

## 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?

## **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Mark 9:14-29

Modern Americans often dismiss this story, assuming that the boy was “obviously a victim of some sort of epilepsy.” However, Jesus makes it clear that the boy was possessed by a demon. Lutheran missionaries have reported many instances of demon possession. It is real.

Demon possession, however, is rarely portrayed in novels or movies as it really is. They especially fail to accurately portray God’s power in the arena of demon possession. Generally, in novels and movies, people of God are portrayed as terrified, arrogant, or just plain evil themselves. God is portrayed as ineffective and powerless in the face of evil. Only the human “hero” of the story can prevail over true evil. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In today’s verses, Jesus demonstrates the real truth of God versus evil. Contrary to movie story claims, the men in the story—Jesus’ disciples—could not force the demon to obey. Only Jesus, the Son of God, the “God-Man” if you will, could command the spirit to leave.

In this story Jesus implies that the disciples’ lack of faith was the reason they failed. However, it was not a lack of faith in their own power that failed them; it was their lack of faith in God’s power to bring evil down.

We need not fear that we might be possessed by a demon. As Christians, we are protected and held close by the One from whom evil flees. The father of the possessed boy makes a statement that is one of my favorites in Scripture, and I use it often, “I do believe; help my unbelief.” The Holy Spirit lives within us. He protects our faith, strengthens it, and keeps us pointed to Jesus. We are protected from Satan’s demons because Christ has died and risen. The power of Satan and his minions over us is crushed.

**Have you invited a friend to attend a regular Bible study with you?**  
(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Mark 9:14-29

1. What issue gets the attention of the disciples, crowd and Jesus?
2. Why couldn’t the disciples perform the miracle?
3. Why could Jesus do the miracle? When did Jesus finally conquer the devil forever? Can we conquer the devil?

### **For Family Reflection**

4. How does Jesus emphasize the power of prayer? (vs. 29) Why is prayer important to your family?
5. Reflect on vs. 23. What does it mean to truly believe? Do we ever limit God’s power and presence in our lives?
6. What unbeliefs do you struggle with? What promises of God do you believe?

## Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 9:30-37

All of Jesus' followers expected Him to throw off His gentleness and take up a sword against Rome; to restore Israel to the prominence she enjoyed in Old Testament times. That was their sincere belief about the Messiah. So being "greater" in this political messiah's entourage would bring a higher position in his government and more power and honor. Only later did they begin to understand that the Messiah's mission was to save people; restore them to His Father; grant them eternal and abundant life. Jesus' teaching about servanthood was essential if they were to ever understand the true nature of His kingdom.

Many in today's churches still act as though our Master's church is political. We treat the "least" of her servants as though they were of little importance, when Jesus taught that being a servant of all was the most valuable character trait of all. While we may treat the janitor as though we can command and demand without appreciation, we may virtually bow to the council president. We treat the pastor as though he were a much greater servant of God than the women serving in the nursery.

Jesus in fact uses children in this passage to make His point. How often do we disregard the importance of children in the church; in the kingdom? How often do we tell parents that they will have to provide their own child care for a Bible study because we can't find anyone to man the nursery? What would Jesus' reply be to that problem? He would sit them all around Himself while teaching.

Pastors are wonderful and important servants in the church. They are called to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments. Also worthy or honor and respect are the people bringing food for a funeral luncheon. Christ's church is not about politics and power and impressing the "right people." It is about serving one another and the community where we live.

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

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

## Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 9:30-37

1. What prophecy does Jesus share in vs. 31? Why couldn't the disciples understand His words at this time? When did they understand?
2. What were the disciples arguing about? Do we ever argue about the same issue?
3. What's the point of Jesus' action with a little child?

### For Family Reflection

4. How does the world define greatness? How does Jesus define greatness?
5. To whom has God called you to be the servant? How can you serve them?
6. How are you welcoming the children in your family? Your church? Your community?

## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 9:38-50

Have we forgotten that we have received the greatest gift of all time? The gift of salvation brings us eternal and abundant life in Christ. We declare this truth during every worship service, yet our mental response is often, “That’s nice, I wonder where we’re going for breakfast this morning?”

Today the world has reversed Jesus’ words in verse 40. The world shouts that it *is* against Christ. There are very few neutral positions in our culture. Unfortunately, the loudest voices are not those who are “not against us,” or those who are for Christ, but those who adamantly oppose Christ.

Jesus told John that He could not stand lukewarm Christians (Revelation 3:16). Why have we become neutral and lukewarm? Satan has pressured Christians into silence because he knows that if we remain silent all non-Christians will spend eternity in his fiery hell. By our silence do we fail to give a cup of water; do we fail to welcome God?

Today’s world demands that Christians be neutral about their faith except at home or in church (and working to stop that as well). Christian teachers, students, counselors, business leaders, and coaches must all be religiously neutral so that others cannot be offended by their Christianity. In more countries than you may think, sharing the Christian faith is a capital offence.

As a Christian community we have come to accept our culture’s adamant demand that Christ offers nothing that other religions do not. The truth is that Jesus said, “I am *the way, the truth and the life*. No one comes to the Father *except through Me*” (John 14:6). Will we one day stand in the presence of Christ and say, “I didn’t think that speaking of You would be appropriate?” As Christians we need to stand in a world that doesn’t know Christ and say, “I am a Christian. Christ is not only part of my life; He *is* my life. Don’t ask me to disregard Him, or deny His uniqueness.”

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

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

## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 9:38-50

1. Did Jesus discredit the mystery miracle worker (vs. 38-41)?
2. Does Jesus teach that hands and feet should be cut off? What is His point?
3. What does it mean to be “salty” (vs. 50)?

### For Family Reflection

4. What does it mean to give a cup of cold water (vs. 41; Matthew 25:35)?
5. How might we (as a society and perhaps as individuals) be responsible for the “sins” of little ones (vs. 42)?
6. “Be at peace with each other” (vs. 50). Is there peace in your home? In your church? Where does our peace come from?