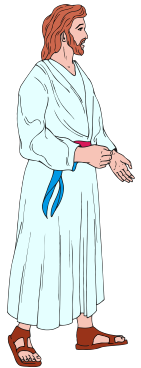


4th Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 7:36-50

Not much is known about Simon the Pharisee. He may have believed Jesus was a false teacher and hoped to catch Him in some offense, or he may have just wanted to meet this popular teacher. 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 liked to compare himself to other people. When he did this, especially as a Pharisee who supposedly could live without sinning, he had no need of any kind. He especially had no need for forgiveness. Simon was guilty of spiritual arrogance. He could tell people all about God; he could even tell God about God, but he couldn't see who he really was, who the woman really was, or who Jesus really was. The woman compared herself to the Son of God and recognized her sin. She saw the reality of her life through the light of Jesus and knew that He was her only hope.



Many of us know people like the self-assured Simon, but we often fail to reach them with the love of Jesus. We live in a culture that prefers many paths to Heaven, but there is still just One. The sinful woman and the arrogant Simon will die and spend eternity in Hell without Jesus. It's easy to share Jesus with people like the sinful woman. The Holy Spirit has already filled them with repentance and the knowledge of their need. It is much harder to share God's love with the Simons, but we can never stop trying.

Happily, Jesus apparently didn't give up on self-saving, arrogant Simon. Jesus' gentle teaching leaves us with the sense that the warning that Simon received in verse 47 may have had a lasting effect. After all, unlike most of Jesus' enemies among the Pharisees, Simon's name has been preserved for us in this Gospel story. Perhaps that is so we will know him when we meet one day.

Learn more about reaching out with God's love in a Bible study!
A message from your District Education Committee.

4th Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 7:36-50

1. The introduction to the woman in the story is simple. How is she introduced in vs. 37? What particular sins of this woman do some commentaries suggest? What do you think brought her to Jesus?
2. Summarize the woman's actions toward Jesus (vs. 38). What motivated her actions? (vs. 47)
3. What is the point of Jesus' parable in vs. 41-42?
4. What wonderful announcement did Jesus make to the woman in vs. 48? On what basis could the woman receive that announcement? (vs. 50)
5. Simon, the Pharisee, and others were quick to judge the woman. Are there individuals or situations where we are quick to judge? What lesson do we learn in this story?
6. The good news is that no matter how great our sin, Jesus has a wonderful announcement for us too (vs. 48). What relief or joy does this announcement bring to you today?



Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 19:2-8a

Only three months out of Egypt, Moses gave God's people His command. They replied, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" Did they mean it? In the following months, they rarely obeyed God. They frustrated Moses and even erected a golden calf to worship. Is it possible that they did not understand the promise of God and the responsibility that He required of them?

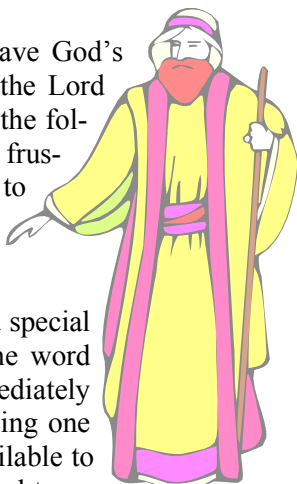
The word for "priest" in those days meant a special person, even to people not related to God. The word meant to be an adjutant of the king; to be immediately available to him. Perhaps it was a little like being one of our president's immediate staff—always available to respond to his requests. The people of God failed to respond obediently to God most of the time!

It is hard to believe that God would choose such a fickle people to participate in important tasks, yet He did, and He continued to guide, love, and endure them throughout Old Testament history. He also shows that same unfathomable love and mercy to us. In I Peter 2:9 the apostle proclaims that the same gift and expectation have been given to us who are followers of the Savior. If we wonder why God would have chosen the people of Israel, we have to also wonder why He would choose us, for we fail our God as often as they.

God pursues us with mercy and grace. He sent His Son to show us Himself and to pay the price for our sins, all so that He could welcome the unworthy into His kingdom and into His ministry. We can do nothing to assist in making ourselves usable to God, or worthy of coming into His presence. He has done it all, but not being able to participate in our salvation does not mean that there are not expectations of us. God expected the people of the Exodus to obey Him and to serve Him in His world. He expects the same of us. Bad news? Never! It's exciting and wonderful news because God Himself provides power and joy in following Him.

Is your Bible study group serving in God's world?

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)



Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 19:2-8a

1. Where does this dialog take place?
2. Although everything belonged to God (vs. 5b), what was special about God's ownership of the people of Israel? (vs. 6)
3. Reflect on the illustration of vs. 4. What did it mean to be "carried on eagles' wings"? How does God carry us?
4. What was the peoples' response to God's command (vs. 8)? Would they always keep their promise?
5. This section begins one of the key covenants of the Old Testament. (See p. 18 of the Concordia Self-study Bible). What did it mean for Israel to have a covenant relationship with God?
6. Read I Peter 2:9-10. What thoughts are repeated in Peter's letter? What does it mean for us that we are "priests" and a "holy nation"?

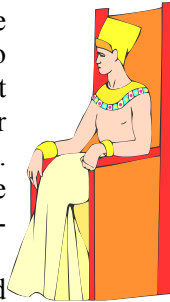


Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 17:22-24



God used the pagan king of Babylon to bring His own rebellious nation to her knees. After being warned by the prophets and losing his throne to Babylon, the king of Judah did not repent and seek God. Instead he rebelled against Babylon, turning to Egypt for help. He didn't know that Egypt had neither the intention or ability to fight against Babylon. Judah was destroyed. This was the historical incident that Ezekiel described earlier in this chapter.



Ezekiel tells us that regardless of the mire caused by the will of men, God is still in control and His will shall be accomplished. After their time of struggle and chastisement, God would lift His people up again because His absolute love for them never stopped. Babylon would fall to her enemies because she was an enemy to God. His salvation would come to His people.

People often think that their own power is supreme. They may think, like the king of Babylon, that since they do not accept God He has no authority over them. We see this attitude today when the world claims that God should have no place of honor in America because the country is not based in any one religion. God would say that denying Him cannot change His authority over the world and its inhabitants.

What a wonderful assurance this is to us as His people. When we become discouraged about the actions and situations and attitudes in our world, knowing that God's will cannot be thwarted by man brings us that peace that surpasses human understanding. Not only do we know that our eternity is assured through our Lord Jesus, we know that our world's history is under the control of the same Lord that created the universe so many years ago.

Nothing could stop God's will in the Old Testament; nothing could stop His plan of salvation in Christ; nothing can stop His plan for us.

Bible study helps us grow up in Christ!

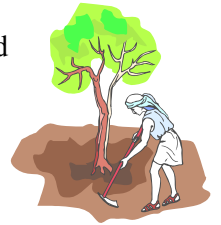
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 17:22-24

1. Ezekiel has shared a message of judgment (17:1-21). Who was the "cedar" (vs. 3) that had been planted? Who was the "eagle" (vs. 3) of destruction?

2. Who was the "shoot" (vs. 22) that the Lord would plant (Isaiah 11:1)?



3. On what "mountain" (vs. 22-23) would God reestablish His earthly kingdom?

4. How is vs. 23b fulfilled in Mark 4:32?

5. How is the authority of God expressed in the closing words of vs. 24?

6. The liturgical green of the Pentecost season symbolizes growth. Is the message of salvation growing in your heart? Is it growing in your community through the witness of your church?

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
2 Samuel 11:26-12:15

While none of us has murdered in order to get our own way, it is probable that all of us have been so obsessed by some wanted position, thing, or pleasure that we have been more than willing to sin to get it. Like David we even blind ourselves to our sin or pretend that God doesn't mind. We selfishly assume that He wants us to have whatever makes us happy. However, the end never justifies the means when the means is rebellion against God or harm to our fellows.

How did David end up in such a position? He did not run from the temptation. He watched with growing desire. One of the early church fathers wrote about a young Christian protégé who abhorred the bloody gladiatorial games that really were very popular among Romans in those days. However the young man agreed to attend the games with a friend but professed that he would not watch. He not only succumbed to watching the games, he found himself shouting for blood along with the crowd and returned to the games again and again, bringing more friends along. Like the young man, David did not realize that even someone close to God can become a victim of temptation when he or she is careless.

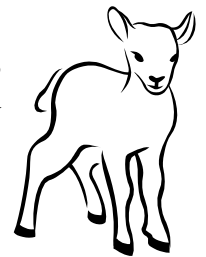


God's response to David's terrible sin of murder was not to strike him dead with lightning or condemn him to hell. God sent a prophet to David who had the courage to make the king realize the truth of his actions. Though there were tragic consequences to David's sin, there was also mercy from his God. We need to pray that God will bring prophets into our lives who will love us enough to show us the truth and help us to turn away from our sin. The Holy Spirit uses such special people to reach out to us with God's forgiveness and love. God granted David mercy and grace. He does the same for us as we sincerely repent of our daily rebellions against Him.

Learn more about God's mercy and love in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa West Education Committee

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
2 Samuel 11:26-12:15

1. Read the earlier verses of 2 Samuel 11 to review the background to our text. Who was Uriah's wife? Why had Uriah been killed?
2. The last sentence of vs. 27 is powerful. How did God feel about David's actions? How does God feel about our sins?
3. What's the point of Nathan's story? What's David's initial reaction to the story (12:5-6)?
4. How was David like the rich man in the story?
5. What words of confession do we hear from David? What words of absolution does Nathan offer? Where in our worship do we have a similar dialog?
6. Sin has consequences. What consequences did David and Bathsheba experience? Can you think of other examples where fully forgiven Christians may still experience earthly consequences for their sin?



Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

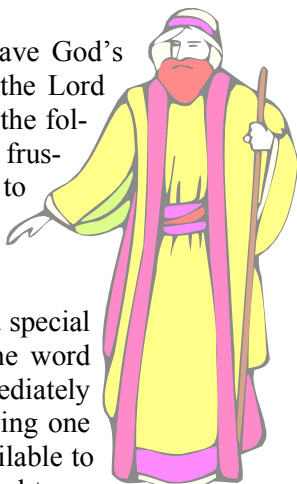
Exodus 19:2-8

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Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 19:2-8

1. Where do the children of Israel gather as they begin their journey to the Promised Land? (Exodus 19:1-2) Find the location on a Bible map of this area. What mountain (vs. 3) is part of the setting?



2. What word picture describes God's care in vs. 4? What does it mean to be carried on "eagles' wings"?
3. Covenant language usually includes "if...then" statements. (See v. 5) What is the "if" requirement for Israel? What is the "then" response of God? Use a Bible reference to find other Old Testament covenant expressions.
4. God's people were to be "a kingdom of _____ and a holy _____." (vs. 6) How do these words also describe us? (See 1 Peter 2:5,9-10)

For Family Reflection

5. God says "the whole earth is mine." (vs. 5) Is EVERYTHING in your home and your community God's? How do we care for what He has given us? How do we thank Him for all that He gives us?
6. God made a promise (covenant) with His special family. What promises has God made to you? What promises do we make to Him?

Is your Bible study group serving in God's world?

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Today's lesson sounds really great—life is tough, but there is a home awaiting us in heaven that will be glorious. Cool! Then we read verse 10 and we aren't so positive that Paul's message is all that great. In fact, many Christians like to forget that verse 10 is there. Life is easier that way. But, like all of Scripture, we need to look at verse 10 as it fits in with the rest of God's Word.

Paul shows no doubt in his message. Heaven is ours because of Christ. Peace with God is ours because of Christ. We will not meet Jesus only to be told that our spot has been taken by another, more worthy servant. So, what is Paul telling us?

The church of Corinth had some major problems. We have all read of the unrepentant sinner accepted by the congregation without question, their misguided practice of the Lord's Supper, their excessive pride in the gift of tongues. Like us, they were a band of saved sinners who often succumbed to temptation. Paul reminds us all in these verses that we are to be Christ-like in our lives.

When we face God, He will **not** greet us with punishment, but Paul seems to say that our actions will be recognized—but not in anger. Our sins are already paid for. Jesus did that on the cross. He guarantees our salvation. It cannot be accidentally lost. Comedian Bill Cosby tells a story of walking home late at night after a scary movie. He shuffled his feet along, careful not to lift one or the other off the pavement—out of fear that if a monster scared him to death, launching off to heaven on only one foot might cause him to miss the gate! With faith, we cannot miss the “gate” to our eternal life with Christ. We can, however, fail to serve our Father as we ought.

As God strengthens us in this life, and as we yearn for the time when we will all live with Him in peace and safety; as we dream of the time when peace will cover His creation, there is another dream to pursue, too. Jesus has a dream—actually a command—that we will share Him with the world. He wants all people to bow to Him—not forced to bow as they will be at the Last Day, but to bow to Him as we do, in love, respect, and gratitude.

Learn more about our heavenly rewards in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa West education committee

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

1. How is our body like a tent? What is life like for us while we are “camping” in our tents?
2. What does it mean to live by sight? (vs. 7) What does it mean to live by faith?
3. Is it important to try to please God in our daily life? Will our pleasing actions gain us salvation?

For Family Reflection

4. Do you have any deposits in the bank? How is the Holy Spirit like a deposit? (vs. 5)
5. What things are you confident about? Are you always confident? According to vss. 6 and 8 what can we be confident about?
6. How will your eternal home be different from your earthly home?

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Galatians 3:23-4:7

Paul describes a situation familiar to his readers. Roman minors, even the children of the wealthy or powerful, had to be under the guardianship of someone until coming of age. Paul compares this to the guardianship of the Law. The Law was placed by God to reveal what He demands and to reveal our inability to meet those demands. Though meeting the requirements of the Law is impossible for us, it instructs us. It teaches us to seek salvation from God, understanding that we are unable to please Him based on our own life's record. It reveals to us that only through the Son can we see the Father.

Paul also mentions the "elemental things." His Gentile readers could especially understand this. They had just come out of religious practices and philosophical beliefs that denied the true God and followed gods honoring the natural world and the world of man's imagination and intelligence. Paul tells them and us that there is something higher than man's mind or man's religion. The ultimate influence is the true God who wants to freely give His kingdom to anyone who will believe on His Son and be adopted as His own.

In Romans 8:15 Paul writes that being sons of God we, "*have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but [we] have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'*" He uses the term "Abba" for God in today's passage as well. It is a term expressing the extremely trusting and close relationship one has with a well-loved father. Using it to call God our "Pa Pa," or in today's more familiar term, "Daddy," is a very special picture of us and our God. God's adoption of us brings us into that kind of trusting love with our Father. Like an adopted Roman, we are full members of God's family with all of the love, blessings, and even expectations of our Father.

Knowing the Law means that we know our need. Knowing our Savior means that we are assured that all of our inadequacies and rebellion have been erased through Jesus' death on the cross. It means that we are free to serve Him, never fearing that the Law can cut us off from His love.

Learn more about our adoption in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Galatians 3:23-4:7

1. How do we become part of God's family? (vs. 26-27)
2. According to vs. 28 who's in God's family? Is there any rank or any level of family membership? Why not?
3. Read 4:4-5. These verses are often part of the Christmas season readings. Why are these verses appropriate for that season?

For family reflection

4. Have you ever been in a setting where you felt you didn't belong? What did that feel like? What does it mean to always belong in God's family?
5. Do you know someone who's been adopted? How are all of us adopted? What are our privileges as adopted members of God's family?
6. What does it mean to you to pray "Abba, Father"?

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 9:9-13

Matthew was a tax collector, a Jew working for Rome before Jesus called him to be one of the twelve. His life demonstrates two things to us. First, Jesus came to save all people. Second, Jesus changes hearts.

Tax collectors were true outcasts among the Jews. They were considered collaborators with hated Rome. Jews also, quite correctly, believed that most tax collectors were thieves. The collector's deal was this: collect as much as possible from the people, turn over a prescribed amount to Rome, and keep the rest for yourself. (Most tax collectors were quite wealthy.) One Roman wrote that he had once seen a monument dedicated to an honest tax collector, apparently quite a rarity.

So, here is Matthew, hated collaborator and first class crook. Even if he were better than most, he was none too compassionate or honest. Jesus, however, not only associates with him, but calls him as one of the twelve. Matthew, realizing his sin and God's grace, followed Jesus for the rest of his life.

In Matthew's life there was also the miracle of relationships that are possible only through Jesus' action. The other disciples should have hated Matthew. Simon the Zealot, for instance, should have been plotting his assassination since his sect believed that this was only just! But, instead we see men pulled together through their common focus—Jesus, their Lord.

Like Matthew, we receive forgiveness of sins through Christ, and like Matthew we can experience the miracle of relationships with people that we might not ordinarily even speak to. When we begin to see others as Jesus sees them, even with their sins and “the little irritations in their personalities,” our understanding of them begins to change. We see the reasons behind their actions, opinions, and words. Matthew did not become perfect, but he began the journey of becoming like Jesus (or “sanctification,” to use a doctrinal word). His companions did the same. We each do the same and as we do, we begin to see others as those also in need of the love that is ours in Christ. Jesus was the answer for Matthew, and He is the Answer for each of us.

Learn more about living in Christ in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 9:9-13

1. Review Matthew 4:18-22. Who were the disciples whom Jesus first called? What was their occupation? What was Jesus' invitation to them?
2. What was Matthew's occupation when Jesus called him? What about his previous career made Matthew an unlikely choice for a disciple of Jesus? (See the Concordia Self-study Bible note on Matthew 5:46.) What was Jesus' invitation to Matthew?
3. What kind of health is Jesus talking about in vs. 12? In what ways are we all “sick”? Where do we find healing?
4. On what other occasions did Jesus reach out to unlikely sinners? (Luke 18:10-14; Luke 19:1-9)

For Family Reflection

5. If Jesus were to come into your community, what types of people would He have dinner with? Would your family be invited? Would your family be comfortable with the company at the table?
6. Read or sing the hymn “Chief of Sinner Though I Be” (LSB #611). What's the Good News that Jesus has for Matthew and for you and for all sinners?

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 5:21-43

Jairus, synagogue official and father, came to Jesus to beg Him to heal his ill daughter. Before Jesus reached Jairus' home, the girl died. The men coming to tell Jairus the terrible news included the advice, "Why trouble the Teacher any more?"

It is as though they said to the desolate father, "Now that she is dead, God is no longer concerned for your plight." They believed that death meant that hope was gone. In response, Jesus said to Jairus, "Do not be afraid any longer." The translation could read, "Stop being afraid." Far from being hopeless, Jairus' life was about to be filled by the presence of God.

Illness, or death, can fill us with dread and fear. Sometimes we, as Christians, have a very difficult time with these feelings—"Why am I afraid when I know that I will spend eternity with Jesus?" We know that He is Lord, but something unknown is before us when we face serious illness or death. We know that it is time to give up control and place every part of our lives in the hands of Jesus. Trusting Him becomes truly unavoidable and something that we can no longer put off or pretend.

In raising Jairus' daughter, Jesus demonstrated that God is in control of all things. We have no need to fear even the finality of death. Jesus will raise us up, not to continue a sinful life on earth, but to begin an eternal life with Him in His kingdom. Like Jairus, we are assured that we no longer have to be afraid. We no longer have to be in control. Jesus is the One who has the power to take us where He wills. He is the One who loves us so much that we need not be concerned about where we are going. He is the loving Master and His will is our future. It's going to be great!

Get to know God through His Word this week!

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

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 5:21-43

1. What was the physical predicament of the woman who came to Jesus (vs. 25-34)? What was the physical miracle that took place? What was the spiritual miracle?
2. How is the faith of the woman evident? Can you think of other times where Jesus complimented the faith of His followers? Can you think of people of great faith whom you know?
3. What was Jairus' concern when he first came to Jesus? How did his situation change? How did Jesus respond to Jairus' needs?
4. Was the child dead? Why did Jesus say that she was asleep? In what sense is the death of a Christian also a sleep? When will we wake up? Where will we wake up?

For Family Reflection

5. Can you identify with Jairus or the woman? Are there times that you wish you could have gone to Jesus when you were ill, when a child was sick, or when a loved one had died? Can you go to Jesus? What power and promises does He bring to you?
6. What do Jesus' words "Don't be afraid; just believe" mean to you? What do we believe in?

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 8:26-39

Demon possession has become quite a topic for the movie crowd. We like to experience the terror of what is considered the myth of a spiritual war between good and evil. After all, these days no one is sure how to define either. As to our lesson this week, some insist that Jesus did not cast out demons, but healed epilepsy. However, Matthew (in chapter 14) describes a boy as an “epileptic.” Matthew also describes instances when Jesus cast out “demons.” Clearly there was a difference between the two in the minds of many of Jesus’ contemporaries.

I have visited with an LCMS missionary who has witnessed victims clearly demon-possessed. He described the supernatural events that had no other explanation. Add to that the witness of Jesus Himself, and the account of His temptation by a very real Satan, and you have a pretty clear idea that there is a spiritual world that vies for control of mankind.

Having said that, what does the incident of the man of Gerasenes say to us? First, the demon recognizes Jesus as the Son of God. The gospels tell us that this happened frequently. Second, the demon had to obey Jesus, even begging Him to send the “legion” into a herd of swine. Third, who but God could control demons? This was a great witness for the Jews.

Jesus’ command to the demons to leave the “demoniac,” had instant results. Jesus’ power over evil was so great that the community feared Jesus and asked Him to leave.

While the Bible’s description of demon possession and the movies’ fictionalizing of it may be frightening, Christians have nothing to fear. Demons cannot possess a believer. They may tempt us, but they cannot control or destroy us. Jesus said in John 10:28, “I give eternal life to them [that’s us], and ... no one will snatch them out of My hand.” Contrary to the claims of the movies, the reality is that Jesus overcomes all evil.

Get to know God through His Word this week!

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

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 8:26-39

1. We have a “before and after” story. Describe the man’s appearance and life while he was under the influence of demons? What do we learn about the demons?
2. Describe the man’s appearance and life after Jesus had rescued him from his possession? What do we learn about Jesus?
3. Why would the demon seemingly treat Jesus with respect (vs. 28)?
4. What is Jesus’ direction to the man who wanted to travel with Jesus (vs. 38-39)? What’s the application for our own primary place of witness?

For Family Reflection

5. Are Satan and his “army” real? Do we need to be afraid of demons? (Read stanza three of “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” LSB #656)
6. The rescued man tells the city what Jesus had done for him. What has Jesus done for you? Who can you tell?