

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:13-21

Several things come to mind reading this parable of the rich and satisfied man who missed the point of life. How many of us had “many goods laid up” in investments, ready to enjoy the “good” life within a few years when we retire? What happened to all that we had worked so hard to save when the market crashed? Then there is the song, “Cat’s in the Cradle,” that brings tears to the eyes of empty-nesters when they hear it. It brings to mind the times we told our kids “just a minute. I’m busy” or “One of these days we’ll...” Now the kids are grown and those opportunities are gone.

As Americans we are very proud of what we have. The old joke, “Whoever dies with the most toys wins!” has tragically become a model many in our country follow—people who have been buried in their cars; children fighting over who will get the farm after Dad dies; and parents who give their kids everything but time and real love because they believe that giving them lots of “stuff” is *love*.

And now we come to the most important thing that we neglect for the sake of prestige, greed, and popularity. Jesus’ parable concerns a man who concentrated on building his own security at the expense of trusting or acknowledging his God.

The man who approached Jesus with an inheritance complaint had not come to listen. He merely sought a rabbi who could settle his problem in his favor. He did not understand that his real need was God as the Director of his life. But Jesus used the opportunity to tell a story of what really matters in life.

In it Jesus does not condemn wealth. He condemns greed, and cautions those with wealth to be on guard against letting wealth take the place of God.

Going back to the parable, Jesus calls the rich man a “fool,” yet who do we look up to today? Who do we place on our “people to meet” list? Who do we emulate in our dress and conduct? The very people who display the same values as the fool in the parable.

It is good to prepare for retirement; to give our children gifts; to want to be without financial worry, but when we let those things replace God in our hearts, we lose so very much. In Jesus we have eternity to gain.

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

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

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:13-21

1. What concerns about earthly possessions provided the opportunity for Jesus’ parable? In what scenarios do families today become distracted by earthly possessions?
2. Did the famer in the parable have earthly security? Did he have heavenly security?
3. Is it always sinful to “eat, drink, and be merry” (vs. 19)? How can the Christian also enjoy aspects of our earthly journey?
4. What does it mean to be “rich toward God” (21)? What does Jesus teach us in this parable about managing our possessions and our lives?

For Family Reflection

5. Read the explanations to the ninth and tenth commandments from Luther’s Small Catechism. How and when are you guilty of coveting? Toward Whom should all our desires be directed?
6. Are you rich? What riches has God given us in Christ?

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 12:22-40

It's important to note in this passage that it directly refers to last week's lesson. Jesus says, "For this reason I say to you...." It is His reassurance to His disciples then and His disciples now (that's us) that what He has said is trustworthy.

Let's be honest. We have all wondered at some time if God really cares about our daily lives. Does God know? Does God take care of anything but our eternity? Some parents chide their children for praying that God will let them have a new bike, but to the children their request is no different than hearing their parents ask that God provide the family's "daily needs." However the children are often told, "Don't bother God with that kind of prayer." Verse 27 expresses God's promise to provide our needs according to His will. We are free to place Him first in our lives and this we must do (contrary to the man in last week's parable). What about the bike? To be personal for a moment, my daughter is a musician. After she prayed, her first instrument was indeed arranged through a miracle from her caring Father. It's a long story, or I would tell you about it.

Do you still wonder if depending on God is wiser than depending on the bank account? Read verses 25 and 26. They are, in a way, shocking. Jesus challenges His listeners with the question of whether their worry can lengthen their lives. He then says.... "if then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters?" All the intricacies of nature are a "very little thing" to our creating and sustaining Father.

By trusting in God for all things, we automatically obey Jesus' final words in today's lesson. We are ready at all times for His return when He is first in our hearts; first in our lives; first in our thoughts; first in our jobs; first in our families; first in everything. The only other thing that He asks of us in our time here is to bring others to Him. As we trust in Him for everything, we also live as His witnesses to the truth of the gospel of salvation given to us through His death on the cross.

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

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

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 12:22-40

1. What examples from nature does Jesus use to teach us about God's provision? Can you think of other illustrations?
2. What does the world seek after? What do you, as a Christian, seek after (vs. 31)? What assurances does Jesus give about our earthly security?
3. What special appearance of Jesus is described in vs. 35-40? How can we be ready for our Master's arrival?

For Family Reflection

4. Are there times when we have "little faith" (vs. 28)? What do you worry about? What can we do in those times of doubt or worry?
5. What are some times that you get ready for? How do we get ready for Jesus?
6. Jesus says "Give to the needy" (vs. 33). How can your family help those who are needy in your church or community?

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:49-56

After many assurances of God's love, Jesus seems to really switch gears in this passage. He has come to "cast fire" on the earth; He has come to grant—not peace—but "division." Even families will be divided, all because of Him. Verse 49 seems to concern the eradication of sin in God's world. Jesus is not saying that He is anxious to destroy people, but the evil that has overtaken His creation. He wants the cleansing to begin.

Jesus also gives His followers a warning to prepare them for rejection, even by their families.

Any person's salvation enrages Satan. He will do anything to try to wrest that one from God, even using his family to force them from God's hand. There are Jewish families who disown one who becomes a Christian, even holding a funeral service for that person who has left Judaism. Islamic families of certain sects threaten, or even kill, a family member who confesses Christ. These things are happening today, not thousands of years ago.

Would you leave your family for Christ? Would you die rather than deny Him? Actually none of us can positively answer that question until we face the challenge. Like Peter, if we depend on our own assumptions who knows what we might do or say?

Jesus also gives notice to those who stand against Him. The ones present are most likely the religious leaders who wanted Him dead and gone from their lives. We can see this in His accusation that they are "hypocrites" who refuse to see the obvious. They judge the weather but they refuse to "analyze (vs. 56) this present time."

Those who refuse to use their own initiative to see the reality before them will perish. Their fate will be harsh. Like the man who refuses to make settlement in a court case that he cannot win, those who reject Christ will face the "judge" and spend eternity enduring the sentence brought about by their stubborn sin.

As we read these verses, we can be thankful that our own sinful rebellion against God is erased because Jesus shed His blood on the cross.

Is Bible study part of your Christian walk?

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

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:49-56

1. What "baptism" (vs. 50) and "distress" (vs. 50) was Jesus going to face? What blessings would come to us because of His fulfillment?
2. In several other contexts (Luke 2:13; John 20:26) the Gospels mention that Jesus brings peace. Why does Jesus say in these verses that He brings divisions rather than peace?
3. Why could some in Jesus' audience interpret the weather but not interpret His messages to them?
4. Can you think of any situations where the confession of Jesus has divided families or friendships? How can we stay true to Jesus in those times?

For Family Reflection

5. How can your family stay strong and united around Jesus and not become divided?
6. Pray that God gives us the wisdom to interpret His Word. Who or what helps us interpret the "signs" of His Word?

Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 13:22-30

In this passage Jesus speaks to those who know about Him. They have watched Him in their streets. Some have scoffed at His miracles; some have figured out that He is not going to drive Rome out of Palestine and so rejected Him; some actively seek His death; some are using His fame to lift up their own reputation—the old name dropping game; some have followed Him, but would fall away at His death.

When Jesus returns, these will call to Him and will receive His answer. Many Pharisees will be among them (vs. 28), but also many of today's church members who have hidden reasons for coming to church—family habit, good business contacts, a good philosophy to follow, or they just like the fellowship, but they do not accept Jesus as the Savior who can erase their sin and lift them up to a better life.

Jesus' message also fits the prevailing view of the world today that all religions lead to the same God, or the idea that good deeds (even done in the name of Jesus) lead to salvation. More than once in the gospels Jesus specifically states that He (His person) is the only way to the Father. Only He could pay the price of salvation.

Some say that this makes Christianity too exclusive or too restrictive in its belief. When confronted with these charges, Christians should answer with boldness and love: "Salvation is a free gift from God through the blood of His Son on the Cross." Far from being exclusive, Christ is profoundly inclusive. There is no work to do for salvation. Jesus has done it all. No human being, regardless of religious upbringing, race, past, mental or physical condition, or whatever terrible crime or sin they may have committed, will be denied. As Jesus says in this passage, "They will come from east and west and from north and south..." (vs. 29) Social position cannot affect salvation in Christ—slave and free, man or woman, child or adult are all welcomed *as equals*. We are children of the God of mercy, grace and love, whose Son is the *only* path to the Father.

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

Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 13:22-30

1. Who is the "narrow door" (vs. 24) that leads to salvation? (See John 14:6)
2. To whom will the door of salvation be closed (vs. 24-28)? What will be the response of those on the outside?
3. To whom will the door of salvation be opened (vs. 29-30)? What surprises will we find in heaven?
4. Jesus responds to the question, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" How would you summarize Jesus' answer?

For Family Reflection

5. On several occasions heaven is compared to a banquet (vs. 29; Isaiah 25:6-9). What kind of banquet do you imagine? What foods will be served? Who will be serving us?
6. How do we know that we will go through the "door" and into Jesus' banquet hall?

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?

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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?