

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

John 16:12-22

In The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod less than fifteen percent of adults are involved in any type of Bible study. Most do not read their Bible on a regular basis. Some leave it on the end table as a silent witness to guests that they are Christians. No wonder our kids don't want to read the book of God's love.

Two of the men to whom Jesus is speaking in this passage wrote gospel accounts—Matthew and John. They were eye witnesses of Jesus' teachings, miracles, and life. Luke, another gospel writer, says that, "having investigated everything carefully from the beginning..." (Luke 1:3, NASB). Mark's gospel is shorter, but nonetheless an account by one thought to have seen Jesus arrested—in other words, another eyewitness.

Yet we fall into the trap of the world that says the Bible is unreliable, filled with fanciful stories meant only to communicate the essence of Jesus' teachings, and is unrelated to this time and culture. Some of the same critics applaud the "very words" of Confucius, Socrates, or Plato—never doubting their actual words were preserved through the millennia.

Why discuss the Bible, when Jesus was teaching the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be their Guide? The Holy Spirit speaks to us through the words of Scripture. He inspired the men writing the book that we so rarely read.

Unlike the disciples, we do not have the physical presence of Jesus. We cannot invite Him to our home for dinner and a discussion of our problems and joys. We cannot hear His voice as did those who knew Him on earth. But we can hear Him speak in the gospels, and through the letters written by John, Peter, and Paul.

This season we celebrate the proof of Jesus' Being, teachings, and our salvation. We celebrate the resurrection. He did walk out of the tomb. You can rediscover this truth in God's Word.

*Are you part of a Bible study group? If not, please consider joining one.*

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

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

John 16:12-22

1. Jesus suggests a "pause" in His teaching ministry: "you cannot bear them now" (vs. 12); "a little while you will not see me" (vs. 17). What is the context of Jesus' teaching in this chapter? What events would soon interrupt His teaching?
2. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in regard to truth?
3. What is the Holy Spirit's relationship to Jesus and to the Father?
4. How can sorrow turn to joy (vs. 20)? What are the Easter implications and applications of Jesus' words? How has God turned sorrow into joy in your life?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. What are some of the truth "robbers" that you see in our culture? What does the truth of God's Word mean for you, your family, and your church?
6. What are some of the joy "robbers" in your family and church? How do we bring the joy of the resurrection back into life situations?

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 16:23-33

In this passage Jesus explains that once His mission is accomplished His followers will be able to communicate with His Father directly. The cost of the sin that had kept them from the presence of God would be paid. Verse 26 states that we can approach the Father directly, not because of our goodness, but because we belong to Jesus. His work opened the door and tore the curtain to the holy of holies on the day of His crucifixion.

The disciples reply that now they understand. They are relieved that now there will be no more confusion. But confusion would return. Jesus tells them that they will scatter at His arrest, leaving Him alone to face the authorities.

Christians today experience times when we have no doubt, no questions; we just have peace. At those times we want to believe that doubt, fear, and pain will not return, but they do. We are still sinners. We are still rebels. We still, deep inside, will try to be God in our own lives.

As this passage concludes, Jesus gives us words that can carry us through the times of doubt and fear; times when our brains know the truth, but our emotions take over. Jesus said that though the disciples would leave Him, He would not be alone because “the Father is with Me.” He followed with “...in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulations, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (vs. 32 & 33).

His words are true today. They are words to memorize. Even though we can’t always “feel” like God is in control, He is.

Just think about it for a few minutes: Jesus has overcome the world; as He was never alone, we are never alone. God really is in control, even when our country is changing, our lives are changing, our relationships or health are suffering, God is in control of the outcome of it all.

Just as the Holy Spirit brought the right words and faith to the early Christians, He does the same for us. However, we do control which way we will turn—will we listen to Him and turn to Him for the truth, or turn inward, giving in to our doubts and fears?

***Get to know your Father. Join a Bible study group.***

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

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 16:23-33

1. How would the disciples’ relationship with Jesus and with the Father change after Jesus’ resurrection? How would their prayer life be different?
2. Did the disciples fully understand Jesus’ words (vs. 29-31)? What is the danger of assuming “now I get it!”?
3. How were Jesus’ words in vs. 32 fulfilled? In spite of their abandonment, what confidence does Jesus express? What similar confidence is ours?
4. How might Jesus’ words “In this world you will have tribulation,” be discouraging to the disciples and to us? What good news does Jesus have for them and for us?

### For Family Reflection

5. What does Jesus’ promise “Ask and you will receive” (vs. 24) mean for our prayer life? Will Jesus always give us everything we ask for?
6. Is your joy “full” (vs. 24)? What special joys have been part of your life and your family during this Easter season? How have you shared your joy in Jesus with others?

## Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:20-26

These verses comprise part of Jesus' prayer in behalf of the disciples, and in behalf of you and me. What a wonderful blessing to contemplate, and what a challenge

Jesus painted a picture of who we are in Him and why. He prayed that we may be in unity with one another and with God. He prayed that we may be with Him so that we can see His glory in His kingdom. He said that He will continue to reveal the Father to us through Himself. Knowing how urgently Jesus prayed for us should give us just a taste of our great value to Him and His great love for us.

But there is more in Jesus' prayer than unity and love. There is an urgent mission to accomplish through that unity and love. At the end of verse 21 is the phrase, "...so that the world may believe that You have sent Me." Verse 23 says, "...to let the world know that You have sent Me..." These words are for you and for me. It was after Jesus included us in His prayer to the Father that He said these words of blessing and mission.

We can no longer claim that the job of letting the world know about Jesus' love is just for pastors and paid staff.

Pastors are our leaders, our teachers, our trainers, and our co-workers in getting the gospel out, but they aren't the only ones called to tell the world about the Savior. It is also a command from Jesus to us. To put this into perspective—when your church was built what if the architect sent his assistant out to the property with a hammer and piles of wood and bricks, saying, "Get started"? Would your church be standing today? Another example—what if General Eisenhower had sent his assistant generals to storm the French beaches in World War II? No troops—just the generals.

God can do anything He wants. He could flick a finger and turn everyone into dedicated Christians, but He chose to use us to spread the word of salvation. If we ignore His command, we will not lose our salvation, but neither will we be working within God's will.

Jesus described the very best way of sharing Christ—sharing our unity and His love. We can be the Holy Spirit's tools in drawing people to listen to Him. Churches whose members love one another and display the love of Christ in their communities are more likely to draw an unbeliever's attention to Christ. Christians, you and I, who allow Christ's love to dwell deeply in our hearts can be a mighty witness to the world around us.

*Let God's Word bless you in a special way this Easter season.*

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

## Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:20-26

1. Jesus begins a new petition in vs. 20. Glance back at the previous verses. Who was Jesus praying for when He prayed for "them" (vs. 11, 12, 19)?
2. Who is Jesus praying for in vs. 20ff? What is His prayer for us in vs. 21?
3. What is Jesus' ultimate desire for us and for the world (vs. 23-24)?
4. Why can't the world naturally know Jesus (vs. 25)? How does the world find out about Jesus? Who brings people of the world to faith in Jesus?

### For Family Reflection

5. Have there been times when the individuals in our family or in our church have not been "one" (vs. 21-22)? What does "oneness" look like? How does "oneness" give glory to God and bless His church?
6. Another Easter "season" is completed! How has your faith grown the past seven weeks? How will the Easter joy continue to be evident in your life and family? Is the Easter season ever really over?

## Day of Pentecost

John 14:23-31

You probably hear these words every Sunday: “May the peace of Christ which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds...” How many times have you said in your heart, “If only it could be true” as you hear these assuring words? In today’s passage, Jesus speaks to the disciples about the peace that His presence can bring to our hearts.

As Jesus spoke to these men, what was their future? When Jesus said to them that they had no need to fear, He was preparing them to face His death. Yet, these men who believed that Jesus would overthrow their Roman oppressors, and restore Israel’s monarchy; who heard Jesus’ words of assurance, would cower in fear after His arrest and execution. They would believe themselves to be leaderless, hunted men. They had no idea that Jesus was about to return to them. Not until the resurrection did they begin to understand, a little.

After Jesus returned to them in His post-resurrection appearances, and after His ascension, the apostles courageously faced the ones who had executed Christ, preaching the gospel to the crowds.

If even the disciples could lose their confidence in Christ and experience fear, what is the key to knowing and keeping peace in one’s heart? The disciples’ fear came at a time when they believed that Jesus had left them. They forgot, or doubted, His promise that He would always be with them, even though they would not see Him.

Isn’t that when we also fall into fear? Sometimes we just drift in our faith until suddenly something happens that makes us realize that we can’t see Jesus. He is still there, but we have turned away, relying on our own power and wisdom.

Jesus never leaves us, even when we lose track of Him. We are like the toddler in a large store who wanders around wondering at the new sights in his world when he suddenly realizes that he doesn’t see Mom! He panics and turns to flee, only to run smack into Mom’s knees. Jesus is always there, offering us true peace. We just need to keep our lives focused on His presence.

*Are you asking your friends to join you in Bible study?*

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

## Day of Pentecost

John 14:23-31

1. Jesus prepares the disciples for some transitions in His life and theirs. What immediate transitions would be taking place after this time of teaching? (Glance ahead to John chapter 18 and following.) What transition would take place 40 days after Jesus’ resurrection? What transition would take place 50 days after Jesus’ resurrection?
2. Some contrasts are suggested in the text: When things look helpless who is the “Helper” (vs. 26)? What help does He bring?
3. When there is trouble (vs. 27) where do we find peace?
4. When the ruler of the world (vs. 30) wants to rule our life who can Rule our hearts and home?

### For Family Reflection

5. How do we show our love for Jesus (vs. 23-24)? What are some specific actions that might show our love for Him?
6. Review the events of the first Pentecost (Acts 2). What happened in Jerusalem? What blessings did the church in Jerusalem experience? What blessings do we experience in our family and church because of Pentecost?

## Trinity Sunday

John 8:48-59

These verses conclude a debate between Jesus and His enemies. These were “hecklers” in the crowd. Verse 31 says, “So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him...”

Jesus accused His enemies of having Satan as their father, while they claimed Abraham as their father. Jesus told them to then act like Abraham. They were not. Jesus says that instead, “you are seeking to kill Me ...” and “If God were your Father, you would love Me for I have... come from God...”

This background highlights the seriousness of the growing gulf between God’s Son and the religious leaders. Jesus ends verse 47 with the phrase, “...you are not of God.”

At the beginning of today’s verses, the leaders reply that “you are a Samaritan and have a demon.” This was a double accusation. A Samaritan had no authority to teach Jews. A man possessed by demons would obviously be controlled by Satan, so His words were from the prince of liars. To protect the truth, Jesus had to counter their every accusation.

The Jews then charge that Jesus could not have known what Abraham felt or thought. Jesus replied “... I say to you that before Abraham was born, I am.” The Jews knew that God had told Moses to tell the people that “I am” sent him. At this statement, the Jews tried to stone Jesus but He avoided them.

Why retell the highlights of this story? Because the truth of God—that He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is essential to Christianity, and worth proclamation.

Our world claims that it doesn’t matter whether Jesus was divine. He was a great teacher, humanitarian, communicator, but not God. However, if Jesus were not both God and Man, He was not perfect. If He was not perfect, He could not be the sacrifice for sin. If He was not the sacrifice for sin, we are all in trouble. As you listen to the media, and read books about Jesus and Christianity, remember this truth. It is absolute.

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

## Trinity Sunday

John 8:48-59

1. Why did Jesus’ challengers base so many of their arguments on father Abraham?
2. According to vs. 50, how many gods are there? How was this truth confessed by the people of Israel (Deuteronomy 6:4)? Why is the emphasis of this truth important in today’s world?
3. Will we all die? What does Jesus mean when He says, “If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (vs. 51, 52)?
4. What is the significance of Jesus’ claim to be the “I am” (vs. 58)? Is Jesus God? How do you know? Is our God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? How do you know?

### For Family Reflection

5. Many churches celebrate Trinity Sunday. What symbols for the Trinity do you see in your church? How do we celebrate the Trinity with our words and actions in the worship service?
6. Find the “Holy Trinity” hymn section in *Lutheran Service Book* (or another hymnal). Sing or share a favorite. Why do we typically stand for a hymn verse that is “Trinitarian?”