

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Text: Job 7:1-7

There is an old saying, “You have the patience of Job,” but Job doesn’t sound very patient in this passage. Here he sounds tired, discouraged, and hopeless. Many of God’s people throughout the Bible experienced discouragement: Elijah, Jeremiah, Hagar, Abraham, Sarah, Paul, and Peter, to name a few. We also experience times of discouragement, frustration, depression, and hopelessness. Job had lost everything and then found that his “friends” believed that he must have deserved his troubles due to some shortcoming of his own. It must have been a lonely time for him. As Christians we sometimes feel very alone because there are so few people in our lives who will point us to our loving Father. In fact, our world’s rebellion against God is often part of our discouragement. What can the answer be to those days of wondering if things could get much worse than they already are?

In the story of Job, he *is* finally restored by God. He makes a statement of confidence in Chapter 19:25, “I know that my Redeemer lives...Whom I myself shall behold...” Job’s sorrows were real. Ours are real too, even when they originate simply in the stress of everyday living. Notice that Job didn’t say, “I *feel* like everything is going to work out just fine.” Rather he said that he *knew* that God lived! One commentator said that in 19:27 the words “How my heart yearns” could be translated “I’m overwhelmed at the thought.” Job had to see past his feelings by depending upon the knowledge that God was his all-powerful Protector.



It is in God’s Word that we find the Light of the world. Here we see Jesus and are assured of His loving mercy and kindness. Here we find that He offers us peace in the face of our feelings of frustration and discouragement. Here we learn that it’s inevitable that we will not always *feel* great, but that we can always *know* that our Redeemer lives!

Try out a Bible study this week with friends!

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee



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Text: Job 7:1-7

1. Was Job’s lament in these passages due to real or imaginary circumstances? Review Job chapters 1 and 2 to rediscover Job’s situation.



2. Paraphrase Job’s feelings in your own words. How does vs. 7 express the depth of Job’s despair?

3. Does Job speak for the human condition? Does Job speak for your situation? How?
4. Job looks at his diseased skin (vs. 5). What hopes beyond diseased and decaying skin does Job express in chapter 19, vs 25-27?
5. We are in the Epiphany season, the season of Light. What light did the promise of a Messiah bring to Job? What light does the presence of Jesus bring to our times of despair and darkness?

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Isaiah 6:1-13

Isaiah found himself in the presence of God in the throne room of Heaven. He witnessed the majesty of God. At a time when a king's power was shown by the length of his train, God's royal cloak filled the room. The seraphim covered their faces in His presence.

Isaiah's reaction was one of realization. In the presence of the most holy One, he could only feel his sinful condition and that of his nation. A burning coal from the altar of the Lord cleansed Isaiah. Renewed and clean, Isaiah heard God say that He was seeking someone to carry His message. In his exaltation as a creature newly freed from his sin, Isaiah yelled out, "Here am I, send me!" Isn't that a great picture of salvation? In our sinfulness we can only fear God, but He sets us free, not to continue on our way as we were, but as new creatures ready to serve Him in our world.

God confronted His people with their sin through Isaiah. Sometimes we are tempted to point our fingers and yell at the world about its sin. However, Isaiah's most crushing pronouncements were to believers who had failed their God, and even these were given the hope of restoration.

In the early years of the Church, a plague swept through Alexandria, Egypt. In those days the plague (probably Bubonic) terrorized people to the point that they fled from the city and from family members who became ill. Instead of shouting condemnation on the unbelieving populace, Christians willingly remained in the city to care for the sick and dying. That was their message to the unbelieving masses of Alexandria.

As each of us answers God's call with the words, "Here am I! Send me!" may we eagerly seek the true message that God has for us to deliver. How will God have us persuade the unbeliever to see Jesus in his life? The ways will be varied, but by seeking the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, we can serve our Lord as the Isaiahs of our time.



We learn how to witness to our foes through the study of God's Word!

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Isaiah 6:1-13

1. Imagine yourself to be a witness of Isaiah's vision. What unusual sights do you see? What sounds do you hear? In what other ways are the senses stimulated?
2. What was Isaiah's first reaction to his vision (vs. 5)? What is our response to God's being and God's presence?
3. With what act of grace (vs. 6-7) did God reassure Isaiah?
4. How does God also say to us "Your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for?" Does God also give us touches of assurance?
5. What is Isaiah's response to everything God has done for him (vs. 8)? Read the first verse of "Hark the Voice of Jesus Calling" (LW #318). What response does the hymn writer encourage in verse 1?
6. What question does Isaiah ask in verse 11? In this Epiphany season God continues to ask us to "go" with the Gospel. "How long" are we to be His lights to the world?

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Paul says that he was “compelled” to preach the gospel. Does this mean that he was obligated to preach Christ? Did Christ have him in a spot that he could not escape? Did Jesus threaten him with condemnation if he did not obey?

The world generally looks at “compulsion” in a negative sense. We hear of “obsessive-compulsive” disorder or about being compelled to pay blackmail in return for silence. How about the person compelled into sin by insatiable desires? Paul would laugh if someone tried to apply negative definitions to his words.

Paul was compelled by his love for Christ. He preached the gospel because he knew that this is what Jesus wanted him to do. He did it because it was the most important thing in his life. While most of us look forward to the time when we can retire from our jobs, Paul never thought of retirement because preaching the gospel was his life. He was like Jeremiah who said that the word of God burned in his stomach until he shared it.

Though born a Roman citizen with greater personal rights than almost anyone in his time, Paul valued his slavery to Christ higher than any so-called freedom that the world could offer. How about us? We have even greater freedom than Paul had. Do we value it?

We are free to be slaves to Christ. That concept is feared in our culture, and some seem to be unable to accept that it is possible to be free and a slave. The difference is in the Master. Who do we serve? Consciously serving sin is out of the question and serving the self has proven to be filled with pitfalls and dangers. Why not join Paul in slavery to the Master who truly has our welfare in mind and has the power to protect us from snares and dangers?

We can also follow in Paul’s steps as purveyors of the gospel. We don’t have to become pastors or foreign missionaries to do so. God has a ministry that he wants us to get excited about; that He wants us to know His love so intensely and so intimately that we feel compelled to share that love. That ministry will be a little different for each of us, but it will be exciting and meaningful, and it will make a difference in our world.

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

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

1. In what sense was Paul free? In what sense was Paul a slave?
2. In what sense was Paul “compelled to preach” (vs. 16)? What was Paul’s motivation for his preaching (vs. 23)?
3. Paul becomes “like a Jew” (vs. 20), “under the law” (vs. 20), “weak” (vs. 22). Was Paul fickle? What was the motivation for his flexibility? On what issues would Paul never be flexible?

For Family Reflection

4. Today we may hear people say “I have my rights!” What do you think the Apostle Paul would say to that claim?
5. When is it “okay” to adjust to others’ needs and situations for the sake of the Gospel? Why shouldn’t we compromise the message of the Gospel?
6. Paul was “compelled to preach.” What is God “compelling” you to do for Him?

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Corinthians 14:12b-20

The Corinthians were “American” in many ways. Their city was the urban ideal—lots of shopping and entertainment, filled with world travelers, and a financial and trade center. Its residents were filled with a desire for fun, power, and reputation. The church in Corinth consisted of people who needed little but wanted much, just like residents in any wealthy community. This was part of the reason that Paul had to keep reminding them that bigger, louder, and richer is not always better. He was well aware that just the name “Corinthian” brought to many minds a stereotype of a drunken party hound, just as today the term “American” in many countries may raise a vision of someone who is rich and obnoxious.

So, it isn’t surprising that the Corinthian church members eagerly sought out spiritual gifts that they considered the most flashy and powerful. In doing that, they were seeking to make themselves more important and visible. It was a natural inclination for people used to having the “best” of everything. The gift of speaking in tongues, for instance, must have looked great to anyone wanting to prove what a special place they *obviously* had in God’s plan.

The problem in Corinth was not that members were involved in false gifts. Paul says that he also spoke and prayed in languages not his own. The problem was that they were misusing their gifts to build themselves up. In doing so the gift users had disrupted worship and even hindered unbelievers from hearing the gospel. (vs.23-25) Paul reminds us that we can misuse God’s gifts if we do not pray for, and depend on, the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

What is your spiritual gift? Is it teaching, or encouraging, or caring, or giving, or intercession through prayer, or wisdom? Is God calling you to be a pastor, an elder, a teacher, a janitor, a gardener? Maybe your gift is to help others see their own gifts. God gives each of us wonderful abilities and insights. One person or one gift is not more valuable to Him than another. God challenges us to use our gifts, listen to His Spirit, and to be servants of one another. May Christ be glorified through every gift!

Learn more about using your spiritual gifts in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

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Corinthians 14:12b-20

1. Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-25. What was the issue that Paul was addressing in this church? Why had this become an issue?
2. According to vs. 12b what was to be the blessing of the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues (and all other gifts as well)?
3. Did Paul have the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues (vs. 18)? What was his perspective on this gift in his life?

For Family Reflection

4. Some places in Scripture we are encouraged to be like children (Matthew 18:3-4) and in other places (1 Corinthians 14:20) we are encouraged not to be like children. How do we discern the difference?
5. How do we sometimes “tear down” the church by our words or actions? How can we “build up” (vs. 12) the church?
6. This discussion on the gift of tongues is in a context of Paul’s discussion on worship (see 1 Corinthians 14:26-40). Why is worship such an important activity in the church? Why is it important that we worship in Christ-glorifying and God-pleasing ways? What do you appreciate about worship in your church?

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Mark 1:29-39

Jesus had shown His authority over demons in the synagogue of Capernaum. He continued to show His authority over all things by healing Peter's mother-in-law and others. Upon hearing about these great miracles, large crowds began to follow Him. His life was filled with long days and hard work. Mark says that "in the early morning, while it was still dark..." Jesus went out alone to pray. He made room in His life for what we often think of as "quiet time." However, we rarely experience quiet times ourselves.

Note that Jesus wanted to be alone in order to share time with His Father. Have you ever needed to be alone with God? Are there times when you are tired, perhaps over-committed, or just too busy, but you feel that it just isn't right for you to take time out to be alone with God? Would you feel guilty for taking time out for your own needs?

Jesus is the only person (remember that He was True Man as well as True God) to ever live a perfect life, yet He needed time alone with His Father. His divinity did not lessen that need. His disciples needed Him, as did the crowds who hungered to hear Him, but there were times when He declined to be helping them because He needed to be alone and with God.

If Jesus took time to rest and to be with His Father, how much more do we need to take time to be in God's presence—in His word and in prayer? Our days are hectic, and loved ones and not-so-loved ones demand our time. But, to deny ourselves time with God is not unselfish, it is unwise. We are His children. He is our Strength, our Redeemer, and our Peace. He enables us to serve others. Without time with Him, we will soon be of little use or joy to anyone.

Ask God for time to be with Him. Pursue that time. Prioritize that time. Schedule that time. Be with your Father.

Join a regular Bible study—it will strengthen your life!

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

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Mark 1:29-39

1. What insights about Peter and his family do we get from this text? What disciples (Jesus' traveling partners in these stories) did Jesus especially consider as His "family"?
2. The disciples observe, "Everyone is looking for you" (vs. 37) What were people looking for from Jesus? What are people looking for from Jesus today?
3. What did the demons (vs. 34) know about Jesus? Could their knowledge save them?
4. What do we learn about Jesus' prayer life from vs. 35? What other times in Jesus' life do we find Him in prayer?

For Family Reflection

5. What times and places for prayer do you set aside? What distracts you from prayer time? What assists you in making prayer a priority?
6. Jesus went to nearby villages to preach and teach (vs. 38). The Epiphany season is a season of sharing the Good News of Jesus with those close to us and those far away. To whom is Jesus sending you?

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Luke 5:1-11

How could a fisherman be a great preacher? How could a crooked tax collector be a disciple of Christ? How could Simon the Zealot associate with a Roman collaborator (the tax collector) whom he was sworn to kill? Finally, how could this motley crew of twelve (you might call them the first “congregation”) move out from their homes and spread the Gospel of Christ to millions of people? The answer to all of these questions is, of course, that the Holy Spirit moved and enabled them.

These men did not see themselves as great orators or leaders or pastors or missionaries. Peter’s words to Jesus, asking Him to depart from the fisherman because of Peter’s sinfulness was much like Isaiah’s response when he found himself in the presence of God, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips...” Yet God sent Isaiah out as one of the great prophets of the Old Testament.

Jesus was about to send Peter on a lifelong journey that the fisherman never would have chosen for himself. Isaiah and Peter had something marvelous in common--their awe of God and the reality of His grace in their lives. Their response to God’s call was to obey, even though they found it hard to believe that He could possibly choose them to be His tools in the world.

The Holy Spirit brings us to Christ and continues to be in the enabling and sending business. He sends us to worship and He sends us into the Word. He does that so that He can send us into the world. We are the fishermen, tax collectors, household managers, and engineers of today, called and enabled to tell our world the Good News.

Have you added Bible Study to your weekly schedule?

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

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Luke 5:1-11

1. In what role do we find Jesus in the opening verses of chapter 5 (vs. 1-3)? What might have been the subject matter of His teaching?
2. What was unusual about Jesus’ request to begin fishing? What was the result of the fishing adventure?
3. With what title does Simon address Jesus in vs. 5? Using the self-study Bible or another reference find about more about this title. Who uses it? Why is it significant?
4. Why does Peter respond with a confession?

For Family Reflection

5. What does it mean to “be catching men”? Where does God want you to go “fishing”?
6. In what ways were the fishermen obedient to Jesus (vs. 5)? In what ways is God asking you to obey His words? What promises does Jesus make to you?