

St. Mary Magdalene—July 22

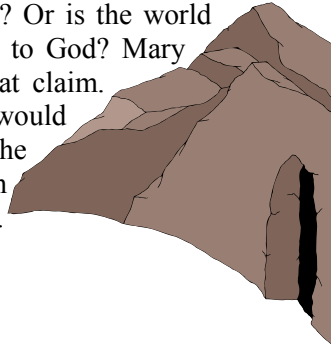
John 20:1-2; 11-18

Mary Magdalene had at one time in her life been possessed by seven demons. Jesus drove them out of her. She, of all of the followers of Jesus, seems to have been most devastated by His death. Why was His death so crushing to this woman?

It is hard for us to imagine the agony that Mary had endured when she was possessed by demons. We can only guess what it must have been like to have evil itself dictating her thoughts and actions. Jesus freed her from the power of Satan in a startling, visual way. Once Jesus asked Peter if he and the other disciples would ever leave Him. Peter replied, “Lord, where would we go?” At the tomb on that early morning, Mary must have felt utterly hopeless, wondering, “Where will I go?” In contrast, how overwhelming her joy must have been when she came to understand that Jesus was not dead, nor would He ever die again. He would be her Savior forever.

Most of the Christians in our churches today have become believers in far less dramatic ways than Mary. Many of us have grown so used to the idea of salvation that we actually seem to be bored with the whole Sunday morning worship thing. Some Christians don’t seem to realize the unbelievable grace that we have received through our Savior. We may even relegate Jesus and our relationship with Him to a second, third, or even fourth place in our daily agenda. We often do not realize that without Christ, our doom would be as tragic and hopeless as Mary’s existence with the demons.

Is our Gospel good enough to share? Or is the world right—that there are thousands of paths to God? Mary Magdalene would shout her reply to that claim. Her witness to the world and to all of us would be that there is no one else in whom the “demon possessed” of our world can hope. There is only the resurrected Christ.



Learn more about Mary’s hope in Christ.

Join a Bible study at your church.

A message from your District Education Committee.

St. Mary Magdalene

John 20:1-2; 11-18

1. Who is Mary Magdalene? (See also Luke 8:1-3; John 19:25)



2. Identify with Mary as she is at the tomb. What feelings and fears does she bring with her? Why wasn’t the empty tomb an immediate source of good news? Why is she crying?

3. What simple word brings Mary hope and joy? (vs. 16)
Does Jesus call us by name?

4. What is Mary’s response to the risen Savior? (vs. 18)

5. Jesus sees and hears our tears. (Rev. 21:4) What fears and sadness do you bring to Jesus today?

6. Reflect on the Propers for this day of “St. Mary Magdalene.” (LW, p. 111) Why is it fitting for us to remember Mary and others who faithfully followed Jesus? What can we learn from Mary Magdalene?

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Zechariah 9:9-12

A king who is “humble” and armaments that will be eliminated; a king who “will speak peace,” yet whose “dominion will be from sea to sea;” inconceivable. The people of God at the time of Zechariah had been through centuries of warfare and were back only a few years from an exile in Babylon. You could say that *who* they were as a people was partially shaped by their experiences of war. When Jesus came, fulfilling the prophecy in these verses, He didn’t fit their expectation. A people still hungry for vengeance and political restoration rejected Him and the peace that He offered—peace with God and peace within themselves.



So far in our history, the peace that Jesus brings to us is one of knowing Him and His loving power that cares for us in all situations. But even that personal peace we sometimes demand on our own terms. Jesus comes to us and says, “My peace I give to you; not as the world...” But we reject Jesus’ peace in favor of searching for our own means of how we will achieve our own definition of peace. Sometimes we demand “war”—we want inner peace through money, or power, or domination of our family members or fellow workers. But our methods just don’t work. If we finally give up and give in to Jesus, He says that whatever our frustration, concern, or desire, He will meet the need that has caused the turmoil. He will do it in His own way, not in ours.

Someday, when Jesus returns, Zechariah’s prophecy will be completely (spiritually and materially) fulfilled for all of the nations of the world. Evil will be destroyed and there will literally be no more war, no more armies, and our King will still be gentle yet all-powerful. Today, He offers us His peace, a peace that is beyond reason. His authority is already complete. He can care for us and complete our joy in Him. But it is so hard to let go. It is so hard to “trust”, even in our Savior—but He can enable us to do it! He longs for us to ask.

Read Luke 12:22-34 for more about Jesus’ care for us.

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Zechariah 9:9-12

1. Who is Zechariah? What is the context of his message? (See the book’s introduction in the Concordia Self-study Bible or another reference.)
2. The word “oracle” introduces chapter 9. What is an oracle?
3. What would be the plight of earthly kings and kingdoms? (9:1-8)
4. In what ways would Zion’s King be different from earthly kings?
5. Who is the King prophesied in this lesson? (See Matthew 21:1-11)
6. What would be the message and mission of the Messiah (vs.10)? How is that message needed in our world today? How is that message needed in your life?



Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 2:1-5

Ezekiel began his ministry in approximately 590 B.C. Judah's king had been exiled from Jerusalem to victorious Babylon to prevent rebellion in the subdued Israeli capital. For six years, during which the leaders of Jerusalem tried to manipulate their way out of Babylon's clutches through rebellion and political alliances with other subjugated nations, Babylon totally destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

God spoke to Ezekiel in a vision and appointed him to be a prophet to a "rebellious," "obstinate," and "stubborn" people. God's reference to him as "son of man" must have made Ezekiel wonder why God would choose him for such a task. Though a young priest of the Lord, he was, after all, just a man. It seemed that the daunting task at hand could only be accomplished by God Himself. How could he not be afraid living among "thorns," "briars," and "scorpions"? (vs.6) How could he speak God's message to them "whether they listen or fail to listen"? Yet, Ezekiel fulfilled his calling from God. He prophesied for at least 22 years.

Have you ever thought of yourself as an Ezekiel? We are not priests or prophets in the sense that Ezekiel was, but we are called to proclaim God's Word to everyone. God told Ezekiel that his success did not depend on whether or not his words were accepted, and the same is true for us. We are to proclaim the Word in love, not counting the number of those who believe and not retreating because of ridicule or unbelief.

God commanded Ezekiel to proclaim judgment and restoration to a stubborn and obstinate people. We are called to proclaim the Word to an unbelieving world and to a believing Church in need of encouragement.

What is the Word? It is Jesus, our Savior and Lord. How do we proclaim Him? Through every word and action of our daily lives. God calls us, like Ezekiel, to share Him in every way that we can.

But, as God said of Ezekiel, we are just men (and women and children). He and we cannot set out to do this on our own. Verse 2 says that the Spirit picked up Ezekiel and spoke to him. The Holy Spirit lives within us. He calls us to the task and He enables us to be His prophets in our world.



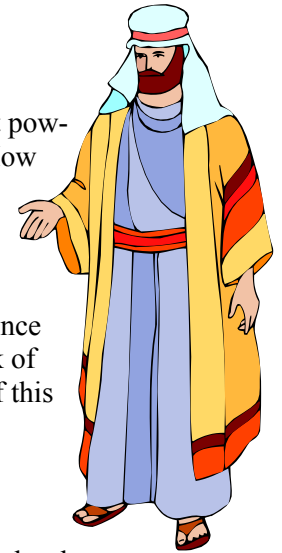
Bible study teaches us how to show the Word to our world.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 2:1-5

1. Who is the "son of man?" (vs. 2) Check the Concordia Self-study Bible note or another commentary for the significance of this title in the book of Ezekiel.
2. According to vs. 2 who would be a significant power and influence in the prophet's ministry? How would this be helpful to Ezekiel?
3. What adjectives are used to describe the audience to which Ezekiel is being sent? Can you think of any Old Testament stories that are evidence of this attitude?
4. How would the Israelites know "that a prophet has been among them?" (vs. 5)
5. The prophets of the Old Testament were to prepare the way for which greater Prophet? (Luke 1:76; Luke 7:16) What would be the message of The Prophet?
6. What other dramatic calls to divine service are shared in Scripture (Isaiah 6:18; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Jonah 1:1; Acts 9:1-16; others)?



Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 66:10-14

Part of Isaiah's ministry was to warn God's nation of the disaster coming because of her rebellion. God would not tolerate the cruelty, greed, and false worship that ruled His people. His tool of destruction would be Babylon. According to our perception of justice, that should be the end of the story. The rebels would be destroyed and God would move on. However, God does not give up!

The destruction of Jerusalem was a tool of deliverance! Punishment was a means by which to drive God's people back into His arms. Without a "reality check," the people would have continued to pursue false gods, greed, alliance with evil nations, and cruelty to one another, but God would not give them over to that fate.

In today's passage Isaiah announces a message of hope to the people. Though destruction is in their path, there is something glorious beyond their immediate situation. By God's love and power they will be restored to a far better time than they have ever known. The city will be filled with bounty and peace. Isaiah appears to be speaking of a time in the future when peace will reign everywhere and "the hand of the LORD will be made known to His servants." (vs.14) Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus.

Jesus allows us to see the hand of the Lord; to see God Himself. Jesus brought the salvation that allows us to look forward to the time when God's glory will shine not only in His holy city, but throughout His world. Jesus showed us the God who would not let us be eternally lost; the God whose love would not let us go, no matter what the cost. The punishment for our sin and rebellion is not upon our heads, but was upon Jesus on the cross. He carries us and the believers of Isaiah's time into a future of unimaginable goodness and bounty.

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

A message from your Iowa West Education Committee.

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 66:10-14

1. The hope (Gospel) of this text can only be appreciated with an understanding of God's judgment (law). Where do we read of judgment in this text? (Also read vs. 4 and 6 of this chapter.)

2. How is God like a caring and comforting mother? (v. 13)

3. What does it mean to have peace like a river? (vs. 12) Are there times when rivers are not peaceful?

4. What does it mean to "flourish like grass"? (vs. 14) How does our God give us the moisture and the nutrients so that we can flourish in Him?

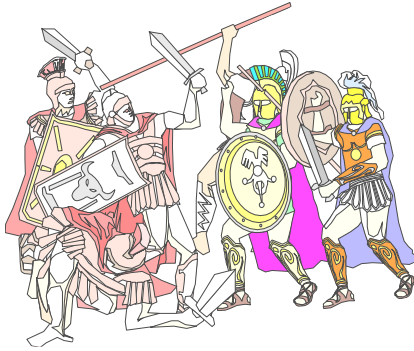
5. Israel was to "delight in her overflowing abundance" (vs. 11). In what ways has God given you an abundant life? How do you show your delight in Him with others?

6. The lesson is a call to rejoice. Philippians 4:4 inspires us to "rejoice in the Lord always." What special joys in the Lord do you have to share? How do others see your joy?

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

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Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

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3. What would be the plight of earthly kings and kingdoms? (9:1-8)

4. In what ways would Zion’s King be different from earthly kings?



For Family Reflection

5. Who is the King prophesied in this lesson? (See Matthew 21:1-11)
In what ways do we celebrate Jesus as our King?
6. What would be the message and mission of the Messiah (vs.10)?
How is that message needed in our world today? How is that message needed in your life? With whom can you share the Savior?

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

St. Paul was a man of strong conviction and character. He was seen as a traitor to the Jewish faith by his former friends and family members who remained faithful to Judaism. In the Christian churches that he served and taught there were those who tried to lessen his authority and his reputation by spreading false rumors about his teaching and his practices. Jewish Christians who believed that only Jews could come to salvation fought his mission to bring salvation to the Gentiles. All in all, Paul found himself with quite a collection of notes and letters warning him, condemning him, and congratulating him. How he handled this mixture, which sounds very much like a contemporary dilemma, provides a wonderful example for us to follow.

First, Paul understood that God could use some of the frustrations and irritations of his life to help Paul grow in his walk with Christ. Paul says in verse 7 that he had a “thorn” that he asked God to remove three times, but God would not. Many people would begin to doubt that God cared or even existed, because their prayers were not answered quickly and “correctly.” However, instead of demanding quicker action from God, Paul chose to listen to the quiet voice of God telling him that it was in this affliction, seen by most as a weakness, that Paul could be reminded of his need to depend upon Christ’s strength.

Second, Paul realized that if his own intelligence and reputation were interfering with the ability of people to hear the gospel message, then the emphasis on Paul had to diminish so that the gospel could take center stage. Not many of us are as wise. Often, when misunderstood, we defend ourselves loudly to make sure that others know how capable we are. We belligerently assure them of our wisdom and good works. We do this because we believe that it is only if our opinion and person are the center of attention that the job (whatever it may be) can be accomplished.

Paul’s insight in these matters was not his own—it was given to him by God. That is good news for us, because it means that even we can become like him with God’s help.

Learn more about God’s wisdom mercy toward us in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

1. What do we know about Paul’s “thorn in my flesh” (vs. 7)? What don’t we know?
2. What was Paul’s wish regarding this “thorn”? What was God’s response?
3. What does Paul mean when he says that he delights in his weaknesses or “when I am weak then I am strong”? (vs. 10) Doesn’t it seem strange to delight in a weakness?

For Family Reflection

4. Do you know someone who has a Paul-like response to illness, loss, financial struggles or other faith testing situations? Where do they find their strength?
5. What is God’s promise to you in vs. 9?
6. For six weeks we have had readings from 2 Corinthians. Quickly review the readings from this book (or skim the book). What favorite passages or sections do you note from 2 Corinthians?

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Colossians 1:1-14

Paul had heard of the faith of the Christians at Colossae. He had heard of their love for one another. He knew from others that the gospel had constantly been growing and bearing fruit in them since they had first heard it and understood God's grace.

Have you heard from another about a congregation's love for one another, that the gospel is changing them and their community more and more, that they are bearing fruit for God? Or, are we more likely to hear about another congregation's failure, frustration, or difficult pastoral search? Does it seem that bad news absorbs our thoughts and conversation? Why is it that the early churches seemed to impress the world more than we sometimes do? Why does it seem that early churches were more likely than our own to be known for very good things?

That isn't to say that Colossae somehow overcame all of its problems and always presented perfect, loving, Christian joy to everyone who entered the city. It didn't. Later in his letter, Paul implies that many problems, even doctrinal problems, were plaguing the church. No church in history has been without problems. However, something else overshadowed the problems in Paul's time. That something was the gospel and its power in people's lives.

Many of us were born in the church, grew up in the church, married there, and baptized our children at the same altar where we were confirmed. In that ongoing, protected life, we sometimes forget the glory and power of the gospel that has been entrusted to us. We forget that no matter what the problems facing us as individuals or congregations, God is in charge. He has instructed us to not let problems overtake our primary purpose.

Our primary purpose as God's people is not to point fingers at other churches, argue among ourselves, or keep ourselves out of or into politics. Our purpose is to tell others the gospel news; to love each other; to bring others into the kingdom of God by doing God's will in ministry. God will solve the problems—we are to be known by our faith, our actions, our love.

Learn more about living our faith in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Colossians 1:1-14

1. We begin a series of weekly readings from the book of Colossians. Using the Concordia Self-Study Bible or another reference explore the background of this book. Who wrote it? To whom was it written? Why was it written? What are major themes in the book?
2. How does Paul describe the Colossian Christians in vs. 2? Why are they worthy of such a significant title? For what does Paul compliment this church in vs. 4?
3. What was Paul's prayer for this church (vs. 9-12)? How is this prayer appropriate for churches today?

For Family Reflection

4. Who was Epaphras? What was his role in Colossae? How would he be a blessing in your church?
5. Paul compliments the church at Colossae. If he were writing to your church, what compliments might he offer?
6. Have you ever qualified for an event or for an award? What did you have to do to qualify? Why do you qualify to share in an eternal inheritance?

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 10:34-42

Are we Christians too “at peace” with the world? Sometimes we listen too well as the world continues its old, old message, “If you love me, you will agree with whatever I do.” Or, “If you tell me that I sin, you hate me.” How about a favorite, “The trouble with Christians is that they think they’re the only ones who are right with God.” (By the way, Jesus says that we are!)

Christians often think that if they are witnessing properly, no one will be angry. If their action or witness causes anger, they feel guilty of some unloving, offensive sin. Jesus’ words and experience remind us that these perceptions aren’t necessarily true.

Jesus says that the Gospel will cause turmoil even within families. Satan does not want to give up the unbelievers of the world. He plants extreme mechanisms of defense in anyone willing to accept them, and people who want to live by their own power are very willing to defend themselves against the Gospel. Jesus’ life also reminds us of this. He witnessed and served in perfect wisdom, perfect love—even perfect presentation skills. But, the religious leaders of His own people crucified Him.

This doesn’t mean that we will always be right. We are, after all, sinners! Sometimes that angry person is right—we may have been offensive! What a dilemma. How can we know? In this passage Jesus emphasizes service. In addition to being devoted to Him we are to “follow after” Him—we are to try to be like Him. We are to love others as we love ourselves, serve others, and show compassion as surely as we maintain honesty and truth. We are to even pray for our enemies.

Sounds impossible, and it would be, except that the Holy Spirit is always with us. He provides wisdom for our lips, love in our hearts, and a willingness to serve with our hands. He prepares the hearts of those with whom we share Jesus. He is the power; we are just His willing servants.

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

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 10:34-42

1. Jesus was prophesied to be the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). He also said, “Peace I leave with you” (John 14:27). His resurrection greeting to His disciples was “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). How then do we explain His words in verse 34? (See the explanation in the Concordia Self-study Bible notes.)
2. Does Jesus want us to love and honor fellow family members? How do we explain His words in verses 35-37?
3. What did it mean for Jesus to take up His cross? How are we blessed because Jesus carried His cross for us? What does it mean for us to carry our cross (vs. 38)?

For Family Reflection

4. Can we love one another in our family and still love Jesus? Whom do we love the most? How do we love others in a Christ-like way?
5. What are some ways that we can give “a cup of cold water” (vs. 42) to one another? Who might be some “little ones” (vs. 42) in our lives or our world who need that cup?
6. For the last three weeks we have reviewed Jesus’ words to His followers (Matthew chapter 10). How have these words been challenging to you? Where is Jesus inviting you to go as His witness? What promises does He have for you?

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 6:30-44

At the beginning of this passage, Jesus and the disciples are trying to withdraw for a time of renewal and rest, but the crowds discover them and thousands come for a glimpse of Jesus and the hope of hearing Him speak, or perhaps even seeing a miracle in their lives.

Jesus and His apostles were tired. We also get tired, and it is necessary for us to get away from all of the stress and hard work of life in general and even from our work as volunteers in the church and community. But, as with Jesus and the apostles, the time of rest isn't permanent—there is no retirement from our calling as God's agents in His world.

In the Old Testament, men like Moses, Elijah, and Jeremiah got so tired that they sat down and expressed this feeling to God—"I've had it. I'm done with this. I quit." Each time their frustration peaked, God did two things. First, He showed them compassion and understanding concerning their need. Second, He sent them back to work.

Today, we must set aside time to rest, just as Jesus needed to do. As we step back and stop trying so hard to do it all, we realize that Jesus has the strength and patience to comfort us in times of frustration. He has the power to enable us to get back to the ministry in which He has placed us, whether it is teaching, preaching, shoveling, sweeping, or praying. In today's passage, we find a proof of His ability to take care of all our stress and worry...

Has Jesus ever said to you, "Well, what do you think we should do about this?" What would you have said when Jesus told the apostles, "You feed them?" Somehow our imaginations could never envision the possibility. The apostles couldn't "think outside the box" to use a modern phrase. They couldn't imagine that Jesus could feed 5,000 "men" plus all of the women and children present, and have leftovers.

As we struggle through today's problems, worries, and frustrations, Jesus is always there, not to pat us on the back, but to provide real answers. He has promised that our needs will be met. Rest in Him, trust Him, rely on Him, seek Him in prayer, and act on His promises.

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

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

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 6:30-44

1. Why would Jesus seek some privacy for Himself and His disciples (vs. 31-32)?
2. What do we learn about Jesus in vs. 34? Was Jesus concerned only about the physical and emotional needs of the crowd?
3. Compare Mark's account of this miracle with that of the other Gospel writers. (Matthew 14:13-21; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:5-13). What differences do we see in the accounts? Why do you think this miracle is mentioned in all four Gospels?
4. What was so amazing about collecting twelve baskets of leftovers?

For Family Reflection

5. What example does Jesus provide us in 41? Is it your family custom to offer a prayer of thanksgiving at every meal?
6. What was the disciples' solution to a hungry crowd? Do we sometimes limit Jesus' presence and power? What happens when we turn our predicaments over to Jesus?

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 10:25-37

This “scribe” or “lawyer” approached Jesus to test what He would say to certain questions. Probably a Pharisee, he hoped to prove that Jesus was a false messiah. He came filled with the hope of success. But, the scene didn’t play out as planned. Instead of answering the lawyer’s presumptive words, Jesus asked him a question.

After reciting the answer that he assumed Jesus wanted to hear, the lawyer asked Him another question: “Who is my neighbor?”

Don’t we ask the same question and for the same reason? The Bible says that the lawyer wanted to justify himself. We may not believe that we can justify ourselves to God, but we do like to think that we have done all that is expected when it comes to loving our neighbors. Like the lawyer, we try to limit the definition of “neighbor.” It’s not that we don’t care about others, but we have busy lives and can’t be expected to dedicate too much time to people that we really don’t know all that well.

At the end of the parable of the good Samaritan, the lawyer was forced by his own honesty, and the power of Jesus’ teaching, to admit that one is a neighbor if we come in contact with him or her; if they need our help or our ear to listen. This is true even for those we don’t like or respect. The victim in the parable was clearly a stranger to the people who passed him by and to the Samaritan who helped him.

This was a hard lesson for the Jewish lawyer. Samaritans were despised by the Jews. A good Jew would lengthen his journey by walking around Samaria in order to avoid touching its soil. Yet this Samaritan honored God more than the Jewish priests who ignored the victim.

The lawyer’s mind must have reeled. The Jewish victim would have hated his helper. Having been robbed, he could not even pay back his benefactor. He was just plain stupid for being alone on the robber-infested road to Jericho. It was his own fault he’d been hurt. Yet, the Samaritan showed “compassion” to this inept Jew.

Luke doesn’t share the outcome of this encounter. How did it end? How will our stories end? Can we learn from Jesus to show compassion and mercy to all that we meet?

Do you get together with friends for a regular time of Bible study?

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

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 10:25-37

1. What question did the lawyer bring to Jesus? Did the lawyer have the right answer in his head? Did the lawyer have the right answer in his heart?
2. What was the response of the priest to the man in need? What was the response of the Levite? What was the response of the Samaritan?
3. Jesus says to the lawyer (and us) “You go, and do likewise.” What excuses might we have for not responding to those in need? Who forgives all our excuses?
4. Who is The “Good Samaritan” who made the sacrifice to take care of us when we were spiritually wounded? Were we Jesus’ enemies when He came to help us? Did He help us anyway?

For Family Reflection

5. Who are our neighbors? Are our neighbors just the people in our neighborhood? Can you think of a neighbor in need? How can you as a family assist them?
6. The Good Samaritan helps an enemy. Is it harder to help somebody that we may not like or that may be different from us? Can you think of someone in your school, community, or elsewhere that is hard to accept and help? Pray that God gives us loving and helping hearts.