control of everything in our lives. How many of us have been described by those who love us as "control freaks"? In short, we want to be able to rejoice in the Lord always and have a peace that surpasses human understanding for this reason—that we have everything under control and everything is going just the way that we want. Paul's life and Jesus' life show us that this isn't likely to happen.

Jesus was the perfect follower of His Father, and yet He experienced the Garden of Gethsemane, and He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness after forty days of hardship. He died on a cross, not only the most terrible death then known, but reserved for the most vile of criminals. Paul, the author of today's verses, would face beheading at the hands of Rome. What then can we say about the peace that surpasses human understanding or the ability to rejoice in the Lord always?

Paul does not tell us to figure out all of the answers and then tell God what we think so that He can make everything go the way we want. Rather, he assures us of God's nearness and tells us to let *Him* know our needs. Paul says to not be anxious, and we could add "in the midst of your turmoil." There is an old song with the line, "I never promised you a rose garden." God promises us something much better—Peace. Is there a price for us to pay? Yes—we have to let it go and trust in His faithfulness and ability to meet our every need. As Paul concludes, we can do this because of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Learn more about joy and trust in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

21st Sunday after Pentecost

Philippians 4:4-13

1. This text supports (and expands) the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23. Where do we find the "fruit" of joy listed? What is the source of our joy?
2. Where do we find the "fruit" of peace listed? Who is the source of all peace? (vs. 9b)
3. Where do we find the "fruit" of gentleness emphasized? Who modeled gentleness for us? (Matthew 11:39 and 21:5)
4. Where do we find the "fruit" of contentment emphasized? Why could Paul be so content?

For Family Reflection:

5. What do you worry about? What is God's solution to our worries? (vs. 6) (See also Matthew 6:25-34)
6. A theme of the book of Philippians has been "joy"? Does your family find its joy "in the Lord"? (vs. 4, 10) Do we find that joy "always"? Say it again: REJOICE!

21st Sunday after Pentecost

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

In chapter 2, Paul reminded Timothy to be a person who “accurately” (NASB) or “correctly” (NIV) handles “the word of truth” (2:15). In chapter 3 he continues writing to Timothy about the importance of knowing God’s word and accurately “handling” it. Timothy knew the word of God. He had learned it from his mother and grandmother. He had studied under Paul. He was a pastor of God’s people. And we, also, are called to do as Timothy did. In Timothy’s time, and in our own, knowing God’s word is essential in the life of every Christian.

How many odd and crazy things and beliefs pass for Christianity today? How will you know if they are really Christian or not? How do we interpret the intricate challenges in our culture: yoga, meditation, creation by visualization, the Green movement, premarital sex, women in God’s world, homosexuality, abortion, etc., etc.? How do we explain to a doubting world what we believe about Jesus of Nazareth? Pastors can’t do it all for us. Pastors can’t be there at our side Monday through Friday as we live our lives in a secular world. Knowing God’s word—digesting it in our minds and hearts daily—is our personal task and calling.

Paul compares the pastor to a “coach.” He is not there to live his congregation’s life. He is there to guide them as they go about the task of living the faith that they study and contemplate daily. Paul warns Timothy that there will be times when his job as coach will be hard. Like the coach of a high school football team that marches solidly to the finals of the state championship and then seemingly forgets how to play! He can run them through the practice sessions, sit them down in the locker room for a pep talk, but in the end, it is the players themselves who must do the job.

The good news? The pastor has a Helper—the Holy Spirit who joins him in urging, leading, coaxing, and coaching us to be in the Word, to live the Word, and to know the Word.

Learn more about **God’s word** in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

21st Sunday after Pentecost

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

1. When did Timothy become a Christian (vs. 14-15)? From whom did Timothy learn God’s Word?
2. According to vs. 15-17 what is the source of God’s Word? What is the purpose of God’s Word?
3. What was to be the task of “Pastor Timothy” according to 4:2, 5? How does this section apply to the pastor’s role today?
4. How is 4:3 a “prophecy” for the modern viewpoint and application of the Bible? How is Paul’s advice to Timothy in this section relevant for our church?

For family reflection

5. Talk about the “inspiration” and “inerrancy” of the Bible (Explanation to Luther’s Small Catechism, question #3). Why is this teaching (doctrine) so important today?
6. Paul writes to Timothy as his “son” (I Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; 2:1). If Paul were writing to you as his “son” or “daughter” what do you think he would write?

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 21:33-46

The Pharisees understood! Isn't that the most puzzling part of this story? They listened to Jesus' story of the vineyard. They knew that Jesus was telling them that they were the managers who killed the Son. They knew who Jesus was claiming to be.

The Pharisees and priests were men who knew God's word; they knew the prophecies of the Old Testament; and yet they hated the Son of God and His teaching. How could this be?

The great tragedy of the Pharisees and other groups fighting against Jesus was that they had taken God out of their study; their outlook; their logic; and their decision making. While we proudly claim to follow Jesus, do we sometimes make the same mistakes?

If the enemies of Jesus were guilty of ignoring God's word, are we also guilty? How often do you sit down to study the Bible to just be with God and ask His counsel in your life?

If the enemies of Jesus were guilty of depending on their own powers of reason, are we also guilty? How often do you ask God to guide you in everyday decisions concerning your finances, your relationships, or your job?

If the enemies of Jesus reacted defensively against His teaching, do we do the same? Do we get angry when asked why a child missed Confirmation class for hockey practice? Do we become defensive when listening to a sermon on tithing? Do we challenge God when He asks us to speak and act for Him in our world?

Perhaps the greatest tragedy concerning the enemies of Jesus in these passages is that they refused to see who *they* really were. Perhaps the reason that we so often forget to include God in our lives or fail to place Him at the center of our lives is the same.

We don't like to see ourselves as owned by God, nor do we like the idea that we cannot rule our lives better than He. Like the Pharisees, we hate to step back and see our desperate need for Jesus.

Tragically, most of the priests and Pharisees pursued their egos to the end. We, as Christians, have a better option. Because Jesus paid for our sin and lives within us, we are able to step back, understand our need, and learn each day to lean on Him more and more.

Ask your pastor about starting more Bible studies in your church.

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

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 21:33-46

1. Interpret Jesus' story. Who is the landowner? Who are the tenants? Who are the servants? Who is the son?
2. How did Jesus' story become reality? What the "good news" in the tragic story?
3. Where in the Old Testament is verse 42 found? Who is the rejected "stone"?
4. Why didn't Jesus enemies (vs. 25) immediately arrest Him and silence His threatening words?

For Family Reflection

5. Share times and places when we might reject Jesus? Does He ever reject us?
6. When was the kingdom of God given to us (vs. 43)? By whose power do we produce fruits? (Galatians 5:22-23) What fruits can we produce?

Twenty-first Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 18:1-8

“He was telling them...that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart” (vs.1). What an outstanding and needed word of encouragement for us in our world today. Recession, unemployment, farm profits, estate taxes, out of one war and into another, being hated by the world that we feed.... And then there are usual family conflicts and problems, hail-crunched crops, drowned crops, roasted crops, threatened layoff, condemnation of one’s land to create a highway, etc. etc. Our world just keeps getting more confusing and more frightening every year. We bow our heads, but is it in prayer, or despair?

Jesus’ point in this parable is not that we have to beg God for attention; or plead that He take time from His busy schedule to hear us. Jesus specifically points out that the judge in the parable is not a caring man. He was one “Who did not fear God and did not respect man” (vs. 2). Yet, even this unjust judge would at last listen to the woman’s complaint. How much more will our God, who loves us more than we can imagine, grant us comfort, peace, justice, and care?

Read Luke 12:22-34. It will help make today’s passage more clear. God encourages us not to be afraid that He will fail us. He has not given us life (eternal and abundant) so that we can continue to worry about what will happen tomorrow, or depend on ourselves for all the answers to life’s problems. Jesus says that worry cannot fix problems or even lengthen our lives (an act He considers simple).

Not only in eternal matters, but in daily matters, God is working in our behalf, according to His timetable, and according to His power and His deep, deep love for us.

Each time you bow your head, ask God to take away the despair and replace it with confident prayer, knowing that God is in control even now.

Is Bible study on your “to do” list this week?

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

Twenty-first Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 18:1-8

1. The Gospel writer makes interpretation of the parable easy for us. According to vs. 1, what’s the point of the parable?
2. Why did the judge respond to the woman’s request? Was it because she was worthy of her request? Was it because the judge was a “nice guy”?
3. How is our God different than the judge in the story? Why does He respond to our prayer requests? How does He respond to our prayers?
4. What’s the point of Jesus’ question in vs. 8? What’s the answer to the question?

For Family Reflection

5. Have you ever “lost heart” or been discouraged when your prayers did not seem to be answered? How did you find the heart of God again?
6. What does it mean to be persistent? Are there other areas of our Christian life that deserve persistence—our service, stewardship . . .?