

Second Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 2:23-28

In today's verses, Jesus is presented with another question: Why are His disciples picking heads of grain to eat when this was unlawful. The questioners are referring to the act of rubbing the grains together in one's hands to remove the hull and get to the edible grain within. This was defined by the Pharisees as working on the Sabbath—a violation of the Pharisees' extensively defined versions of God's Law, developed to make it possible to work one's way into God's acceptance.

Jesus' answer is to first cite the Jew's own history when David broke religious law in order to feed the hungry. Then Jesus made a profound statement, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." And "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Have you ever thought about these words? God rested on the seventh day of creation and calls on His people to set aside this time for concentrating on their relationship with Him. The Pharisees, instead of revering the Sabbath as a time to rest in the presence of God and to fellowship with Him, used the day to load the people with more laws to obey; to use it to browbeat the people with their interpretation of God's will.

Jesus corrects His critics, telling them that far from being a day for the manipulation of God or the manipulation of God's people the Sabbath is a day of refreshment for them; a time of worship and praise. It is a time to get to know Him better.

Do we sometimes try to influence God on our day of worship? Do we celebrate worship just to do the right thing? Or, do we find it a day of joyful worship and praise followed by a time when our minds are free to seek fellowship with God and family; a time of reflecting on the statement that Jesus is Lord of our every day, including the day set aside for worship and praise.

Get to know God through His Word this week!

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

Second Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 2:23-28

1. Which commandment gave God's direction regarding the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11)? See Exodus 31:12-17; Exodus 35:1-3. Why was God so emphatic about the keeping of this Day?
2. How had David seemingly disobeyed this commandment? Read more about David's action in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. Why were David's actions justified?
3. Who is the "Son of Man"? (See the Concordia Self Study Bible note on Mark 8:31.) What is significant about this title for Jesus?
4. What does it mean that the "Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath"?

For Family Reflection

5. How does your family keep "the Sabbath"? Why is it important that we set aside time to worship Jesus? How and when do we worship Jesus as a family?
6. Read and review the Third Commandment in Luther's Small Catechism.

Third Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 4:35-41

These days most of us lead lives that are pretty stressed and busy. Our work, our family schedules, our feeling that there should be at least thirty-six hours in a day, all at times contribute to short tempers, tired bodies and thoughts of that old cliché “Stop the world, I want to get off!” No wonder that very few Christians can read today’s passage without thinking, “Wow, I needed to be reminded of that.”

The disciples found themselves in a terrible situation. Their boat was filling with water from a bad storm and death seemed a real possibility. Our lives are sometimes like their boat, filled with trouble and in danger of sinking. Life, like the boat, can seem to be out of our control.

In response to their inability to conquer trouble on their own, the disciples called to Jesus, as we do. He responded with love, patience, healing, and a miracle beyond their understanding. Their response to Him was fear.

Fear? Perhaps awe is a better word, but an awe that left them trembling. Why would they feel this way when the Lord had stilled the storm in their lives?

Perhaps we also would be awestruck and overwhelmed. We are so used to thinking of ourselves as in control of our lives that we forget about the awesome power and authority of God.

We think of God as the One who cares and Who loves and encourages, but often forget that He is also Lord of the universe and Lord of our lives. We belong to Him and are precious to Him who is the Almighty Ruler of all things, even the weather. Standing in awe of Him is not only understandable, it is appropriate. Serving Him is a joy, because we know that He has the power to accomplish wonderful things for us and through us in His world.

Get to know God through His Word this week!

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

Third Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 4:35-41

1. How does vs.38a show that Jesus was true man? What other incidents in Jesus’ life demonstrate His humanity?
2. What does the disciples’ reaction to the storm and situation (vs. 38b) tell us about their trust in Jesus? What does the disciples’ reaction to the miracle tell us about reverence for Jesus?
3. The miracle shows Jesus’ power over His creation. What other miracles of Jesus show that He is Lord over all created things? Does Jesus still have power over His creation?

For Family Reflection

4. Are there times in your life where Jesus might have said to you “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”
5. The disciples were terrified of Jesus’ power? Do we need to be afraid of Jesus’ power? Why not?
6. The disciples asked Jesus “Don’t you care?” Have you ever been tempted to ask Jesus whether He really cared? Does He care for you? Always? How do you know?

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?

Trinity Sunday

John 3:1-17

What if Nicodemus had written his autobiography? What a book! He began as a Sadducee and member of the Sanhedrin (the body that plotted Jesus' crucifixion). As a Sadducee, he did not even believe in the resurrection preached by Jesus. Though he was a "ruler" through his membership in the Sanhedrin, this man from the Jewish aristocracy knew in his heart that he was in need of answers that his world and his own training and understanding had failed to provide. Overwhelmed by spiritual hunger and curiosity, he went to Jesus by night, so that his colleagues would not know.

He approached Jesus boldly, his need outweighing his sense of caution, and he participated in one of the most famous discussions in the Bible. He asked one of the most famous questions in the Bible, "How can a man be born when he is old?" Not many months after his nighttime encounter, Nicodemus helped Joseph of Arimathea lay Jesus in a tomb. It isn't too bold a step to think that at about this point in his life, Nicodemus came to understand Jesus' answers to his questions, and was brought to peace in the midst of his stressed out world.

How about you and me? Do we always understand Jesus' answers to Nicodemus? Do we understand that to be born again by the Spirit means that the old life of sin no longer has the power to tell us what to do? As Paul said, "We are new creatures in Christ." Do we always know in our hearts that the Father sent the Son out of His tremendous and unrelenting love for us, the undeserving? Do we know how the Son's death paid our debt? Perhaps we cannot truly comprehend the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the way each works in us as our one God, but we can know through our Lord Jesus that we are loved, forgiven and part of God's eternal Kingdom.

Is studying the Bible on your list of "to do" today?

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

Trinity Sunday

John 3:1-17

1. Who was Nicodemus? Where else do we meet Him in the Gospel accounts? (John 7:50-51; John 19:39) Why did Nicodemus interact with Jesus at night?
2. Is the teaching of the Holy Trinity an "earthly thing" or a "heavenly thing" (vs. 12)? What's the difference between the two "things"? Can you think of other examples?
3. Where do we find the three persons of the Trinity in this lesson?

For Family Reflection

4. While the nature of the Trinity is a mystery, the purpose of the Trinity is clear. According to verses 16-17 what is the desire of our God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
5. What mystery challenged Nicodemus (vs. 4)? How is the Holy Trinity a mystery? What do we do when there are things about the Christian faith that we cannot fully understand?
6. When is the Trinity mentioned in our church services? Are there any pictures or symbols of the Trinity in your church?