

## Third Sunday after Pentecost

Hosea 5:15-6:6

One commentator, described the time of Israel's history when Hosea prophesied as, "material prosperity and spiritual bankruptcy." Times appeared to be good. Political alliances looked firm and money was flowing into the nation. A more modern cliché might be, "God's in His heaven and all's right with the world." It was a most dangerous time for God's people, not because they were suffering, but because they were not!

Like us, the people of Hosea's time tended to get very involved in the daily tasks of business and family. It became more and more difficult to find time for prayer and worship, at least prayer and worship that was heartfelt. Staying close to God was less and less important as it became clear that times were good and problems were few. Who needs God when everything is comfortable? They gave sincerity a try from time to time, but quickly fell back into making worship and prayer duties of monotony rather than privileges of joy.

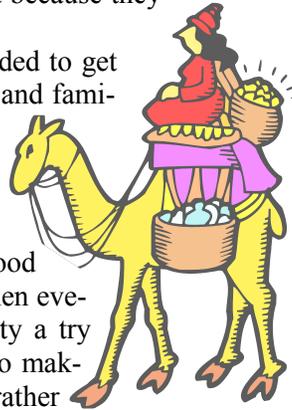
What would be God's answer to the dilemma? He would allow His people to fail; He would allow them to rely on their own wisdom and strength. They would fail. In the midst of their failure, they would have to decide whether to turn back to God or to run further from Him.

As Christians, we know that God will never stop loving us, but do we, in our pursuit of comfort and "success", let our love for Him falter? Do we begin to think that we are doing fine on our own without God? Perhaps it isn't as blatant a thought at that, but do we begin to be bored in church, forget to pray, decide to put off Bible study until a more opportune time?

Here is something to think about the next time you are tempted to put off worship, prayer, or the study of God's word. The phrase "...until an opportune time" is found in the Bible in John 4:13. Satan also looks for opportune times in our lives. Don't let apathy become a part of your relationship with God—stay close to Him!

### Study God's Word with other Christians

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)



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Hosea 5:15-6:6

1. Who is Hosea? What is the context of his message? (See the Concordia Self-study Bible or another Biblical reference.)
2. Israel speaks in vs. 1-3. Was her repentance sincere? Did she take the justice of God seriously?
3. God responds in vs. 4-6. Was God fooled? What does God "desire" of those who follow Him?
4. Hosea frequently repeats the theme of "acknowledging" God (vs. 3; also 2:8,20; 4:1,6; 5:4). What does it mean to "acknowledge" God?
5. Have you ever felt "torn to pieces" or "injured" (vs. 1)? How has God healed you?
6. Israel often just went through the motions in offering their sacrifices (vs.6). How do we stay sincere in our faith response?

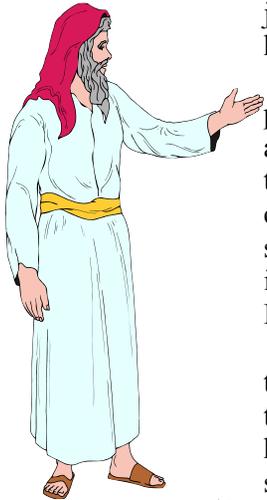


## Third Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 34:11-16

In these verses we see God's caring love for His people and His commitment to provide for their need. The first part of Ezekiel's message was a judgment against the religious leaders of Israel. What is Ezekiel's message to us as "flocks" (congregations) today? What is God's directive to pastors-shepherds today?

Sometimes congregations look to their pastor as the guy who makes everything work. If God calls that pastor to another place, the members may feel like lost sheep without a shepherd. Ezekiel reminds us that the Shepherd of us all never leaves us. We sometimes just forget that He is the Shepherd of the shepherds.



Ezekiel teaches us that God is able to provide all that is needed both in our homes and in our churches. While we look to our pastors for teaching, leadership, and vision for the church, it is God who is our strength and source. It is He that empowers and sends us out in mission. God is our center and He is our Lord.

Even pastors can fall into the stressful trap of thinking that everything depends on them. One pastor, a few years ago, confided to his congregation that he had forgotten that Jesus was the Lord of the church until he found himself in the hospital for a week after severe chest pain put him down. He had been so busy "running" the church that he had forgotten that his God had a plan and the energy to carry it out.

So what can Ezekiel's words say to us today? As pastors and parishioners in congregations, God calls us to focus on Him, trust Him to care for and lead us; to enable and sustain us and the church which we comprise.

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

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

## Third Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 34:11-16

1. The early part of chapter 34 speaks a word of judgment. How had the shepherds of Israel failed in their tasks? (vs. 2-4,8)
2. When no adequate or faithful shepherd could be found, who assumed responsibility for the care of the sheep?
3. How is Jesus the fulfillment of this prophecy? (John 10:11-16)
4. The shepherd tends to the lost, straying, injured, weak (vs.16). Have you ever found yourself as one of these struggling sheep? How did the Shepherd tend to you?
5. "I will shepherd the flock with justice." (vs. 16b) In what circumstances will the shepherd judge the flock?
6. Read Psalm 23. What parallels do we find with Ezekiel's prophecy?

Third Sunday after Pentecost  
1 Kings 17:17-24

Like the widow and Elijah we wonder why bad things happen to people who don't "deserve" trouble upon trouble. It's a question brought about by an old assumption that bad things happen in retribution for some sinful act. Some religions even teach that a person is born crippled or experiences disease or pain because of the "karma" they created by being evil in a previous life. This is the way eastern religions maintain that indeed evil happens to those who have been evil. However, God denies that bad things always happen in repayment for specific sins.



Although we cannot know why a tornado strikes one farm but not another, or why one person is killed in an accident but another is not, we do know that suffering is often a burden upon good and righteous people. Such was the case with the widow who housed Elijah. She had already suffered the loss of her beloved husband, who would also have been her financial support. She and her son had nearly starved to death. Now she endured the pain of losing her son whom she loved, and who would have become her only support as he had grown to manhood.

Elijah was as upset as the widow. They both lived in a culture that expected God to do good to the righteous and evil to the unrighteous.

The good news of this passage is not contained in Elijah's prayer, but in God's answer. God had compassion upon the woman. Far from causing death, God restored the boy to life. Jesus showed this compassion to the widow of Nain, raising her son as he was being taken to burial. He also raised Lazarus and the daughter of Jairus.

We may want to shout out that He did not raise my relative from death! But, in our hearts we know that He did. While we do not all see what we desire, a miraculous restoration of physical life after death, Jesus promised that every believer is resurrected to a glorious life with Him. We can trust that promise because of His own resurrection from the grave.

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

*A message from your Iowa West Education Committee*

Third Sunday after Pentecost  
1 Kings 17:17-24

1. A familiar Sunday school story precedes our text. Read 1 Kings 17:7-16. What miracle had God already worked for the widow and her son?



2. According to vs. 18, what assumption does the woman make about the calamities of her life? Is her reaction unusual?
3. The miracle of vs. 22 is the first resurrection miracle in the Bible. Can you identify other Biblical instances where the dead were brought back to life?
4. How do we see the faith of Elijah? How do we see that Elijah trusted in God rather than in his own powers?
5. What other "Son" was brought back to life? How does His resurrection breathe life into all of us?
6. The woman was convinced of God's presence and power (vs. 24). Do we always receive physical evidence of God's working in our life? How do Jesus' words to Thomas (John 20:29) speak

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Hosea 5:15-6:6

In this week's passage we seem to see a contrite people seeking God. God replies with puzzling words. Why did He not encourage them in their quest?

As with many passages of Scripture there are multiple opinions as to just what is meant by either the people or God. But, let's look at a possibility that seems to make a lot of sense.

As we read the words of the people, there is much emphasis on desiring the blessings of God, much confidence in God, but no word of guilt or repentance. God's people had a strong tendency to consider themselves worthy of His love and to believe that belonging to God made Him responsible for their wellbeing. They often chose to worship pagan gods, and only flee back to their Creator when times were bad or enemies were attacking. They rarely comprehended their sin and God's loving mercy.

How about us? Do we attend worship out of true desire to praise God and repentantly contemplate His mercy? Do the little "gods" of our busy lives often supersede our true God? Do we flee to God's arms only when everything else has failed? We are as guilty as the people of the Old Testament days.

Why do we take God for granted? Perhaps it is *because* of His loving mercy. We are surrounded by appointments, jobs, clubs, families, and creditors who do not easily forgive us when we are late, forgetful, incompetent, or just plain grouchy. Because of our sinful nature, these automatically take precedence over God, who we know will love us no matter what.

Sometimes we forget that God loves us not because we are such good children, but in spite of the fact that we are rotten children. We do not deserve His blessings, but He sends them anyway because the blood of His own Son has paid for our sins and they are gone. The unconditional love we receive from our Father is only possible because of His grace in Christ. The next time that the busyness of life tries to draw you away from God, stop and remember that our confidence in God came at a great price! It is His mercy at work, not our worthiness.

**Learn more about God's love for you in a Bible study this week.**

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

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Hosea 5:15-6:6

1. What is the "place" of God (5:15)? What would cause God to withdraw from His people?
2. Israel assumed that God's response to them would be like the sunrise, winter rains, and spring rains (vs. 3). What happens when God is taken for granted?
3. What does it mean that Ephraim's and Judah's love was "like the morning mist" and the "early dew"? How is our love for God like mist and dew?
4. According to vs. 6 what was God's desire for Israel and for us?

Family Table Talks:

5. How had God healed us and bound up our wounds (6:1)? (See Isaiah 53:5)
6. God's people in Hosea's time were very apathetic to God. What apathy toward God do we need to confess in our family, in our church, in our society?

### Third Sunday after Pentecost

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

Paul *knew* that his death would usher in the wondrous conclusion of eternal life in Christ. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, he *knew* that any suffering in this life merely served as an opportunity to express the life of Christ in his own life. “Knew” is italicized in today’s devotion because Paul did not doubt the truth of his gospel message. He spoke because of his faith in the truth—his faith in his Lord. Paul says that he did not lose heart because God renewed his inner man every day.

What about us? It seems that we have a lot to lose heart about these days. Our faith is under constant attack from “the world.” One example of a successful attack that is both sad and disturbing is a letter written by a young woman who had read *The Da Vinci Code*. I partially paraphrase—she said that history used to be boring to her, but she learned a lot of neat historical stuff from her reading of the book, and “The Bible is fictional too, and *The Da Vinci Code* is a lot more believable.” (The last is a direct quote.) There are many other examples of discouragement for the believer, from *The Gospel of Judas* to the recommendation of “death with dignity” as a defiance of “religious fundamentalism” contained in a recent letter to the *Des Moines Register*.

Lose heart? How could we not? At those thoughts, Paul would sit us down for a long talk. He knew that his life could end at any time (and probably not pleasantly). He most assuredly did not expect to die of old age. Yet he kept on keeping on, as we would say. He did not hate or condemn because he knew that only Christ’s love could keep him going, and only Christ’s love could save those who needed so badly to hear what he had to say. In two thousand years, nothing has changed. Paul is with Christ, but his encouragement to us is still as valid as it was when he first penned it.

We do not lose heart because God renews us every day. We speak what we believe. We share Christ with one another to encourage one another. We encourage one another so that we will speak out to the world, and so that others can come to know the truth.

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

### Third Sunday after Pentecost

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

1. According to verse 13, what follows faith? How did Paul practice the passage in his own life?
2. What are the limitations of what “is seen”? (vs. 18) What are the blessings of the “unseen”?
3. What perspective does Paul put on the troubles of life? (vs. 17) What is the Good News for the Christian in the midst of life’s challenges?

### For Family Reflection

4. What causes you to “lose heart”? (vs. 16) How does God restore your heart?
5. Why can we too be glad that Jesus is alive? (vs. 14)
6. The LCMS *Ablaze!* emphasis encourages us to speak of Jesus to others. (vs. 13) Who is there in your place of work, your neighborhood, or among your friends who does not know about Jesus? How do our witnessing efforts bring glory to God? (vs. 15)

### Third Sunday after Pentecost

Galatians 2:15-21; 3:10-14

Before we shake our heads at the Galatians for their failure to understand the contrast between Law and Faith, perhaps we should ask ourselves a question: “Does a day pass that we don’t try to justify ourselves; to prove ourselves right?”

We rarely do it during Sunday worship because that is when our hearts are most aware of who we are in Christ Jesus. However, on Monday, when we start running on “automatic,” we are in danger of rejecting grace in favor of self-justification.

When you make a big error at work (and we all have), or when a police officer stops you for a traffic violation, or when the kids catch you holding your own actions to a different standard than you do theirs, or when your spouse confronts you with an unfulfilled promise, do you feel like you have to respond with a self-justifying claim? Do you even get angry? How often do we actually respond with, “I’m sorry—I shouldn’t have been doing that.”?

“I’m sorry” is an admission that we really aren’t perfect, and we really aren’t better than the guy confronting us. It places us in need of forgiveness and few of us enjoy that. To some Jewish Christians, it seemed that failing to obey the Law meant their undoing. They did not understand that the Law was meant to bring a sinner to faith. Therefore they felt that they could never be wrong for that would remove them from God’s love.

Paul, on the other hand, understood that grace could not be earned. We cannot earn God’s grace by being better than anyone else. Grace is generated by God’s love, not by perfect obedience to His Law. It can only be received and only received by Faith.

This is the marvelous gift that we have. We don’t have to be right in order to be loved by God. He has chosen to accept us, not because we are perfect and therefore worthy, but because He loves us. Grace is contrary to the world’s understanding. The world knows pity, obligation, retribution, justification, and the phrase “Now we’re even.” Only God looks at us and says that we are forgiven because grace has come to us through Christ Jesus. All we can do is believe, and even the ability to do that is a free gift from our Lord. He does it all.

Learn more about Faith in a Bible study this week.

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

### Third Sunday after Pentecost

Galatians 2:15-21; 3:10-14

1. We are not justified by \_\_\_\_\_ (3:11) but through \_\_\_\_\_ (2:16).
2. When were we crucified with Christ? (Romans 6:3) What does this crucifixion mean for our daily life?
3. What is the benefit of the law? What is the limitation of the law?
4. Read Deuteronomy 21:23 (quoted in 3:13). What was the curse of crucifixion? What does it mean that Christ was the “curse” for us?

#### For Family Reflection

5. How might we try to prove ourselves worthy before God? Do our actions ever make us worthy to Him? What is our only hope and comfort?
6. The Jews thought they could rely on their family heritage. Do we sometimes think that our family membership (or some other criteria) makes us special church members? Whose family do we belong to first?

## Third Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 7:15-29

In this passage Jesus talks about “fruit” which believers are to bear. People should even be able to tell that we are Christians by the fruit that we bear (vs.17). What about grace? Aren’t we saved by “grace through faith”? Yes, we are. So, why is Jesus adding “rules” to this whole salvation thing? Or, is He?

God does not see our salvation as an event followed by years of doing whatever we want, knowing that Heaven is ours. He saves us for a purpose (Eph. 2:10). Our very lives are to stand as a witness to believers and non-believers that God has the power to change lives for the better. We are to bear fruit! This fruit will be internal (peace, joy, self-control, etc.) and external (how we treat others; the way we react to daily frustrations and problems; how we treat our families, etc.). We are to become more like our Savior every day. We’ll never be perfect, but God calls us to grow up into mature Christians who strive to emulate their Lord.

We don’t do this of our own initiative but by the leadership and enabling of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. He provides the strength, encouragement, and even the will to do good. Read through the Gospels and see how many times Jesus commands His listeners to “follow Me.” Today’s passage ends with the story of the wise man who built his life on the Rock. The most interesting phrase in that story is this: “everyone who hears these words of Mine *and acts on them*, may be compared to a wise man...”

Verse 21 is hard. What is the will of our Father? Not that we do good works or bear good fruit, but that we believe in Jesus Christ, His Son. Many people do many good things, sometimes even in the name of God. They think that they have pleased God and are working their way into His salvation. Jesus says, however, that unless those works are based upon a relationship with Him, they are worthless. All the works in the world will not impress God, unless the doer is a child of Christ. Oh, there will be fruit in the life of the Christian, and there will be good works, but they will not result in salvation. Rather, they will be the result of salvation.

Learn more about works and fruits in our lives a Bible study this week.

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

## Third Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 7:15-29

1. The text contains three comparisons. Review vs. 16-20. What’s the difference between a good tree and a bad tree? What’s the fate of the bad tree?
2. Review vs. 24-27. What’s the difference between the actions of the wise man and the foolish man? What’s the fate of the house built on sand?
- 3., Review vs. 29. What the difference between Jesus as a teacher and the “teachers of the law?” What Teacher are you listening to?
4. Knowing that we are saved only by faith, how do we explain Jesus’ words “but only he who does the will of my Father” (vs. 21) will enter the kingdom of heaven?

### For Family Reflection

5. Compare your family to a fruit tree. What kinds of trees are you? Are you producing fruits of faith? Who’s receiving the fruits from your tree?
6. At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7) the crowds were “amazed” at Jesus teaching. What’s the most “amazing” section or teaching for you in these chapters?

## Third Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 4:35-41

These days most of us lead lives that are pretty stressed and busy. Our work, our family schedules, our feeling that there should be at least thirty-six hours in a day, all at times contribute to short tempers, tired bodies and thoughts of that old cliché “Stop the world, I want to get off!” No wonder that very few Christians can read today’s passage without thinking, “Wow, I needed to be reminded of that.”

The disciples found themselves in a terrible situation. Their boat was filling with water from a bad storm and death seemed a real possibility. Our lives are sometimes like their boat, filled with trouble and in danger of sinking. Life, like the boat, can seem to be out of our control.

In response to their inability to conquer trouble on their own, the disciples called to Jesus, as we do. He responded with love, patience, healing, and a miracle beyond their understanding. Their response to Him was fear.

Fear? Perhaps awe is a better word, but an awe that left them trembling. Why would they feel this way when the Lord had stilled the storm in their lives?

Perhaps we also would be awestruck and overwhelmed. We are so used to thinking of ourselves as in control of our lives that we forget about the awesome power and authority of God.

We think of God as the One who cares and Who loves and encourages, but often forget that He is also Lord of the universe and Lord of our lives. We belong to Him and are precious to Him who is the Almighty Ruler of all things, even the weather. Standing in awe of Him is not only understandable, it is appropriate. Serving Him is a joy, because we know that He has the power to accomplish wonderful things for us and through us in His world.

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

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

## Third Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 4:35-41

1. How does vs.38a show that Jesus was true man? What other incidents in Jesus’ life demonstrate His humanity?
2. What does the disciples’ reaction to the storm and situation (vs. 38b) tell us about their trust in Jesus? What does the disciples’ reaction to the miracle tell us about reverence for Jesus?
3. The miracle shows Jesus’ power over His creation. What other miracles of Jesus show that He is Lord over all created things? Does Jesus still have power over His creation?

### For Family Reflection

4. Are there times in your life where Jesus might have said to you “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”
5. The disciples were terrified of Jesus’ power? Do we need to be afraid of Jesus’ power? Why not?
6. The disciples asked Jesus “Don’t you care?” Have you ever been tempted to ask Jesus whether He really cared? Does He care for you? Always? How do you know?

## Third Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 7:36-8:3

Not much is known about Simon the Pharisee. Perhaps he believed Jesus was a false teacher and hoped to catch Him in some offense, or he may have just wanted to meet this popular rabbi. Either way, he failed to provide his guest with even the most basic amenities of the time. In Simon's initial meeting with Jesus, he seemed to see Him as an equal...maybe. The woman, the sinner, had an opposite attitude. She saw Jesus as her only hope. Why was there such a difference between the woman and Simon?

Simon felt safe comparing himself to other people. Who could compare to a righteous Pharisee? He obeyed all the religious rules without fail (or so he believed). God must think him an extraordinary person. With that attitude he could easily view others as beneath his achievement; beneath his place in God's eyes. Simon was guilty of spiritual arrogance. He could tell people about God; he could tell God about God, but he couldn't see the reality of his own life.

The woman, on the other hand, compared herself to God's Son and saw her sin. She saw the reality of her life by the light of Jesus and knew that He was her only hope.

We all know some Simons. Sadly, reaching them with Jesus' love is not easy. The effort is often greeted with sarcasm or the accusation that we are hateful Christians.

Our culture prefers many paths to Heaven, but there is just One. Sharing Jesus with a searching sinner is easy, but we are also called to share Jesus with the Simons of the world. Jesus never gave up—even on Simon, as we see in verse 47. Did those words touch Simon's heart? This Pharisee's name, unlike most of Jesus' enemies, has been preserved for us. Perhaps that is so we will know him when we meet one day.

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

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

## Third Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 7:36-8:3

1. What were some of the unusual actions of the woman who came into Simon's house? How did the Pharisee interpret the actions? How did Jesus interpret the actions?
2. What's the point of Jesus' short story (vs. 41-42)? How did the story apply to the woman? How does the story apply to us?
3. What declaration does Jesus make to the woman (vs. 48)? Why was this declaration startling to the audience (vs. 49)? Why was this announcement important for the woman?
4. Was the woman forgiven because of her loving acts (vs. 47)? Why was she forgiven? Can we ever earn forgiveness?

### For Family Reflection

5. Where do you hear the announcement "Your sins are forgiven!?" Why is that good news to us?
6. What women are named in vs. 2-3? Why do you suppose these women are noted among the faithful followers? Who are some of the women in your church that you note as faithful followers? Why is their service important to your family and in your church?