

14th Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 13:22-30

Go down to a street corner some time and tell people that Jesus is the only way to God and to eternal life. Do you already know in your heart what would happen? Oh, there would be plenty of laughter, but the real tragedy would be the reason for the laughter. You would find that people are not as offended by your willingness to share your faith as they are by the idea that you could believe that your faith in Jesus Christ is the only true religion! They would wonder how you could be so narrow-minded as to not recognize that there are a myriad of other religions proposed to be equal to Christianity—Islam, Judaism, Paganism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Pantheism, Wicca, etc.



There are very few people left in our world who would profess to be true atheists. Even tried and true Humanists have a god—Human Potential! And even human potential is thought to be a very real way to godhood, if not to God.

At the final day, there will be millions of people like the unbelieving Jews to whom Jesus spoke, only these millions will be of all races and religions. Their unity will be in their refusal to recognize Jesus as *the* Way to know God. They will arrive at God's feet with great confidence, claiming to be religious, and they will be! Yet, God will say to them, "...I do not know where you are from; Depart from Me...."

What is our response to Jesus' revelation in these verses? Do we shake our heads and say, "There but for the grace of God...", or do we smugly, but quietly, mutter that unbelievers get what they deserve? What would Jesus want us to do in response to this news? Near the end of his gospel, John wrote of his words about Jesus that "these have been written that you may believe...and that believing you may have life..." (Jn.20:31). We too are empowered by the Spirit to share Jesus with our neighbors and friends through our love, our words, and our lives, so that they might never hear God say, "Depart from Me."

Try out a Bible study with your friends!

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

14th Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 13:22-30

1. What is the "narrow door" (vs. 24). See also Matthew 7:13-14. How do we enter through the narrow door?
2. What Good News is there in vs. 29?
3. Why will some be "thrown out" (vs. 28) or otherwise excluded from the kingdom of God? If "only a few people are going to be saved" (vs. 23) what will exclude others from salvation?
4. What is the meaning of vs. 30? (These words are also stated in Matthew 19:30.)
5. Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem (vs. 22). Why was this His ultimate destination?
6. Jesus' words are condemning and challenging. Why doesn't the message of judgment need to frighten us?



Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 6:2-8

“I am the Lord;” “I appeared;” “I also established;” “I have heard;” “I have remembered;” “I am the Lord;” “I will bring you;” “I will deliver;” “I will redeem;” “I will take you;” “I will be your God;” “I am the Lord;” “I will bring you;” “I will give;” “I am the Lord.”



What a deal! God’s people not only don’t have to provide their own salvation, they actually cannot do anything to achieve their own salvation. If they could, they certainly would not have spent over four hundred years in slavery to the Egyptians. If the loving God was to ever have His people free, He had to step in and do the job. It is a picture of our own salvation.

Paul said that we also were slaves, slaves to sin and evil. We did not have it within ourselves to overcome the power of Satan and his efforts to guarantee our separation from God. Only Jesus could rescue us. He came into the world which He had created in order to die in behalf of His beloved people. He overcame the evil pharaoh of the world, Satan. Jesus kicked down the gates of Hell to announce His victory. Because of His work, we have it easy, nothing to do but enjoy His grace. Right?

God was not finished with His people after they walked out of Egypt. He expected them to grow in their love for Him, in their witness to the nations, and in their walk of daily obedience to His will. The rest of the Old Testament is devoted to the story of that struggle between God and His children.

We are a new generation of believers—we are on this side of the cross! Does God require anything of His Christian people? In response to a tough message from the prophet Micah, God’s people said that they would be better believers by doing worship duties better—they would offer more sacrifices. Micah contradicted them, saying, “...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Such a simple demand from our loving God, but SO HARD! But He is not only our God and Savior, He is our Equipper, and He can help us grow up just a little every day.

Now is the best time to join a Bible study.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

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Exodus 6:2-8

1. How many times does the statement “I am the Lord” appear in these verses? What is the significance of that statement?



2. Twice in the text the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are noted. What significance would those references have for the Israelites?

3. What promise does God make to Moses and the Israelites in vs. 6-8?

4. Read Exodus 6:9. What was the response of the Israelites to Moses’ message?

5. The text notes that God “remembered.” Does God ever forget? How is it reassuring to you that God remembers?

6. The deliverance from Egypt foreshadowed an even greater deliverance. How has God delivered all us from oppression and slavery?

14th Sunday After Pentecost

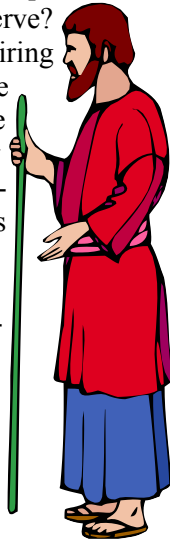
Joshua 24:1-2;14-18

Joshua proclaimed God's love and care to the people and then challenged them as to their future. Who would they serve? The answer was easy, especially right after the inspiring words of Joshua. "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!...We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God!" Peter once boldly professed to Jesus that he would follow the Lord anywhere, but he found that the reality of serving his Lord was more difficult than the profession.

Sunday mornings, in the comfort and fellowship of the pew (well, fellowship anyway), it's easy to proclaim God's love, and promise to serve Him alone. Like Israel, our problems begin when we get home from worship and begin to live out the week.

There are many gods that pull our attention away from our Lord. Our temptations are not gods of stone, but gods of a busy and challenging life. When our desires wander from serving God, we become like the Israelites. Serving God doesn't mean just going to church, or teaching Sunday school, or being a pastor. Serving God is living out our lives in this world while focused on Him. It means putting Him first. Everything else comes after God because we can trust that with Him at the top of our priority list He will provide the means and wisdom to deal with everything else. Money, work, family, hobbies, rest, and worship all work out when He is at the center. Israel lost track of what God wanted to be in their lives. They began to see Him as a God to please with sacrifices and to use to win battles. They forgot that He was the center of the universe and expected to be the center of their lives.

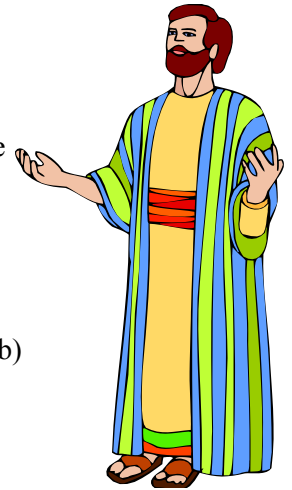
There isn't much difference between us and the Israelites. Every human being but One has failed to serve God without having sin botch everything up. Jesus has paid the price for our failure. Because of Him we can rise every morning and proclaim that we will serve only the Lord that day, knowing that we struggle within the arms of Christ who will keep us close to Him even when we fail.



14th Sunday After Pentecost

Joshua 24:1-2;14-18

1. Joshua's time of leadership is about to end. Skim through the book of Joshua. Where had he led the people of Israel? What obstacles had he faced? What victories had he enjoyed?
2. What sin had (and would) most challenge the people? (vs. 14-15)
3. What commitment does Joshua make? (vs. 15b)
4. What was the response of Israel to Joshua's challenge? What motivated their response? (vs. 17-18)
5. From what you know of subsequent Old Testament stories, did Israel keep their promise to be faithful to their God? In what ways are we like them?
6. Are Joshua's words (15b) found in your home? Are they lived in your home?



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A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 66:18-23

Today's lesson follows a proclamation from God that the wicked will one day be judged and destroyed. All of God's people believed that, but He also proclaimed something that Isaiah's listeners didn't really understand. Likewise the Jews of Jesus' time still did not understand God's message, but we especially rejoice in His words. God would save the Gentiles, but they would not be welcomed by the Israel of Isaiah's time. This was true even though God had told Abraham that his offspring would bless the nations surrounding them. God referred first of all to the fact that the Messiah would be a descendant of Abraham and save all peoples, but He also wanted the witness of His nation to draw unbelievers to Himself. God's people in the Old Testament never accepted that command, and many centuries later when Jesus proclaimed the truth of God's love for all peoples, it was still rejected. Even the apostle Peter had to experience visions from God before finally understanding that God loved Gentiles!

Today we celebrate this good news in a couple of different ways. First we celebrate that God chose to include us in His kingdom. As St. Paul wrote, He has grafted us onto the "vine" of believers; He has "adopted" us as His own children. We also celebrate the joy of knowing that St. Paul and other proclaimers believed in Jesus and became His witnesses to the Gentiles who came to faith in Christ. There is a third aspect to our joy in this time in which we live—we can look forward to the completed and perfected vision which God described through the prophet. There will come a time when all Christians, whether Jew, Gentile, black, white, Hispanic, or Asian will see God's glory without distortion. We will worship Him together without animosity toward one another; and will dwell in a new heaven and a new earth with all believers of all time. What a day that will be!

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

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 66:18-23

1. When will we fully see God's glory? Who will see His glory? What do you think it will be like to experience God's glory?
2. In the old covenant only the Levites served as priests. How will this role be expanded (vs. 21)? See also I Peter 2:5, 9. How are you a priest?
3. How is vs. 22 fulfilled in Revelation 21:1-2? What does it mean to have a "new" heaven and earth?
4. Vs. 20 pictures an offering procession. Is the sharing of our offerings a significant part of our worship? How could we make it more significant personally or in our worship services?
5. The prophet celebrates "They will proclaim my glory among the nations." How are you or your congregation involved in mission proclamation?
6. The Concordia Self-study Bible (p. 1016) notes "The structure of Isaiah is like a miniature Bible." How many chapters are there in Isaiah? How many books are there in the Bible?

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 5:21-31

When Bible study groups read verse 22, the room may get silent, but only for a moment. Most groups have a good time in their discussions concerning marriage, but unfortunately verse 22 is too often misused to justify unfair treatment and even abused by those who conveniently ignore God's instruction in verses 25-33. Our culture may be deep in a quagmire of discovering woman's place in life, but it is not a quagmire created by God. He is the God who lifts up, encourages, and gifts all the children of His creation.

A news documentary concerning spouse abuse once interviewed men who were ordered by the court to undergo rehabilitation for six weeks concerning their abusive behavior. Amazingly most of the men interviewed, who were almost finished with their rehabilitation, still maintained that their spouse or girlfriend would not have been beaten if they had just done what they were told.

Even Christian men and women sometimes use their power of word or hand to dominate or abuse their partners. God is clear in today's passage that far from using our strength to control another person, we are to use that strength to encourage them to become what is right for them—not in our eyes, but in God's.

God does not appoint one person to be in slavery to another. As Paul points out, far from expecting service from our spouse, we are to extend every effort to make sure that our spouse is honored and respected. As Jesus was willing to lay down His life for us, we are to be willing to lay down our lives for one another—not because it is expected or demanded, but because we love that person more than we love our own lives.

What can you do to lift up your spouse today? We live in a very busy world and it is easy to become so stressed and tired that we feel a need to lean totally on our spouse for comfort. Unfortunately, they are in the same situation. What can we do? First, pray that God will guide us in our decisions concerning priorities and schedules. Second, and almost as important, get a babysitter regularly and go out to eat or to a movie—together! Reconnect with the person that you loved enough to want their company for life!

Learn more about knowing how to love in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 5:21-31

1. Read Ephesians 5:1-2 and Ephesians 5:21. What role does Christ play in our relationships?
2. Read vs. 22-23 and vs. 33. Summarize God's divine directive to the wife.
3. Read vs. 24-30 and vs. 33. Summarize God's divine directive to the husband.
4. What is mysterious (vs. 32) about the relationship between Christ and the church? What is mysterious about a marriage based on Christ?

For Family Reflection

5. This text is often one of the lessons used in a Christian marriage ceremony. Why is it an appropriate text? What message does it have to marriages today?
6. Reflect on your own family in light of this text. What is Christ-like about your marriage and about the relationships between parents and children and others? In what ways could our relationships be more Christ-like?

Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Hebrews 13:1-17

Today's lesson begins with the exhortation to love. The Greek word is "Philadelphia." The city of the same name doesn't always exhibit "brotherly love," but we as a church are instructed to do so. We are to understand that in Christ we are brothers and sisters, and we are called to a higher level of success in treating one another as Christ would treat us. We are to reject the modern rendition of an old saying that has been twisted into "do unto others, before they do unto you."

We would all agree with the command to love one another, but most of us would add modifiers like, "unless I've been offended," or "unless I'm too busy to take the time," or "until the pastor does something I disagree with."

However, far from adding modifiers that could lessen the demand to love one another with a brotherly love, the writer adds more specific instructions on showing one another love. He says that even strangers should be recipients of our care. [He seems to have in mind the "strangers" who came to Abraham and Sarah, and who were angels accompanying God (see Genesis 18)]. In our world, we unfortunately cannot unconditionally welcome all the strangers who come into our lives. To do so could lead to harm for us and our families. We can, however, work through our churches to reach out to all those "strangers" who need help and who need to know Jesus.

The writer goes on to include in our "need to love" list those of the body of Christ who are suffering for the cause of Christ and those who are "ill treated." Hebrews also reminds us of the sanctity of our marriages and the importance of seeking satisfaction in nothing but God's provision in our lives.

All of this may sound idealistic in our busy, sometimes angry, days of rush and frustration, but we are also reminded that Jesus never changes. So what? How does that relate to the lesson?

The "so what" is that if Jesus never changes, then the necessity of following Jesus also never changes or evolves. What He said and did has not diminished, nor have these things lost their validity. He still calls us to be like Him. He still promises that He will enable us in the tasks that He places before us.

Learn more about Jesus' patient love for us in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Hebrews 13:1-17

1. "Let brotherly love continue" introduces the text. Skimming the verses that follow who are identified as the specific recipients of Christ-like love?
2. Who never changes (vs. 8)? How does His unchanging nature affect His teaching (vs. 9)? How does His unchanging nature affect our final destination (vs. 14)?
3. How does this text direct us to the sacrifice of Christ? (vs. 11-13) What sacrifice do we offer in response? (vs. 15, 16)

For Family Reflection

4. Who are your spiritual leaders? (vs. 7) How are they a blessing to you? Is there a spiritual leader whom you seek to imitate?
5. Look at the newspaper (or look around your neighborhood, community, and world). Who is being mistreated (vs. 3)? How might you respond?
6. Review the faith descriptions of Hebrews chapter 11. What does faith have to do with our actions? Which one of the actions in Chapter 13 will be part of your faith response?

Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 15:21-28

What an odd thing for Jesus to say, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” This is a good example of what people mean when they say that Scripture must be studied in light of what it says as a whole. Jesus made it very clear in His ministry that He was sent to reach all the world. He witnessed to the Samaritan woman at the well and sent her out to minister to other Samaritans. He told the parable of the good Samaritan who showed more compassion than any of the chosen family of God. After the Resurrection, He went to Saul and sent him as a witness to the entire Gentile world. So why does Jesus make the statement that He is only for the house of Israel?

Jesus was a consummate teacher of His followers, and they needed a change of attitude. They were steeped in the false tradition of their nation that all non-Jewish peoples were worthless trash in the eyes of God, and therefore to be cast aside. Jesus takes this opportunity to demonstrate to them that even a Canaanite woman could believe and become a part of the kingdom. As God, Jesus already knew the woman and her belief. He knew that she would pursue Him and persist in her faith. Did she know it? Perhaps Jesus not only gives His disciples the perfect learning situation, but also gives the woman a chance to experience her depth of commitment. In doing so, she has the opportunity to grow even closer to Him.

Jesus also teaches us by giving us opportunities to grow in our relationship to Him through relationships with one another and with unbelievers. How will we handle each day? Will we pursue studying God’s word so that we may better imitate Jesus? Will we pray for guidance and wisdom from the Holy Spirit every day? Will we hold close to Christ, or will we imitate the world’s wisdom? With Jesus, the journey is never boring!

Been to Bible study lately? It’s never too late to start.

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

Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 15:21-28

1. What was the disciples’ reaction to the woman’s pleas? Have there been times where you have been frustrated by another’s needs and pleas?
2. Who were the “children”? Who were the “dogs”? What were the “crumbs”?
3. What compliment did Jesus give to the woman? What brought about Jesus’ response to the situation: the woman’s pleas, the woman’s faith, or Jesus’ grace?

For Family Reflection

4. At first Jesus seemed to ignore the situation. Have you ever felt that Jesus wasn’t listening to you? Does Jesus ever ignore our needs?
5. Who did Jesus come for? How does this story emphasize Jesus’ grace for everyone?
6. What makes for a “great faith” (vs. 28)? How do we get a strong and consistent faith?

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 7:24-37

The first healing in today's lesson reveals a test of sorts for the distraught mother and demonstration to the crowd that, indeed, God is for all people. Her reply to Jesus shows her determination to see God active in her life and her daughter's

As modern Americans we perhaps identify more with the healing of the deaf man. Many of us have infirmities that we desire to see gone. It's natural, just as it was natural for the friends of the deaf man, to bring him to Jesus, the Healer. Hundreds of people were healed during Jesus' ministry on earth. (See Luke 4:40, Matt. 8:16) At the end of his gospel, John even says, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written" (John 21:25).

So, it is normal that we are disappointed when our prayers for healing don't always result in physical relief. We hear of others receiving miracles and wonder why God didn't choose to heal us in the same way. No one has the answer to that question. Some questions must wait until we see Jesus face to face. Paul writes that then we shall know, even as we are known.

But, John also reminds us of something greater than the physical miracles that Jesus granted to the sick and dying during His ministry. Near the end of his gospel, John wrote of Jesus' miracles, "...these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31). A miraculous healing is a wonderful, indescribable experience that may happen to us at some point in our lives, but the greatest miracle is that Jesus has given us the free gift of eternal life. He has given us the strength to live in joy no matter what the world tosses our way. He has guaranteed our eternity with Him.

Have you invited a friend to attend a regular Bible study with you?

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

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 7:24-37

1. What cultural conditions made the woman a "dog"? Did Jesus mean to be cruel to her?
2. How did Jesus respond to the woman's request? Was it the reply of the woman (vs. 29) that merited Jesus' action?
3. Read the prophecy of Isaiah 35:5-6. How does this miracle fulfill the prophecy? What does this miracle prove about Jesus?
4. Why did Jesus request (vs. 36) that they tell no one about the miracle? Why couldn't they stop talking about it?

For Family Reflection

5. Jesus said, "Be opened." What else has Jesus opened for us? (See John 1:51)
6. The people observe "He has done everything well" (vs. 37). What has Jesus done well for you?

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 14:1-14

Have you ever gone to a meeting and sensed anger in the room, even though no one had said a word? This was the situation for Jesus. He was at the house of “one of the leaders of the Pharisees...they were watching Him closely.” So, Jesus broke the silence with a question concerning one of their laws. Healing on the Sabbath was forbidden unless a life was in the balance because healing was considered work, and to work on the Sabbath broke the law. Since, according to the Pharisees, perfect obedience to the law (both God’s and the Pharisees’) led to salvation, the question was bound to create a dilemma for the religious leaders. They were left speechless.

Then Jesus brought up the subject of pride. Again, have you ever known someone who tried to get the dinner seat nearest the host; stand nearest the political candidate, or “mention” so-and-so, a “good friend” of theirs? Jesus rightly points out the danger of overestimating your own value and finding yourself embarrassed, instead of waiting for others to judge your worth. His point was that seeing ourselves as servants marks us as Christians. Seeing ourselves as rulers is an antithesis to our calling.

Finally, Jesus plainly states one of the problems of the dinner He is attending. Where are the poor? Where are the crippled, the lame, and the blind? The Pharisees were generally aloof from these people. They pursued guests who would impress their neighbors and who would fit well into their class of intelligentsia. Meanwhile, people starved physically and spiritually on the outside. Jesus points out that the one who truly cares about people will seek out the needy and provide for them, without expecting anything in return.

This final teaching of Jesus in today’s lesson echoes so much of what we do today. The homeless are a reality, but our greatest desire is to just get them out of sight so they can’t make us feel obligated to help them. It is easier to blame them for their circumstance than it is to help them overcome it. Not all of those in need are honestly in need, but it is not our place to stereotype all into one definition. When someone not so clean or not so well dressed comes through your church doors, do you greet him or her as the Pharisees would have, or as Christ commands?

Have you invited a friend to attend a regular Bible study with you?

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

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 14:1-14

1. Why was the observance of the Sabbath so important to many in Jesus’ day? What did Jesus demonstrate (vs. 4) was more important than a tradition or ritual?
2. When it came to choosing places at a table, what was the human tendency? What response does Jesus suggest? Why?
3. What is the ultimate exaltation (vs. 11) that the Christian desires? When will we be exalted?
4. When it comes to inviting guests what is the human inclination? What response does Jesus suggest? Why?

For Family Reflection

5. What does it mean to serve and live humbly in our family? In our church? In our interactions with our friends and neighbors?
6. Is there someone that we could be inviting to our Sunday school classes, to church, and to other places where they can meet Jesus?