

Sundays of Pentecost 2025 Messages

Part 1

From Pastor Staker

Bethel Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Russell, Kentucky

*Day of Pentecost – June 8 – “Does Anyone Know You
Are A Christian?”*

*The Holy Trinity (First Sunday After) – June 15 – “Before We
Have All The Answers”*

*Second Sunday After – June 22 – “About A Naked Man And
Crazy Pigs”*

Third Sunday After – June 29 – “Jesus Is The Bread Of Life”
From Sylvia Gardner

Fourth Sunday After – July 6 – “Friends In Low Places”

Fifth Sunday After – July 13 – “AAA Road Service”

*Sixth Sunday After – July 20 – “W*I*T*”*

*Seventh Sunday After – July 27 – “Have A Little Talk
With Jesus”*

Eighth Sunday After – Aug. 3 – “GEMMEE GEMMEE”

"DOES ANYONE KNOW YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN?"

Message for the "*Day of Pentecost*"

From Pastor Norman Staker

June 8, 2025

ACTS 2: 1-21 ** ROMANS 8: 14-17 * JOHN 14: 8-17 & 25-27



GRACE, MERCY, AND
PEACE FROM GOD OUR
FATHER AND FROM OUR
LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS
CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS
RISEN! HE IS RISEN
INDEED!!

Does anyone know you are a Christian?

In his book called, "Gentle Thunder," Max Lucado tells the following story with his usual wit and style, as only he can: Some time ago I came upon a fellow on a trip who was carrying a Bible. "Are you a believer?" I asked him. "Yes," he said excitedly. I've learned you can't be too careful. "Virgin birth?" I asked. "I accept it," he replied.

"Deity of Jesus?" "No doubt."

"Death of Christ on the cross?" "He died for all people."

Could it be that I was face to face with a Christian? Maybe. Nonetheless, I continued my checklist. "Status of man?" "Sinner in need of grace."

"Definition of grace?" "God doing for man what man can't do."

“Return of Christ?” “Imminent.”

“Bible?” “Inspired.”

“The Church?” “The Body of Christ.”

I started getting excited. “Conservative or liberal?” He was getting interested too. “Conservative.” My heart began to beat faster. “Heritage?” “Southern Congregationalist Holy Son of God Dispensationalist Triune Convention.” That was mine! “Branch?” “Pre-millennial, post-tribulation, non-charismatic, King James, one-cup communion.”

My eyes misted. I had only one other question. “Is your pulpit wooden or fiberglass?” “Fiberglass,” he responded. I withdrew my hand and stiffened my neck. “Heretic!” I said, and walked away.

What do you fear? Life is important; we want to keep our heart ticking strong and vibrant. Then what? Jesus has a promise. Thomas wanted to know the way.

What makes you afraid? An ambulance isn’t the only ride that demands valor. You may be down to your last paycheck. Are you afraid of being rejected, or does that new mole appearing on your back bring worry and fear? Fear can lock us into an emotional prison. Life is important to us, so we do everything we can to keep our heart ticking strong and vibrant.

Most of us this morning are old enough to remember the name of Dr. Christian Bernard. He was the cardiac surgeon who performed the first human heart to heart transplant in 1967 in South Africa. Trivia: what was the patient’s name? Louis Washkansky who died sadly just 18 days later of double pneumonia. (My gosh...that seems so long ago, almost 60 years) He tells the story of one of his transplant patients who asked to see the removed organ. So Dr. Bernard brought the man his heart in a large bottle. As the man looked at the big muscle which once pumped life through his body, the famed surgeon realized that this was the first time in human experience that a person had ever seen his own heart. A historic moment.

But for the patient it was a very personal and moving experience. His old heart was worn out, if it had not been replaced, he would no longer be living. After a long pause, the man in gratitude simply said: “I’m glad I don’t have that old heart

anymore.” Yet he knew that his new heart would eventually stop and death would come.

The words written by John in chapter 14 are words we have memorized. I used these words at the funeral of a former member of St John, who had requested them to be used, and ironically, and seriously, I was the acolyte for her and her husband when they got married in the late 60s. “In my Father’s house are many rooms.” It is a promise of our eternal destination when our heart stops beating. As we read this passage we find ourselves “listening in” on a conversation between Jesus and his disciples. He is about to be arrested and crucified. Jesus just told Peter that he would deny knowing Him 3 times. He told them that Judas would be a traitor. They are confused.

Jesus is going to die. He knows it. So He tells his disciples that they will not be able to go with Him where He is going. It will bring a question from Thomas. This news is unexpected and shocking. I’m going to die, but I will live on...so don’t let your hearts be troubled. One of you will betray me but not one of you will miss my return. The words He spoke, we know by heart.

‘Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house. I am going there to prepare a place for you and I will come back to take you to be where I am.’

The Jewish religion was divided on the topic of death and resurrection. For the Sadducees, there are no angels and no resurrection. That’s why they are “so sad you see”! The Sadducees saw the grave as a tragic one way trip. There are people today who agree with the Sadducees view of life and death. It is sad. For they are living life with no hope.

The Pharisees believed in a resurrection, but it was only a spiritual resurrection. Jesus was about to change that reality when on the third day after His crucifixion He would rise with a resurrected glorified body. What did Jesus say to the disciples in the Upper Room on Easter morning when He suddenly appears?

“Why are you troubled? Why do you doubt? Look at my hands and feet, touch me and see that I am not a ghost. A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

Max Lucado in his book “Fearless” writes: Jesus is promising His disciples more than what the Pharisees believed. Jesus is promising an eternity in God’s eternal

home in heaven. Jesus is elevating funerals to the same level of hope and joy we have at weddings. For Jesus, His eyes have the perspective from heaven. He knows what is beyond death's door. The trip to the cemetery, the trip to the borrowed grave on the outskirts of Jerusalem, for Him is like a walk down the wedding aisle.

We don't deserve it. We haven't earned it. The halls of heaven are ringing with music. The music is like none we've ever heard. Suddenly, silence. Now, light—blinding light. It is not the end of our journey, but it is the beginning of eternal life in a new heaven and new earth with glorified resurrected bodies...a return to the paradise of Eden. A place of perfect harmony and peace.

Jesus tells Thomas and the others... You believe in God, believe also in me.” Though there are many religions in the world there is only “one” way to know the true God. “Philip, the Father is in me and I am in the Father....I am the way the truth and the life... no one comes into the presence of the Creator and heaven except through me.

How sad. Jesus has made a great promise. Unfortunately many have missed His words of promise because they do not believe Jesus is God. “Where there is no assurance of heaven, no assurance of salvation, there is no peace. No peace means there is no joy.”

At every Lutheran grave site we read the promise of Job 19:25-27: “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my flesh I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes.”

The human mind wants to know if there is more than life now. What is beyond? The human heart knows there is something more, because God has placed that inquisitiveness in every human heart. We are “like foreigners and strangers in this world.” Because there is nothing on earth that can satisfy our deepest longing. We long to see God.

I don't think the disciples of Jesus fully understood His promise. Thomas could not sit on his hands any longer so he asks: “Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Jesus answers with His greatest title: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Note the definite article “The.” The

book of Proverbs states there is “a” way that seems right to man but it leads to death.” Jesus does not say “I am a Way”. I am ‘the’ Way.

Jesus stilled the storm, gave sight to the blind, healed the leper, raised the dead. What more proof does one need? Philip...you have seen these miracles. It is the Father who is in me and I am in the Father. We are “one” and the same. Wow! What a statement!. Can we even comprehend it?

Here we are now, 50 days later from the day Jesus came out of the tomb. Pentecost. Today we celebrate the day of Pentecost. It was the day when the Holy Spirit of God breathed into the young community of Jesus’ followers. As Jesus prepared his disciples for his departure, he promised them that God would send an Advocate to remain with them.

It was on this Jewish feast of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit breathed upon the early church. They were gathered in Jerusalem. Huddled, actually. They were cloistered together inside a house. While in the house, the Spirit came. It filled the house with the sound of a mighty wind. Not a gentle breeze – no, the sound of a violent wind. This wind breathes holy, heavenly life into the disciples. Three things happen:

- It pushes them out into the streets of Jerusalem. They’d been cloistered, but the Spirit directs them into the public square.
- They speak in varied languages, but the message is all the same: they proclaim God’s deeds of power. They tell the message of Jesus’ victory over death.
- And thirdly, these Galileans speak in the languages of the world. It’s a preview of what’s to come. This good news message of Jesus’ healing love and life will spread to the entire world. This Holy Spirit wind will circle the earth and fill all things, all people.

Jesus called him the “Paraclete.” Loosely translated, it means Advocate or Helper or Comforter. Literally, the word Paraclete means “to call alongside.” This is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God quietly encourages and urges us. It calls to us through hearing the good news. It enlightens and equips us through gifts of the Spirit. It gathers us together and sanctifies us for good works.

On that day of Pentecost, the Spirit called the church of Christ outwards. It breathed in the house where they were gathered and blew them into the streets of Jerusalem. It breathed new languages, new ways of interacting with the world.

On that day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit breathed life into the church of Jesus Christ. From within that tightly enclosed room, it came into their midst. It blew them into the streets of Jerusalem. It would continue to move them in unexpected ways and into unanticipated directions.

The Holy Spirit of God continues to push and move us into new pathways, new ways of interfacing with the world. This holy breath means to move us to ventures as yet uncharted.

My prayer is that the Holy Spirit breathes among us, that it invigorates and enlivens our faith. This Spirit runs beside us and encourages us along the pathway of our lives, over rough terrains and through uncertain trails. May it continue to push us into unforeseen ventures. Come, Holy Spirit! Move your church! Open us to the ever new vista unfolding before us, full of grace and life!

AMEN!!!

"BEFORE WE HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS"

Message for *"The Holy Trinity"* Sunday

From Pastor Norman Staker

June 15, 2025

PROVERBS 8: 1-4, 22-31 ** ROMANS 5: 1-5 ** JOHN 16: 12-15



GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST AND FROM OUR COMFORTER
AND ADVOCATE, THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS RISEN
INDEED!!

I'm thinking seriously about writing a book, an autobiography, and I'm going to call it "Advice from the Furnace; a self-help guide to avoid getting burned in the fire. Jesus' opening line in today's Gospel "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." I thought that was a good lead-in to my many more sermons to come, many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now. And not everyone gets to hear them so a book would reach out. It will be available

on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, even Kindle. You would think that after 23 years I would have written it before now but I haven't! I'll even give you folks autographed copies for free!

In 1992 a movie hit the big screen with Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson, among many other well-known actors called "A Few Good Men." Tom Cruise, Lt. Daniel Kaffee, is a military lawyer defending two US Marines charged with killing a fellow Marine at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba. The movie is described as being thrilling, psychological, and suspenseful. In one of the more suspenseful scenes which takes place in the military courtroom, Cruise's character, Lt Kaffee, and Nicholson's character, Lt Col Jessup have a conversation that ends in a very heated exchange of words, culminating in the five most famous words in film history; well, just listen:

Judge Julius Alexander Randolph begins: You don't have to answer that question!

Jessup: I'll answer the question. You want answers?

Kaffee: I think I'm entitled!

Jessup: You want answers?! Do you want answers?

Kaffee: I want the truth!

Jessup: You can't handle the truth!

Why all this talk about a movie that was filmed over 30 years ago and nominated for four Oscars but didn't win any!!

If you were put to the test, how would you explain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in an email? Forget the email for a moment, how would you explain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity? Today is Trinity Sunday.

Last week being Pentecost, we started teaching on the Holy Spirit. Scripture says that we can quench the spirit, that we can hold its out-flowing in our lives. As part of salvation, God has promised the in-flowing of the spirit into our lives.

Why do we need to talk about the work of the Holy Spirit?

The same thing is true of the Holy Spirit. There are a lot of things that the Holy Spirit will do for us, but we have to know what those things are so that we can recognize them and get all that we can out of the work of the Spirit in our lives. There are some things that the Holy Spirit will not do for us, and we need to know that too so that we are not frustrated in our lives. If we follow the directions, we can have a wonderful experience. It is good to have realistic expectations as well

because if your expectations are not realistic, you can get angry and frustrated. By knowing that there are certain things that the Holy Spirit will do, you will know that your experience is normal and that it is the Spirit of God working and not other spirits because there are other spirits out there working as well. Therefore, by knowing what the Holy Spirit will do, we are assured that it is God's spirit working in our lives and not something else. Again, Jesus said, and this wasn't referring to my future sermons, Jesus said, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."

What will the Holy Spirit do for us? Over the years, books, treatises, lectures, whole lives, have been devoted to contemplating the Trinity. St Patrick expounded on the Trinity, in part to highlight the different kind of God we have as opposed to the different beliefs he encountered. He saw God at work through the Trinity.

We too are bound as we continue to proclaim the faith of the church, the faith into which we were baptized. We bind ourselves as we recall our baptism. We bind ourselves every time we repeat the historic words of the Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed or even the Athanasian Creed which we'll do in a few minutes. We bind ourselves when we gather in unity around the Lord's table. Unfortunately, in our haste to get through the liturgy, proclaiming our faith too often becomes just words and repeated motions. Live it, though. Feel the life that flows from the living God, a God who surrounds us with creative power and redeeming love as we are made His holy people. God lives in us as we live in God.

Let's look at three works of the Holy Spirit—two are obvious and one is hidden:

The first work of the Holy Spirit is in regard to salvation. While we tend to think of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of believers, the first work of the Holy Spirit was actually in the lives of unbelievers or people who have not yet understood what Jesus is all about. The Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin and convince people of Christ's righteousness and God's judgment.

What does this mean? To convict the world of sin simply means that God will be our conscience. His spirit will work in our hearts and minds to convince us of how sinful we are. Why do we need to know that? Well, apart from God's grace, all of us are convinced of our absolute goodness. Just ask the average American, "Are you a good person?" Ninety percent will say that they are very good people. If you ask your children who is responsible for the ink spilled on the downstairs rug, they

will say, “Not me.” That means I have a villain running around my house called “Not me.” If you ask a woman how she stubbed her toe, she will say that she walked into a chair. If you ask a man the same question, he will say that some idiot put a chair in his way. All of us are convinced of our own inherent goodness. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to show us that we are not that good.

If your standard for comparison is Al Capone or Madonna or some famous rapper, we are good. But what if the comparison is Mother Theresa or Jesus Christ himself. Are we good?

For those who golf, what if you have to shoot an eagle on every hole on God’s golf course to win. What if shooting the perfect game is the standard? Is that possible? To have one bogey or one par would mean that you would lose all of heaven. Could you do it? Well, that’s the standard. The standard is a perfect life.

Are we that good? Have you lived the perfect life? Romans 3:23 reminds us all “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” The first work of the Holy Spirit is to teach us this fundamental truth. Has God revealed that you are hopelessly sinful? What about works? Can’t we be good enough? How would you ever know that you were good enough? Do you want to be surprised that you weren’t?

The second work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s heart and mind is to convince people of righteousness. What does that mean—that Jesus is a righteous man? We already know that. This phrase means that the only way we can be right with God as a result of our sinfulness is that God has to provide the way for us.

The same thing is true spiritually. We can enjoy the fruit of the Holy Spirit and God’s spiritual indwelling in us. We can know that we are forgiven and that when we die, we can know that we will be in God’s presence because of a battle that happened a long time ago. God on the cross took our sins upon himself through Jesus Christ. He first came and lived that perfect life that we needed to live and then sacrificed his own life for us. He substituted himself on our behalf. On the cross, God did a wonderful thing. He took the perfect righteousness of Jesus and to all who believe, he gave it to them. He took our sinfulness and placed it on Jesus so that by his one sacrifice, he paid the penalty for all our sins and enabled us to live a free life, a life knowing God and having his presence in our lives.

The blood of Christ paid for our spiritual salvation. Do you know that, and have you received that gift that God has provided for you?

The third thing God will do in our hearts is that he will convince us of judgment. It is very true that there will be a judgment day when all men will be judged. The death of Jesus was not just a tragic event of some deluded person who thought he was God. The death of Christ and the cross of Christ was a spiritual victory, a triumph over death, a triumph over hell and the grave. The Holy Spirit tells us that death has been swallowed up in victory, that grace overcomes our sin, and that the grave is not the last word. Good has defeated evil, and we are on the winning side. The Holy Spirit tells us that we are not at the mercy of the Prince of Darkness or our own principles for living or our own human ability. The Holy Spirit tells us that we don't have anything to fear in this life and that although the odds may be against us, we can have victory through Christ our Lord.

Philippians 4:13 tells us "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Romans 8:37 says "Are we lambs to the slaughter? No, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Nothing depresses me more than seeing what I call "Christian defeatism." It's that "Ain't it awful" type of feeling. "Ain't it awful what we see on TV today." "Ain't it awful what's happening in our communities?" "Ain't it awful what's going on in this person's life?" "Ain't it awful all the terrible things happening in our world?"

We talk about all these things, and yet we don't do anything about them. It's as though there's nothing that can be done. Yet Christ reminds us that we have victory through him and we can do all things through him who strengthens us. The only way that evil can win is if good people do nothing. We don't have to have that sense of defeatism.

I see the same attitude in Christians as they struggle with the different sins in their lives. They say, "Well, we're all saved by grace, Pastor. We're just going to have to struggle until the Lord returns. I'm trying my best." It's as though we have no power to overcome the sins in our lives. It's as though we are shackled to the sinful nature in our lives, and that's not the truth.

Christ came to accept us and he did by grace. However, he accepted us to change us, to make us into a better people.

I'd be remiss to not wish all dads, including myself, a Happy Father's Day today. As I said last month, we dads are second in importance to mothers. More flowers are sent and more phone calls are made to mothers than all dads together. It

doesn't seem fair but it is what it is. The biggest encounters of my life that have impacted my family are those encounters that turn my heart to God. When a man's heart turns to God, the world around him changes. When a father's heart is restored to his children, it transforms generations. Somehow if the hearts of fathers and children are turned towards one another something dynamic happens that moves God's heart toward the earth. When a father comes to Christ first: 93% of the time, the rest of the family will follow and become believers. Those are good odds!

The Holy Trinity, a mystery but at the same time the saving power of God, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. And again, a Happy Father's Day to all of our dads.

Amen!!



“ABOUT A NAKED MAN AND CRAZY PIGS”

Message for the Second Sunday after Pentecost

From Pastor Norman Staker

June 22, 2025

ISAIAH 65: 1-9 ❄️ GALATIANS 3: 23-29 ❄️ LUKE 8: 26-39

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS
RISEN INDEED!!

Then Jesus and his disciples arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, ‘What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.’ (those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.)

We’ve heard about the Mothman of Point Pleasant, West Virginia, that winged humanoid creature of American folklore described as a large, dark figure with glowing red eyes and a ten-foot wingspan, often seen gliding rather than flapping its wings, linked primarily to the period before the collapse of the Silver Bridge in 1967, supposedly a forewarning of that bridge disaster; we’ve heard about the Yeti in the Himalayas also known as the Abominable Snowman, a hairy ape-like creature; we’ve heard about the Loch Ness Monster, Nessie, believed to be a long-extinct plesiosaur from millions of years ago; and who can forget Sasquatch more commonly known as Bigfoot of the Pacific Northwest that can walk like a human, is taller and more robust than a human and is covered in dark hair. All of these are myths; they aren’t real, but have you ever heard of the Blue Ghost of Maddox Bridge Road which crosses the Saluda River in South Carolina? As the story goes, many, many years ago two high school students had been out on a date.

They were driving back home when the young boy lost control of the car. The car had been going 80 miles per hour on this winding, twisting country road, and when the driver lost control, the car ran off the road right at the bridge. The car went into the Saluda River. Two days later, they found the body of the teenage girl, but they never found the boy's body.

Over time, local legend grew about how at midnight, you could sometimes see a blue light in the water, the ghost of the teenage boy looking for his girl friend.

One day, my best friend and I started talking to each other at school about how we had seen the Blue Ghost of Maddox Bridge Road. We were talking in low, confidential tones, confident that everyone around us was trying to eavesdrop. We quietly talked about how we were going to go back out there that night to see the Blue Ghost of Maddox Bridge Road.

That night, a dozen cars gathered together on Maddox Bridge Road, and sure enough, down at the edge of the river, there was a blue light. Was it the ghost of Maddox Bridge Road? It took half an hour for someone to get the courage to walk through the woods to the river's edge and to investigate the blue light. Slowly, carefully, he walked down to the light, and just as he was within 15 feet or so, my best friend and I jumped out of the woods and yelled, "AHHHHHHHGGGHH."

Our poor victim ran all the way back to the road while the rest of us laughed and laughed because after all, the ghost was nothing more than a flash light placed inside a blue glass vase.

A lot of us love ghost stories. Horror movies. Halloween tricks. Myths. How about you; do you love them?

Here in Luke's gospel, there is a wonderfully frightening story. How can those two words be used together-wonderful and frightening? We have the elements of a classic ghost story that would make anyone's hair stand up in fear.

There is a demon-possessed man. Demons and demon possession were a common thing in Jesus' day, more common than we see today but they are still around. But that is not what frightens people in the story. This man has been naked and homeless for years. He hangs around the cemetery. Folks, this man is living among the dead! Do you know anyone today who lives among the dead? I can't say I do. This man shouts at Jesus. Jesus normally moved among the wealthy and rich, not

the dead, and certainly not in cemeteries. But that is not what frightens people in this story.

When Jesus asks his name, there is that dramatic moment when the demon-possessed man says, "Legion" because there are so many demons in him. You and I can think of some pretty ugly looking creatures when we think of demon-possession but he was also possessed by demons of lying, anger, drugs, sexual perversion, drinking, all demons we know about today.

But that is not what frightens people in this story.

When Jesus exorcises the demons, they begged Jesus not to let them go back into the abyss. Now, Hell must be an ugly terrible place and we've read and heard so much about hell; even these demons did not want to go to hell. They wanted Jesus to let them enter the pigs, not totally aware of what was going to happen. Jesus allows them to go into a herd of pigs. The pigs go wild and run off a cliff to their deaths. What a strange image that is.

And yet, that is not what is frightening to the people.

You know what scares the people?

Luke writes this in his book: "When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid." Amazing! Here's a man that chains could not hold him, he wouldn't keep his clothes on, he's screaming and carrying on, and now look at him. Sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind!

I have to tell you, if I am walking the road and some naked man comes running out of the cemetery yelling at me, that would unnerve me.

But in the story, these people have become accustomed to this.

What frightens them is that this man who was evil, becomes good.

What frightens them is the holy, not the unholy.

It is not just discomfort they feel. It is fear, chilled blood, weak-kneed fear. Luke goes on to say in his Gospel, "Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the surrounding

country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear."

Does this not strike you as strange; these people are afraid of the wrong things and comfortable with the wrong things?

These people are afraid of that which ought to comfort them.

And they are very much at ease with the very things that ought to haunt them with fear.

And you know the scariest thing of all? Their story is our story!

Because the greatest problem facing our society today is that we have become all too comfortable with evil.

William Bennett wrote a little book a few years ago which he named, "The Death of Outrage." There was a time when society showed outrage at misconduct. But no more. We accept the flaws of others so easily, that we accept their misconduct without hesitation.

It is not that we forgive these people; we simply excuse their behavior. In the words of the Old Testament, we have forgotten how to blush. We have no shame.

What happens when people have no sense of shame? The result is Hitler's Germany where 6 million Jews and others too were gassed to death. A man named Dahmer kills and eats his victims. The result is a man who injures or kills a judge or police officer or a school teacher or the students.

What happens when people have no sense of shame? The result is people who do drugs, pre-teens who engage in unsafe, premarital sex, and people who engage in shop-lifting and outright theft time after time after time.

What happens when people have no sense of shame? The result is moral Frankenstein monsters who don't care about the hurt and damage and pain they cause.

The haunting aspect of this passage from Luke is that the people were so comfortable with the presence of evil. Here is a man filled with so many demons that his name is Legion. Luke talks about him as a frightening and dangerous

individual. People had to chain him hand and foot, and it appears people in the community simply took turns watching over him. But no one is bothered by that. They are so comfortable with evil that what frightens them is the presence of Christ. See, unclean spirits had great power over the bodies of those they inhabited. These spirits in this story were so strong that they broke the chains and fetters with which the demon-possessed man was bound. When he was delivered and in his right mind, multitudes came to see him. But instead of sensing the greatness of Jesus and opening their hearts to him, they were afraid and urged him to leave as quickly as possible.

In the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah talks about the spiritual condition of the people.

Their lifestyles have degenerated. The cities are filled with crime. And Jeremiah looks around at them and says, "Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush."

Ouch! That sounds like our culture.

There is something missing in our society.

We have no shame. We are so accepting of the behavior and the lifestyles of the immoral that we have forgotten how to blush.

But I think there is something else that is missing in our society besides shame.

It is the presence of Christ in our community.

In the Gospel of Luke, the community can live with a crazy, naked man living in the cemetery. But they throw Christ out of their community. What's wrong with this picture?

By doing that, they throw out the only hope their community has for redemption.

What is wrong with our community is not so much the presence of drugs and alcohol abuse, and violence and crime. What is wrong is that there is no Christian presence in our community to offer hope and healing.

We come in here, in the safety of our sanctuary and we worship God, but outside in the world, we do not live the Christian life. We see our friends and even our

classmates getting drunk, and we accept it. We hear racist comments, and we are silent. We witness greed, and we join in.

What's wrong with our society is that it is missing something -- us.

What's missing is that we are not acting like Christians.

We have gotten so used to the evil in our culture, that we have stopped speaking out against evil.

We are no longer afraid of the demons in our society. We have made peace with evil.

As a society, we accept drug and alcohol abuse, we accept violence in our homes, we accept racism, and we not only accept but almost welcome and encourage some immoral behaviors.

We are the problem in our culture. We are not living the Christian life in our communities. We are not the Christian we need to be.

You know what is wrong with our society? We are what's wrong.

Verses 38/39 say "The man from whom the demons had gone out begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him." Folks, that is what Jesus has called you and me to do. He doesn't ask us to accomplish great things. That's His department. He doesn't ask us to work miracles. He takes care of that. Jesus didn't tell us to change lives. He is in the life-changing business. No, you and I are to put him in charge of our lives and then simply tell other people what He has done for us.

AMEN!!

“JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE”

Message for the Third Sunday after Pentecost

From Sylvia Gardner

June 29, 2025

Bread is a symbol of life. The bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. It symbolizes Jesus as the source of spiritual nourishment and eternal life, surpassing the manna that God provided to the Israelites in the wilderness.

I expect that most of us remember our mother or grandmother baking fresh bread.

We watched as she carefully measured out the ingredients, kneaded the dough, and placed it in the oven. The smell of the freshly baked bread would fill the house with warmth and comfort. After baking, the bread was ready to satisfy our hunger.

We all have a deep hunger inside of us. When Jesus multiplied the bread to feed the crowd, bread became a sign of sharing. It also symbolized the Word of God which nourished the crowds.

Jesus offers Himself as the very bread of life. Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and who believes in Me will never thirst.' In other words, Jesus is the only manna you need at any and every level of your life. You can always depend on Him - in good times and in bad.

Jesus gives us hope when all else fails; He gives us strength when we are weak; He gives us joy when we are sorrowful; He gives us peace when there is chaos; He gives us love when there is hatred; He gives us grace when there is condemnation; and most importantly, He gives us salvation when there is no other way.

We see that a large crowd has followed Jesus because they saw Him perform miracles, feed thousands, and heal people of their sickness. They were looking for physical bread and food, but instead they found something much greater - the spiritual bread that only comes from God.

But his first step was to meet the needs of physical hunger. Bread is nourishment for the body. Jesus fed five thousand people with only five loaves and two fish - a miracle that only God could do! But what does this miracle mean? It means that God cares deeply about meeting our physical needs!

In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus tells about feeding those who are hungry - and how it reflects our relationship with Him. Those who feed others are rewarded by being welcomed into the kingdom while those who don't feed others are condemned for their lack of compassion towards others in need.

But Jesus also offers spiritual bread that feeds our spiritual lives. It brings our souls to life and offers us a way to salvation. Jesus is the answer to our deepest needs and our truest hunger. Part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount states, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." This verse highlights the importance of inwardly seeking God's justice and truth. Those who truly hunger for it will be satisfied,

In Mathew chapter 4, Jesus says: "Man does not live by bread alone". It means that people need more than just basic necessities like food to live a meaningful and fulfilling life. They also require things like love, relationships, purpose, and a connection to something greater than themselves.

The phrase emphasizes the importance of spiritual nourishment and the word of God. It was a response to the devil's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, where Jesus was asked to turn stones into bread. Jesus rejected this temptation, stating that true sustenance comes from the word of God.

The saying is often used to encourage people to consider the broader aspects of life beyond their immediate needs. It suggests that finding purpose and meaning is crucial for a fulfilling existence. You will find fulfillment in life when you live in God's kingdom, by God's power, and for God's glory.

God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Our Church and our community are places where you can give and share your talents and benefit from the love and abilities of others.

As we internalize Christ as our true bread and true life, I encourage you to live out your faith practically by helping others around you who may be physically or spiritually hungry.

- Feed the hungry
- Serve humbly
- Share God's Word
- Pray with others
- Encourage people in their faith
- Show mercy
- Love unconditionally

“Bread of Life? Jesus lived up to the title. But an unopened loaf does a person no good. True hunger can only be satisfied by knowing Christ intimately.

Have you received the bread? Have you received God's forgiveness?” As we celebrate communion, let us remember the manna, let us remember the miracle of the bread and fish, and most of all, let us remember the Messiah, who alone is the Bread of Life.

Let us ask the Lord to help us to be passionate about our faith and to share it with others. To help us to be bold in our witness and to be a light in this world. To give us a renewed hunger for Him and His Word. To fill us with His Spirit and help us to be filled with the joy of the Lord.

**FOR THIS IS THE FEAST OF VICTORY FOR OUR GOD, ALLELUIA
Amen**

“FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES”

Message for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

From Pastor Norman Staker

July 6, 2025

ISAIAH 66: 10-14 ❄️ GALATIANS 6: (1-6) 7-16 ❄️ LUKE 10: 1-11, 16-20

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS
RISEN INDEED!!

Here's a question you probably didn't expect to hear on this first Sunday in July. What do Thomas Jefferson, Garth Brooks, and Jesus have in common?

This past Friday marked the 249th birthday of our great country and not to engage in any political debate but in my opinion, America has been and will always be a great country! Thomas Jefferson, our 3rd President was primarily responsible for writing the Declaration of Independence; this past Friday also marks the 199th anniversary of his death. He once said, “Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God? I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice can not sleep forever. We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men. Almighty God has created the mind free...All attempts to influence it by temporal punishment or burdens...are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion.”

“No man shall be compelled to frequent support of any religious worship, place or ministry.... otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief.... all men shall be free to profess and by argument to maintain their opinions in matters of religion.”

These were the words of the good Christian deist Thomas Jefferson. His conclusions came out of a mind formed by Christian values, beliefs, and

worldviews. Even his conviction that every individual has the right to worship as he so chooses emerges from the construct that Almighty God has created the mind free.

Jefferson's commitment to establishing a form of government that insured these kinds of liberties was not the result of non-Christian or anti-Christian bias, but more accurately the result of his thinking being shaped by the values affirmed in the Scriptures. Jefferson expresses greater confidence in the power of beliefs and values than in the establishment of constitutional laws and guidelines. On a national level, Jefferson appeals to the power of ethos, ethos being the characteristic spirit of a culture, era, or community as manifested in its beliefs and aspirations, Jefferson appeals to the power of ethos as greater than the highest form of institutional or governmental authority. The force of this would give way to the unstoppable force of a small band of rag-tag soldiers that began the American Revolution and eventually gaining our independence from an oppressive government.

When something happens, everyone feels it in the same way. It's an uncommon commonality. No empire is more powerful than ethos.

That's what we see in the Scripture today. You were probably wondering how I was going to tie our 3rd president with our Gospel today. About 2000 years ago the Jews were involved in ethos themselves. They were caught up in a fire and passion of community of their own. And now that this Jesus, the new Messiah had arrived, they were thinking revolution too. Their hopes for a better life were now focused on this new king who would restore their good fortune. Was Jesus promising something better? Indeed he was. A pioneer of Spirit. He said he had come to bring in the kingdom of God, the rules of righteousness in the world. For 900 years, Jews had been hoping for a restoration of the glorious kingdom of David and Solomon.

But Jesus, as always, was the revolutionary. Little did they know that the revolution Jesus had in mind would not only transform the community, but individuals and a nation would emerge anew as well. They presumed the promulgation of a Jewish exclusivism, that is putting a law into effect, to address the needs of the past. They were defining the future by the past. But now Jesus appoints soldiers in this revolution to go to all peoples-Samaritans and Gentiles included. His kingdom-God's kingdom-was to be inclusive, not exclusive; universal, not provincial. This wasn't exactly what they had in mind. And I don't think our forefathers did as well.

He has assembled his rag-tag soldiers and now gives them their marching orders. “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightening. See I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you.”

But this is how he tells them to fight the fight. He commissions the disciples in a way that will serve as a guide for the new models of mission that the next generations will require in the fight. First he tells of the world’s need for the church’s mission; “the harvest is plentiful.” There is more work than they can do. As with any culture, harvesting time is a season of great urgency. We need to bring on more laborers as the crop ripens. There is no uniform to speak of. In fact, we are to not look any different. So, there is no visible sign of rank and no badges. Second, he says that prayer will be needed to see the mission through; “ask the Lord of the harvest,” he will help you to completion. Third, he insists on the active participation of each disciple; “Go on your way,” he says, the work to be done is not merely the calling of a select few. Each one contributes in their own way and in the framework of their own spiritual journey. Fourth, he warns of the dangers you will face as soldiers and he provides guidelines, weapons if you will; by using innocence and sincerity, vulnerability and non-resistance as means of turning aside anger and danger. Fifth, he calls for a singularity of purpose; “Greet no one on the road”, Travel light. Comb and a toothbrush and no extra luggage. Don’t loiter and make small talk with everyone you meet. Sixth, he specifies the mission; “Say peace to this house and the kingdom of God has come near you.” Soldiers in our cause are to declare what God is doing and bring God’s peace to whoever receives them. Share a meal with whoever receives you. Seventh, the host, not the guest, sets the context for the soldier’s witness; “eat what is set before you.” Do not dictate the menu or impose your own cultural background on others. Eighth, he recognizes that they may not always succeed; “When they do not welcome you...” He knew that they would meet resistance and rejection some of the time. Ninth, Jesus admonishes them to persevere: shake the dust from your feet. Tenth, and finally, Jesus gives the soldiers a word of assurance about the fulfillment of God’s redemptive mission: “Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.”

Jesus was now telling the troops that they were to be looking beyond their own fields, beyond their own backyards, beyond their own past definitions of reality. And that is what he says to the church today. The fields are ripe for harvest. The people are there. And I’m delegating you to discover the new opportunities that are there, to bring them into the kingdom.

Most any successful person will tell you that persistence in a task is a major factor in success. Many tell us that success is ten percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration. The same was true of the early church and as this fledgling nation. It is to be remembered that God is not only the Divine, Creative mind of the universe. He is also the Divine, Creative Energy of the universe. God not only thinks. He acts. He gets things done. Jesus Christ began a revolution that transformed individuals. Nothing is more dangerous to a revolution than winning. When a revolution wins, it must face the prospect of becoming an institution.

Want to get the job done? Most all of us do. And Jesus, our Lord and master teacher, shows us how---delegate, discover, and dedicate yourself to the enormous task at hand. He delivered on his promises. "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." And the promise came true; a church, a billion strong and growing, growing throughout the world.

The fields are indeed ripe unto the harvest. Before sending them out on mission, Jesus instructs an additional seventy-two disciples, warning them about dangers and giving them basic attitudes appropriate for traveling through life.

Luke shows that missionary work is not limited to the Twelve. The worldwide task is too great to limit it to so few. The number seventy-two or seventy in some manuscripts, probably symbolizes all the nations of the world. It also reminds us of Moses' gathering seventy men. The rest of my message this morning is based on popular music. How can you go from Thomas Jefferson to popular music, and specifically Garth Brooks.

Like Paul used the "unknown god" to point the people to the "one true God," we are often called to use the secular to point to the sacred.

The rest of my message this morning is inspired by Luke's gospel and Garth Brooks' famous song from the early 90s, "Friends In Low Places." I'm sure some of you, maybe most of you, are familiar with this song – however, just in case a few of you have never heard it or to refresh the memory of the rest of us, let me share a few verses: Blame it all on my roots, I showed up in boots and ruined your black tie affair, the last one to know, the last one to show, I was the last one you thought you'd see there. (The chorus) Cause I've got friends in low places, where the whiskey drowns and the beer chases my blues away, and I'll be okay, yeah, I'm not big on social graces, think I'll slip on down to the oasis, Oh, I've got friends in low places. Well I guess I was wrong, I just don't belong, but then I've been there before, everything's all right, I'll just say good night and I'll show

myself to the door. Hey I didn't mean to cause a big scene, just give me an hour and then, I'll be as high as that ivory tower, that you're livin in. and he repeats, cause I've got friends in low places.

Now friends, just what kind of folks is Garth singing about? He's singing about friends who frequent places "where the whiskey drowns and the beer chases his blues away." He's singing about not being "big on the social graces" so he was going to "slip on down to the Oasis" one of the "low places" where his friends were.

A friend of mine asked me if my message was going to be about some of my old friends and if I was going to use some as an example.

But, no, this sermon message is not about all of my old friends - or even about my current friends - it's really about Jesus' friends. Jesus had "friends in low places" and He loved them dearly - so dearly that He went to the cross at Cavalry for them.

We can understand prostitutes and the like but why were tax collectors thought of as people in "low places?" You see, because the Romans assessed taxes by districts, they would sell the right to collect the taxes to private contractors, who then charged enough to make a profit. But because many charged extremely high tariffs, there's a new word for us, it's already being used in sermons, but their methods were so oppressive, they came to be despised by the people and were classified with other gross "sinners" such as prostitutes and other social outcasts of ill-reputation. So you see, when Jesus set down to eat with the worst of the worst of people in "low places," He broke all social convention. By doing so He showed His ability and desire to forgive even the worst of sinners, the lowest of the low. Friends, only those who recognize their need of forgiveness can be forgiven. Jesus knew this. Jesus said "they are the ones with the need for forgiveness" and to be able to teach them that they had this need, Jesus had to associate with them.

That Jesus was "eating and drinking with tax collectors (some translations say publicans) and sinners" was one of the dreadful charges brought against Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees - dreadful in their view - thinking they had pressed on Him a crown full of thorns - but it was to become instead a crown of honor.

Now, of course, there is a way in which we may meet, mix and mingle with people in "low places" and with immoral lives that would truly merit rebuke. When one associates with such people so as to descend to their own level and be one with

them in spirit and companionship, he puts himself into their class and under their condemnation.

But this was not the nature of the fellowship Jesus had with these people. The Pharisees and scribes knew this. Jesus associated with His “friends in low places” only as a good man or woman such as those in the church may mingle with their “friends in low places,” even the worst - in the slums of the large cities - on the broad ground of human kinship in order to build a relationship to gain their confidence and lead them up into a better life.

Jesus mingled freely with all classes and conditions of people. We know that Jesus was without sin.

And we all know about the criminals on the crosses of Calvary don't we? There was no more disgraceful way to die than on the Roman cross. Jesus hung there between two criminals and one said, we“... receive the due reward of our deeds.” And then, saying to Jesus, “Lord remember me when You come into Your Kingdom.” Jesus answered by saying, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” That criminal, at that very moment, received the gift of God and the “living water.” He had repented of his sins and was saved by the blood of Christ which had been shed. The other was not.

For Jesus that one precious man hanging in the “lowest of places” was the reason He was there. Yes, our Lord had “friends in low places” - that's where it was happening in His day. That's where His mission was. As He said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”

We may never see the beauty in some people, but when we realize that they are God's beloved children, we should do all we have to do to keep them from drowning.

Jesus saw the beauty of all God's children. He mingled with tax collectors, met with prostitutes, other sinners and even the despised Samaritans because of their possibilities and eating and drinking with them was one of His means of approaching them and winning them to His fellowship.

Yes, Jesus had “friends in low places” and so should we. For you see, with Jesus a “low place” is anywhere there is a precious person who needs salvation. In Jesus' eyes, as it is written in the Holy Scriptures, there is “no more Jew nor Gentile” - ALL are equal in His sight and He desires that “no one should be lost” and will go

to the lowest or the highest places to bring the good news. Jesus will help anyone, if that person will receive His grace. And Jesus commands that we, as His disciples of the 21st century, should do no less!

AMEN.

“AAA ROAD SERVICE”

Message for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

From Pastor Norman Staker

July 13, 2025

DEUTERONOMY 30: 9-14 ** COLOSSIANS 1: 1-14 ** LUKE 10: 25-37

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS
RISEN INDEED!!

Last Sunday I asked you what Thomas Jefferson, Garth Brooks, and Jesus all had in common! If I ‘m not mistaken, all of you shouted back in unison with, well, actually with nothing. Then again, you weren’t really asked to come back with an answer, were you? The only real thing in common was Jesus’ love for all mankind, including Thomas Jefferson and Garth Brooks. That’s because Jesus’ teaching on love is totally radical. He pushes us to practice love, rather than giving excuses, and he points out that to love is to be a neighbor to anyone we might come across who needs our care.

Today we’re going to go a little farther back, no, not from Jefferson, but from Garth Brooks. Most of you may remember the Beatles, back in the 60’s singing "All you need is Love." There’s no doubt that there was a great truth carried in those simple lyrics. If we were to look around the world today, it’s clear that a good dose of love would cure many of the world’s ills. But it’s easier said than done, isn’t it? I mean we have no problem loving those who are close to us, our family and friends, but what about those who are different from us? What about those who are our enemies? That gets a bit harder, doesn’t it? In fact it goes against normal human nature. When someone does something to us, the natural human response is to want to get even.

Our text today opens with, ‘Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And Jesus said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this and you will live.”

So it's word time; I'm going to give you some words or sets of words; see how many you recognize or have even said! 'A good Samaritan; you've got to be kidding; like, no way; what are you trying to say; yeah, right; a good Samaritan.' We started with that one so we'll end with that one.

You and I are used to those words and phrases. We've all heard them countless times. They may cause us to think of someone we know who does wonderful things caring for others. Or they may remind us of stories of people stopping on the highway and helping others. There were no such people who did that the day I had my blowout after my Mohs surgery to remove malignant moles. As a matter of fact, I think some of them were trying to hit me; they came across the white line on the side of the road, but don't worry, I was off the highway!

At one time, 'Good Samaritan laws' were enacted to protect those who did stop to help someone in case that help had a not so great ending.

But you and I know those words; they go together for us. But for those listening to Jesus' parable they did not and therein lies the point of our story today.

In the parable that we're looking at today, Jesus teaches something that's totally radical. He says, for God's people, love is something that reverses the natural response of human nature and that extends even to your worst enemy.

You see, things weren't that much different in Jesus' day than the way they are today. The only difference was that instead of the major divide being Christian/Muslim or Protestant/Catholic, it was Jew/Gentile or Jew/Samaritan. For the Jew of Jesus' day, the Samaritans were a despised people. That's because their religion was a combination of Judaism and the pagan religions of a variety of countries from which the inhabitants had been brought by the Assyrians 6 or 700 years before. And even though they claimed to worship according to the traditions of the Patriarchs, they didn't do it in Jerusalem. They'd set up an alternative temple in Samaria. Whereas Judaism had sought to purify their religion of all pagan practices, Samaritan worship was tainted. So the Jews would have nothing at all to do with Samaritans, and it would seem the feeling was mutual. That's the context in which Jesus speaks. A feeling of hostility and animosity equal to or even greater than that shown by certain parts of our population to Muslims in recent days.

But of course that's just background information. What this parable is really about is the nature of love. The account, though, begins with an expert in the law posing the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" It sounds like a genuine question on the surface, if we didn't know how often such experts had tried to trap Jesus with innocent sounding questions on other occasions. In fact Luke tells us he was just asking it to test Jesus.

But Jesus wasn't going to be caught out quite as easily as that. Instead, in the manner of a good teacher, he turns the question back on the questioner. He asks, "What does the Bible say? What does your reading of the law tell you?"

Well, the lawyer knows his stuff, and he quickly replies with the orthodox response, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Maybe he hopes that Jesus, being this radical teacher from Galilee, might question this orthodox response. Perhaps he's a little surprised when Jesus applauds his answer. In fact Jesus says that he's found the secret to eternal life. "Do this and you will live." That doesn't sound very radical does it? But that's because we haven't heard the whole story yet.

Before we go on, it's worth meditating for a moment on the fact that this lawyer knew the answer before he asked the question. How often do we ask this sort of question, not because we want to know the answer, but because if we keep asking it, it puts off the day when we have to do something about it. This was one of the problems with the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They'd debate the meaning of the law till the cows came home. They'd narrow down the interpretations of various laws until they had it all neatly defined to the nth degree. Jesus regularly criticized them for their concentration on fine detail but ignoring of the more important requirement of obedience to God. And that's what this man seems to be doing here. What he wants is a nice safe intellectual debate with Jesus about the meaning of life, so he can score a few points before he goes home to his mates. But what he gets is nothing like it.

Jesus' response, you see, comes not from a desire to convince him intellectually, but from a pastoral response to see his life changed. He says, simply, "Do this and you will live." "Stop debating and start practicing."

Well, clearly that isn't good enough for this lawyer. He doesn't want to be told how to live. And he certainly doesn't want to look stupid in front of his peers, so, we're told, he seeks to justify himself. He understands the implication of Jesus'

short statement to go and do it. He realizes that Jesus' answer is an implied criticism of his love of debate rather than action. But he's been on the debating team for a long time and he isn't going to be put off that easily. So he seeks to justify himself by asking for further clarification of this simple commandment. It's a time honored method of delaying action. He says: "And who is my neighbor?" "Ha, got you there!"

Jesus has a simple answer to this question as well, but this time it comes in the form of a story. He tells the story of a man, a Jewish man, going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, a hazardous journey because of the isolation of the route. It was a notorious place for bandits to attack sole travelers and that's exactly what happens.

The poor man is robbed and beaten and left for half dead which could have been worse; he could have been dead and that would defeat the purpose of our story today. A priest was going down that road and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. A man of the cloth seeing a man in need and he walks on by. Maybe, just maybe, being a priest, he was on his way to a religious conference, like the synod assembly and he was running late or he was heading to a special wedding and the couple to be wanted him to perform their wedding. It makes sense then why he went by on the other side; he was in a hurry for other reasons. Well, just think about it! Then a Levite saw him and passed by on the other side. This man knew the law; he could recite the Ten Commandments by heart but did he live by them? We're not told but he wouldn't help the man. He saw the amount of blood that the injured man had lost; he knew he was still breathing but very labored breathing; why stop, the guy was going to die anyway. Thou shalt not kill. Would that apply?

Then the hated Samaritan; but a different story. He was moved with pity. Compassion. He didn't walk by; he stopped and not just to make fun of the severely injured man. He bandaged his wounds, poured oil and wine on them, cleaned him all up and he provided the first known ambulance, his donkey, and took him to the first Good Samaritan Hospital for treatment. But he didn't just drop him off and leave; he gave strict instructions to the innkeeper "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Anybody here been to a hospital lately? It's not cheap and granted, cost depends on treatment. The Samaritan said whatever it costs you, I will pay you back. When was the last time any of us did that for a fellow man, let alone a stranger?

It's all wrong isn't it? It just wouldn't happen like that. Yet that's exactly the sort of situation that Jesus describes. And he finishes with the question, "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The answer is, "The one who showed him mercy."

Now let me suggest that Jesus removes two common excuses for love in this parable and then in fact turns the whole question itself on its head.

Excuse 1: I don't do anybody any harm!"

Some people read the law of love in the reverse sense. That is, if I don't hurt anyone by what I do, then it's as good as loving them. No doubt that would have been the response of the priest and the Levite in this story. I mean it would have been foolish to stop. There wasn't much they could do for the man anyway. He was already half dead. And if they stopped they'd run the risk of being attacked the same way he had. Besides which, it would be against the Jewish law to go near him if he were dead already. That would make them unclean, unfit to do their temple duties. The law didn't actually require them to do anything about him, as long as they didn't add to his hurt.

Excuse 2: "Charity Begins at Home."

The second way we tend to limit the way we love is to think of our neighbor as restricted to a certain group. It might be geographical, it might be religious or ethnic or cultural. We might decide that God helps those who help themselves, so that's all we have to help. That's a common excuse for not showing love to the socially disadvantaged. "There's plenty of jobs out there for those who want them. All they have to do is get off their backsides and go look for one."

No doubt the Lawyer in our story would have limited the idea of neighbor to those of Jewish descent, but Jesus turns that on its head. He makes the accursed Samaritan shine out as neighbor to the injured Jewish man. He shows that neighborly love has nothing to do with culture or ethnicity. Rather it depends on mercy and care shown to someone in need, irrespective of person. Jesus points out that the man has been stripped of his clothing, so there's nothing to indicate whether he's a Jew or a Samaritan. All the Samaritan sees is someone in need of his care. And that care extends to risking his own life, in walking slowly with the man slumped in the saddle, despite the risk of further attacks by bandits and to pay for up to two months stay in an inn for the injured man in an act of great generosity.

But Jesus' final thrust in this answer, the sting in the tail of the parable if you like, is the way he asks the question at the end. Notice how he subtly turns the question around from who is my neighbour, who am I to love, to who acted as a neighbour to the man in need. It's a double edged answer isn't it? It shows up the hypocrisy of those who want their love to be restricted to their own social or ethnic group, but it also portrays this member of a group the lawyer despises so much as the one who shows up that hypocrisy. In fact the lawyer can't even bring himself to say "the Samaritan."

It's not always popular or convenient or cheap to follow the example of the Good Samaritan, but it is the right way. His is the way of joy. "Go and do likewise."

AMEN!!

W*I*T*

Message for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

From Pastor Norman Staker

July 20, 2025

GENESIS 18: 1-10A ** COLOSSIANS 1: 15-28 ** LUKE 10: 38-42

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS
RISEN INDEED!!

What brought you here today and don't say 'my car!' Was it a sense of duty, you feel a sense of obligation, a responsibility to the Lord for all that he has done for you? Is it possible to serve the Lord out of habit rather than out of love?

In Luke chapter ten Jesus has been discussing with a Jewish religious leader the two great commands of the Scripture: that we are to love God with all our heart, mind and soul and that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus used the story of "The Good Samaritan" last week to illustrate how we should love our neighbor and now he uses the story of two sisters, Martha and Mary, to illustrate how we should love God.

The story that we are going to read about today takes place in the village of Bethany which is located just outside of Jerusalem. From what we can glean from this passage and in John chapters 11 and 12, Martha lived with her sister Mary and their later to be famous brother Lazarus. It appears that Martha is a widow for she is the head of the household. Here in the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, Jesus and his disciples sit down for some relaxation away from the press of the crowds. Here is a home that Jesus had been many times, a place where he knew He was loved and accepted. Both sisters are delighted to see Jesus but as you will see, they express their enthusiasm in very different ways. In verse thirty-eight we are told, "Now it happened as they went on their way He entered a certain village; where a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying."

People have varying temperaments; some are active always needing to be busy, never able to sit still. Others are thoughtful, willing to sit back and think things

through. Martha is a very activity-oriented person, her sister appeared to be of the more thoughtful nature. I believe that we many times have wrongly contrasted Martha and Mary, as though each Christian should make a choice to either be a worker like Martha or a worshiper like Mary. But in so doing, I think we miss the point; the Lord wants each of us to imitate Mary in our worship and Martha in our work, and to achieve balance in both.

Mary is content to sit at Jesus' feet soaking up the Word, and not "do" anything. But her big sister, Martha was looking around at all the guests and sees the need to prepare a meal. Martha was obviously a great hostess; she got up and began to prepare food for Jesus and all those there with Him. Martha looked and said to her self "What privilege to prepare a meal for the Master!" Mary on the other hand would have said, "What a privilege to sit at the feet of the Master." Is one right and the other wrong? No, duty and devotion are both necessary.

I want to share a couple of stories that speak to the opposite ends of the spectrum here:

The little girl's father had just given her a silver dollar to put into her bank. She excitedly ran off to her room to "deposit" the coin. However, in a few minutes she returned and handed the silver coin back to her father.

"Daddy," she said sadly, "here's your dollar back. I can't get it into my bank." "Why not?" her concerned father asked. "It's too full," she said, obviously disappointed.

Her father accompanied her back to her room and, sure enough, her bank was too full to accept even one more coin. It was filled with pennies!

Sometimes our lives are like that bank. So full of errands, obligations and activities that neither nurture us nor help anyone else, that there simply is no room left for what is truly important -- the silver dollars. Does that sound like your life?

If we are going to be people who do whatever it takes to be the people that God desires for us to be and become the church that He desires for us to be, we are going to have to get rid of some of the "pennies" of our busy lives in order to make room for the "silver dollars."

I read a story that speaks to the busyness of our lives. It seems that Satan called a worldwide convention. In his opening address to his evil angels, he said, "We can't

keep the Christians from going to church. We can't keep them from reading their Bibles & knowing the truth. We can't even keep them from conservative values.

"But we can do something else. We can keep them from forming an intimate, abiding experience in Christ. If they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken. So let them go to church, let them have their conservative lifestyles, but steal their time, so they can't gain that experience in Jesus Christ. This is what I want you to do, angels. Distract them from gaining hold of their Savior and maintaining that vital connection throughout their day!"

"How shall we do this?" shouted his angels.

"Keep them busy in the non-essentials of life and invent unnumbered schemes to occupy their minds," he answered. "Tempt them to spend, spend, spend, then, borrow, borrow, borrow. Convince the wives to go to work and the husbands to work 6 or 7 days a week, 10-12 hrs a day, so they can afford their lifestyles. Keep them from spending time with their children. As their family fragments, soon, their homes will offer no escape from the pressures of work.

"Overstimulate their minds so that they cannot hear that still small voice. Entice them to play the radio or cassette player whenever they drive, to keep the TV, the VCR, & their CDs going constantly in their homes. And see to it that every store and restaurant in the world plays music constantly. This will jam their minds and break that union with Christ.

"Fill their coffee tables with magazines & newspapers. Pound their minds with the news 24 hrs. a day. Invade their driving moments with order catalogs, and every kind of newsletter and promotional offering, free products, services, and false hopes."

"Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from their recreation exhausted, disquieted and unprepared for the coming week. Don't let them go out in nature. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, and concerts instead.

"And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotion."

"Let them be involved in soul-winning. But crowd their lives with so many good causes they have no time to seek power from Christ. Soon they will be working in

their own strength, sacrificing their health and family unity for the good of the cause."

It was quite a convention in the end. And the evil angels went eagerly to their assignments causing Christians everywhere to get busy, busy, busy and rush here and there. Has the devil been successful at his scheme? You be the judge.

If we are going to be 'W-I-T' people, we must learn to survive and thrive in the midst of our busy lives. How can we do this?

"Now as Jesus and his disciples went on their way, He entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?' And W-I-T begins!

Martha opened her home to Jesus. Many times this story is told in way that contrasts Mary and Martha as though each believer must make a choice: a worker like Martha or a worshiper like Mary. Truth is that we all need to be workers AND worshipers and to fulfill our WIT commitment, we must be both workers and worshipers.

Like Martha and Mary, all of us have different personalities, gifts, and abilities, but that doesn't mean that Christian life is an either/or situation – either a worker or a worshiper.

When we invite Christ into our hearts, we must allow Him to have complete control over all of our lives. When we do that, we will worship Him and we will work hard for Him. He is our Lord, our Boss, our Master.

Last week we walked through Maria's house as we blessed each room. The comment was made to me that she didn't know there were that many different verses in the Bible about rooms in a house. And not every home is the same.

Some homes have a study – the room of the mind. It's filled with our thoughts, imaginations, and images that we've put there through the years. That's all well and good but we need to fill our minds with Scripture, to hear it; read it; study it; memorize it; meditate on it. We need to center our thoughts on Christ, His purity and power.

There's the dining room – the room of appetites and desires. Spend a lot of time here trying to satisfy our wants. Favorite dishes: our money, position, power, status, our image in the eyes of others. The only food that will really satisfy is knowing and doing God's will.

There's the living room, normally the room with the most activity. It is the room of intimate fellowship. We need to come here often to spend time with Him. Know that he will always be waiting for us. He'll never miss a quiet time.

Some of our homes have a workroom. In our own strength, we can't produce much of anything. But when we relax in Christ and let His Spirit work through us, we are able to do so much more with our lives.

The recreation or fun room, also a room for fellowship. Do we have some activities and associations that we don't want Him to be a part of? Only you can determine that answer. If we're blessing your house and its rooms, will you take the group into this room just so we can all find out about those activities and associations that you and even more the rest of us don't want Him or us to be a part of.

You can bless the hall closet – filled with those rotten things that we still try to hold on to and hide. We don't want Him or anyone else to go there either. And yet, if He is truly going to be the Lord of our lives, we must give Him the key to that private place and let Him clean it out. And He will! Until we let Him do that, our fellowship with Him will be hindered. Then guess what you as the owner get to do; you get to transfer the title to Him; no longer is He just a guest; He is the owner and Master.

Then we need to listen to His words. "Busyness in the King's business is no excuse for neglecting the King." How many times have we gotten so busy in our lives, even doing good and honorable things, that we've neglected spending time sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to His words? Jesus did not tell Martha that she was wrong in doing all the things that she was doing. She just had her priorities mixed up.

The only way we can grow in our spiritual lives is by regularly sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His words, and responding in obedience. The more we neglect listening to the words of Christ and applying them to our lives, the more those "other things" will have a growing fascination for us and the more unspiritual we

become. We simply must determine when and where we will have our quiet time and then, as Nike says, “Just do it!”

If they haven’t already done it, His words will change us; challenge us; convict us; encourage us; embolden us; empower us. But they will never do those things if we’re not regularly sitting at His feet to hear them. And Sunday morning at 10:45 is not enough!

Are you willing to make a W-I-T commitment? Are you willing to do “Whatever It Takes?” Making a WIT commitment can be an easy thing. Anyone can sign one of these forms. But keeping our WIT commitments hinges on our letting Christ into our lives to be our Lord and Master; listening to and applying His words regularly and consistently; and limiting the distractions in our lives.

AMEN!!

“HAVE A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS”

Message for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

From Pastor Norman Staker

July 27, 2025

GENESIS 18: 20-32 ** COLOSSIANS 2: 6-15 (16-19) ** LUKE 11: 1-13

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS
RISEN INDEED!!

Lord, teach us to pray!

The story is told of a doctor who had some very somber news for the family of a patient. “We have done everything that is possible medically. Now, all we can do is pray.” The father, shocked, asked incredulously, “Doctor! Has it come to that?”

Our world is not naturally inclined to prayer. Prayer is not normally seen as ongoing communion with God. It’s a practice left for emergencies, for desperate times. We keep tabs on the weather. If serious storms are forecast, we monitor the Weather Channel, and maybe have the foresight to stock an emergency kit with a radio, flashlight, and bottled water among other things. If the street begins to flood, we contemplate evacuating. But we may not turn to prayer until the evacuation routes are impassible, and all human means of escape are exhausted and Kerrville Texas was a case in point because it all happened so fast!

Jesus did not come to proclaim an absent God who could be reached long distance in an emergency. He lived his life in daily fellowship with God. He did pray on special occasions, in the Jordan River when he was baptized; in the Garden of Gethsemane when he struggled with his call to go to the cross; he spent all night in prayer prior to calling the 12 disciples. But Luke informs us that prayer was Jesus’ regular habit. We’re told that he would ‘withdraw to deserted places and pray.’ Jesus had just finished praying when the disciples requested, “Lord, teach us to pray.” “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Where did you learn how to pray? Our parents may have taught us bedtime prayers, or said grace before meals. We've heard about prayer in Sunday school and sermons. Prayer has been demonstrated in worship services. We may have even taken a class on prayer (I understand no such class is offered in seminaries). Our very first Bible study was on prayer and the different types of prayer. For the most part, however, our knowledge of prayer has been obtained in bits and pieces.

Our spotty education on the subject of prayer often leaves us with questions such as, "Am I praying correctly?" "Is this too small to pray about?" or "My prayers never seem to be answered; does prayer really work?" We also end up with a chronic sense of guilt—prayer is one more Christian activity that we are not doing correctly, that we are failing.

I will not be brash enough to say that I will answer all of your questions and teach you everything you need to know about prayer in one sermon. I do believe, however, that the gospel text has a great deal to teach us about prayer. Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion is such a hypothetical question, the answer is self-evident, no parent would do that!

Two men were drinking in a bar when the topic of conversation got round to religion. One man turned to his friend and said; "I bet you don't even know the Lord's Prayer."

"Wait a minute," said his friend, "I do too know the Lord's Prayer." So his friend pulled out a \$20 and said, "I bet you this \$20 that you can't say the Lord's Prayer." His friend confidently replied: "Now, I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep..."

At that his friend interrupted him. "Here's your money" he said, "I didn't think you knew it."

Sadly there is great ignorance when it comes to the Bible.

One particular four-year old prayed, "And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets."

One cannot escape any number of jokes and misunderstandings when it comes to the concept of prayer. Most of us have heard about the child who believed God's name was Harold Wishart because each week they prayed, "Our Father wishart in

heaven, Harold be thy name". Likewise, there is the story of the smart, computer-literate 5 year old whose rendition of the Lord's Prayer included, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from e-mail."

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'

And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."

I have chosen this morning to look at a part of our gospel lesson this morning, the part concerning what has become known as the Lord's Prayer. This prayer has become something that is prayed at times without even thinking about what we are saying. And to help us understand how misunderstood this prayer has become, I would like to read this morning a dramatization of this prayer.

Someone is praying the Lord's Prayer and God breaks in to answer:

Our Father who art in Heaven...

'Yes?'

Don't interrupt me. I'm praying..

'But you called Me.'

Called you? I didn't call you. I'm praying. Our Father who art in Heaven.

'There, you did it again.'

Did what?

'Called Me. You said, "Our Father who art in Heaven..." Here I am. What's on your mind?'

But I didn't mean anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my prayers for the day. I always say the Lord's Prayer. It makes me feel good, kind of like getting my

duty done.

'All right. Go on.'

Hallowed be Thy name.

'Hold it. What do you mean by that?'

By what?

By "Hallowed be Thy name."

It means.... it means.... good grief, I don't know what it means. How should I know? It's just part of the prayer. By the way, what does it mean?

'It means "honored," "Holy," "Wonderful."'

Hey, that makes sense. I never thought about what "Hallowed" meant before. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.

'Do you really mean that?'

Sure, why not?

'What are you going to do about it?'

Do? Nothing, I guess. I just think it would be neat if you got control of everything down here like you have up there.

'Have I got control of you?'

Well, I go to church.

'That isn't what I asked you. What about that habit of lust you have? And your bad temper? You've really got a problem there, you know. And then there's the way you spend your money...all on yourself. And what about the kinds of books you read?'

Stop picking on me! I'm just as good as some of the rest of those phonies in church.

'Excuse me....I thought you were praying for My will to be done. If that is to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it. Like you, for example.'

Oh all right! I guess I do have some hang-ups. Now that you mention it, I could probably name some others.

'So could I.'

I haven't thought about it until now, but I really would like to cut out some of those things. I'd like to, you know, be really free.

'Good, now we're getting somewhere. We'll work together.... you and I can have some victories that can truly be won. I'm proud of you.'

Look, Lord, I need to finish up here. This is taking a lot longer than it usually does....Give us this day our daily bread.

'You need to cut down on the bread too... You're overweight as it is.'

Hey, Wait a minute! What is this, "Criticize Me Day?" Here I was doing my religious duty, and all of a sudden You break in and remind me of all my hang-ups.

'Praying is a dangerous thing. You could wind up changed, you know. That's what I'm trying to get across to you. You called me, and here I am. It's too late to stop now. Keep on praying. I'm interested in the next part of your prayer.....Well, go on.'

I'm scared to.

'Scared? Of what?'

I know what you'll say.

'Try me and see.'

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

'What about Sally?'

See I knew it! I knew you would bring her up! Why she's told lies about me, cheated me out of money. She never paid back that debt she owes me. I've sworn to get even.

'But your prayer....What about your prayer?'

I didn't mean it.

'Well, at least you're honest. But it's not much fun carrying the load of bitterness around inside, is it?'

No, but I'll feel better as soon as I get even. Boy, have I made some plans for ol' Sally! She'll wish she never did me any harm.

'You won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet. Think of how unhappy you are already. But I can change all that.'

You can? How?

'Forgive Sally. Then I'll forgive you. Then the hate and sin will be Sally's problem and not yours. You may lose the money, but you will settle your heart.'

But Lord, I can't forgive Sally.

'Then I can't forgive you.'

Oh, you're right! You always are. And more than I want revenge on Sally, I want to be right with You. All right! I forgive her. Help her to find the right road in life, Lord. She's bound to be awfully miserable, now that I think about it. Some way, some how, show her the right way.

'There now! How do you feel?'

Hmmm....not bad. Not bad at all, In fact I feel pretty great. You know, I don't think I'll have to go to bed uptight tonight for the first time since I can remember. Maybe I won't be so tired from now on because I'm not getting enough rest.

'You're not through with your prayer....Go on.'

Oh, alright.....And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

'Good...good. I'll do that. Just don't put yourself in a place where you can be tempted.'

What do you mean by that? 'Quit hanging around the wrong places, watching inappropriate movies and television, listening to sinful conversations; getting into compromising situations. Change some of your friendships. Some of your so-called friends are beginning to get to you. They'll have you completely involved in wrong things before long. Don't be fooled. They advertise they're having fun, but for you it would be ruin. Don't use me for an escape hatch.'

I don't understand.

'Sure you do. You've done it lots of times. You get caught in a bad situation, you get into trouble and then you come running to me. "Lord, help me out of this mess, and I promise you, I'll never do it again." You remember some of those bargains you tried to make with me?'

Yes, and I'm ashamed, Lord. I really am.

'Which bargains are you remembering?'

Well, when the woman next door saw me backing away from the neighborhood bar. I'd told my wife I was going to the store. I remember telling you, "Lord, don't let her tell my wife where I've been. I promise I'll be in church every Sunday."

'She didn't tell your wife, but you didn't keep your promise, did you?'

I'm sorry Lord, I really am. Up until now I thought if I just prayed the Lord's prayer everyday, then I could do what I liked. I didn't expect anything to happen like it did.

'Go ahead. Finish your prayer.'

Oh yes...For Thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

'Do you know what would bring me glory? What would make me really happy?'

No, but I'd like to know. I want to please You. I can see what a mess I've made out of my life, and I can see how great it would be to really be one of Your followers.

'You just answered the question.'

I did?

'Yes, the one thing that would bring me glory is to have people like you truly love me. And I can see that happening between us. Now that some of these old sins are exposed and out of the way, well, there's no telling what we can do together.'

Lord, let's see what we can make of me, OK?

'Yes, let's see.....'

Have you ever thought of praying the Lord's prayer in that light?

What would God say or is saying to you as you pray that prayer?

Have you forgiven others of their sins to you? Have you been staying out of places and things that are tempting? Do you trust in God to provide for you as you pray 'give us this day our daily bread?' Do you believe that the kingdom of God is now on this earth and it is coming because of you?

As you pray the Lord's Prayer, do you expect to be changed, forgiven and blessed?

If we truly stop and think about what we are praying for in the Lord's prayer, it is truly a powerful prayer, a perfect prayer, a prayer that does handle all the aspects of our lives!

And notice that this prayer is not a selfish prayer; it does not pray for your needs alone, but prays for the needs of all people whenever we pray it. You've heard it said, 'there's no I in team.'

You can't say the Lord's prayer, and even once say "I."

You can't pray the Lord's prayer, and even once say "My."

Nor can you pray the Lord's prayer and not pray for another.

For when you ask for daily bread, you must include your brother!

And while we're on the subject mister; you can't forget your sister!

For others are included in each and every plea. From the beginning to the end of it, it does not once say "me."

One day Charles Spurgeon, a famous British preacher from the 19th century was walking down the sidewalk when he heard a young man swearing and using God's name in vain. As he came upon the man, Spurgeon asked, "Can you pray as well as you can swear?" The young man laughed and said prayer was useless. Mr. Spurgeon held up a very valuable coin and said, "I will give you this coin if you will promise me never to pray." The young man grabbed the coin, thrust it in his pocket and walked away. As the day progressed, the young man began to feel a bit uneasy. Never to pray? Never? Perhaps he had made a bad bargain because he may need to call upon God someday for some urgent need. When the young man returned home, he and his wife discussed the incident and decided to see if they could find the person who had given the coin and to whom the husband had made the promise. They found Mr. Spurgeon, who, seeing their interest, began to talk with them about Christ and soon had two new converts. I ask you, would you sell your privilege to pray for a valuable coin? What would you be willing to sell it for?

The Lord's Prayer is an all inclusive prayer as we pray it. For it does not just see my life in reference to God, but your life and other lives too.

Have you thought about how the Lord's Prayer is used in our worship service on communion Sundays? Where does it come in? How is it used?

The Lord's Prayer is prayed just before we come to communion as a meal prayer. It is said before communion as we would pray a prayer of grace before we sit down to eat.

It is the most perfect meal prayer, grace prayer, as it lets us pray for all of life before we eat and drink from the Lord's table, the perfect table prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is an inclusive prayer, a non selfish prayer, a grace prayer, the perfect prayer for us to use to develop our lives with God through Jesus Christ.

In closing, if prayer is not a natural tendency for us, if it is not natural for us to seek and practice communion with God, should we simply give up? Far from it. Jesus is more than a teacher, more than an inspiring example. Jesus practiced prayer as communion with God and comes to give us a share in his communion with God.

When we pray as Christians, we enter into a prayer life that is always going on. We enter into the prayer life of Jesus, who always lives to pray for us. He strengthens our weak prayers; he converts our selfish prayers. He gives us the will to pray, 'thy will be done.' He gives us the heart to pray and then teaches us to pray.

We may not get an answer right away, but we need to persist. We may not get what we want but answers will become much clearer if you do not give God an agenda or timetable. Give God yourself, and invite God to do with you what God seems best.

AMEN!!

“GIMMEE GIMMEE”

Message for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

From Pastor Norman Staker

August 3, 2025

ECCLESIASTES 1:2, 12-14, 2:18-23 ✱ COLOSSIANS 3: 1-11

LUKE 12: 13-21

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS
RISEN INDEED!!

This is a story and not just a story but a true story, about a man in Mississippi named George Phillips who was getting ready for bed one night when his wife told him that he had left the lights on out in his workshop. George went out to turn off the lights but saw through the window that there were people in there in the process of stealing his tools.

He immediately went back into the house and phoned the police, who asked "Are they inside your house?" George answered, "No, they're out in my workshop." The officer replied that all the officers were busy right now, and that he should simply lock his door and a patrol car would be sent out when one was available.

George said, "Okay," hung up, stayed right where he was, slowly counted to 30, and then phoned the police again. "Hello, I called you a minute ago because there were burglars in my workshop. Well, you don't have to worry about them now because I've just shot them all." Then he hung up.

In less than 5 minutes, three squad cars, an armed SWAT unit, and an ambulance showed up. And the police caught the burglars red-handed. But one of the officers said to George: "I thought you told me that you had shot them!"

To which George replied, "And I thought YOU told me that there were NO officers available!"

Now, I would not recommend trying this to get the attention of the police; but I did use this story to grab your attention this morning and I think it worked!

I can remember as a kid, sometimes we would go over to a person's house, and Mom would give us that stern warning, "Now don't you all be acting greedy when you get over there." So there were several occasions in which the person would say, 'would you like some more spaghetti or another cookie or whatever she was serving,' and even though deep down inside I wanted to say yes, if Mom was around, I was able to say, "no thank you." Whenever we went over to someone's house, the first thing we were asked by mom, was "did you eat anything over there." If you said yes, you knew the next words were going to be, "didn't I tell you not to be greedy!"

There is a verse in Proverbs 22 that warns us about being greedy. It says not to eat too much food of a stingy man, because even though he may tell you to have some more, go ahead and eat, in reality he's counting the cost and his heart is not with you. Many of us are some times like that stingy man. People come over and we tell them to eat, eat, and have some more. No sooner than they are out the door, we get on the phone and say, "those were the greediest people I ever met; they almost ate me out of house and home."

What is greed? Greed goes beyond eating too much. Greed is wanting more than what's needed or wanting something that belongs to another. We live in a society that runs on greed, encourages greed, and uses greed to keep us in bondage. We even feel good when we can satisfy our greedy nature. Let's suppose for a moment that Aladdin showed up with his magical lamp. Suppose the genie popped out, and said 'Okay, you've got three wishes. What shall it be? Think quickly.' I wonder how many of us would ask for things such as a more godly character, a more forgiving spirit, a more servant like attitude, or to be more generous in our giving.

Instead, what probably came to the minds of many were a bigger house, a nicer car, designer clothing, better jewelry, a lot more money, and a lot more free wishes. It's amazing that we can be perfectly happy with something, until we go and find out that someone we know, has something slightly better. An adult is happy with her three bedroom house, until her younger sister gets a five bedroom house with all new appliances. A man is happy with his new Toyota Camry until his next door neighbor pulls in with a new Cadillac Lyriq.

A man or woman is happy with his or her spouse, until he or she sees another person who shines in the area that his or her mate is lacking. A pastor, hey it hits all of us, a pastor is thrilled that his church added 25 members last year, until he finds out that the pastor down the street added 25 each month last year.

The Bible calls this desire to have other things covetousness. We've seen that verse in the Bible, in the 9th and 10th commandments. "Thou shall not covet." It says you shall not covet your neighbor's house, your neighbor's wife, your neighbor's servants, your neighbor's ox or donkey or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

To covet means to have a strong desire for something, or to be envious of another person. You either want to get what belongs to another person, or you refuse to be happy until you can get your own.

There is a big difference between the excitement of wanting to get something, and the actual feeling you have once you get it. No matter how much things promise to satisfy us, they always fall short. Sooner or later, we're out chasing something else. Often times we have not finished payments on the last item that we just had to have. All of us have items that it seemed like we just had to get it, but now we don't know why we desperately needed it because we never use it. How do we get out of the need to have to have the latest, the biggest, the best, and the name brand?

It begins with the realization, that greed is not motivated by God, but by sin. If a person trusts you with their property, if they loan you their lawn mower or toaster on Tuesday, what's going to happen if they ask for it back on Saturday? Most of us believe that God can trust us with a million dollars. I'm convinced that if God gave everyone of us here in the church a million dollars today, over half of us would not be in this church a year from now. Half of that half that left wouldn't be in any church a year from now.

Suppose God allowed you to win the lottery, and you've promised, "Lord. I'll give you 10%, but God turns around and says no you give me 90% and you can have the 10%." The greed in most of us, would want to argue tooth and nail with God over that, not realizing the 10% is more than the nothing we had to start out with. I keep saying it over and over, if you're not a giver with a little check, you won't become one with a bigger check.

Why do we need to be concerned with greed and covetousness? After all, who does my coveting hurt? It's one of those little sins that's respectable. It's not like adultery, or stealing, or sexual sins. Let's look in our Bibles for a moment at 1 Cor 6:9-11: 'Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor

male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.' And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were justified, you know what that word really means, it's just as if I'd never sinned in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Do you see the word greedy listed among the so called big sins. Do you see why none of us can look down on each other based on our weaknesses? We frown on the drunk in the streets and go home to a home we can't afford to live in, just because we got greedy. Greed didn't just start. Christians have always struggled with the issue of "how much is enough." Just like there is hope for all the other groups mentioned here, there is hope for us struggling with greed. Paul says, some of you were this way, but that means that Jesus Christ showed them a way out.

Some of us are very close to being like the rich fool in our New Testament reading. Just as his grounds produced a good crop, so have ours. Oh we may not have accumulated plants, but we have accumulated things. We don't say, 'Oh I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones, because we don't usually have enough money to do it.' Instead we say, 'I've got to put this in the attic, or in the basement, or in the closet, or in the garage or under the bed.'

Almost all of us here, have perfectly good stuff sitting in the basement, in the attic, in the garage, in the closet, doing absolutely nothing for the kingdom of God. We could use that same stuff, make it available to people who truly need it, and never miss it while being a Christian witness for Jesus Christ.. Most of us are saving it, so that when we die, our family members can throw it all away as junk. These same things that we could have given away when we were alive to help those in need, will come back to haunt us when we stand before God and God asks, why were you hoarding all this stuff?

Where did we get all this stuff from. Most of it was accumulated by wanting more than what we truly needed, and then hoarding it just in case we might need it in the future. Just like the rich man, we're busy collecting for that one day, when tonight might be the night that God requires our souls. If you died today, would your attic and basement speak in your favor, or against you?

We may think that our greed affects only us, but that's not true. Our greed can hurt those around us.

Every day of our lives we are being pulled in a number of different directions; on one hand we have family responsibilities pulling us one way; our obligations to the church pulling us another and friends pulling us in yet another. We are left wondering, "What is really important in life?"

Our passage that we looked at today in Luke forces us to make a decision about what kind of life do we want? Do we want a life dependent on things of this world or a life with no guarantee of any of the world's goods but close to God?

This passage is very relevant to us today because for most people in America the main priority in life is to attain enough money to live the good life. Today no matter what one possesses, someone else has something bigger, better or different. Especially in American society the distance between comfortable and covetous may not be that great.

Jesus is in the middle of a sermon teaching his disciples to fear God alone, when he is suddenly interrupted by a man who is dissatisfied over what he considers to be an unfair division of his father's estate between himself and his brother. I find it oddly comforting that even the Lord Jesus Christ could not keep everyone's attention. One such man says in verse thirteen, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

This man really didn't ask Jesus for a decision on what would be a fair division of the estate; he just demanded, "Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!"

Jesus did not answer as he was expected to do. In verse fourteen he says to the man, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" Jesus refuses to be sidetracked from his mission of seeking and saving the lost.

Instead Jesus does not make a legal judgment but a moral one. Jesus knew that this family feud over inheritance was only a symptom of a greater problem, greed. In fact the "you" in verse fourteen is plural indicating that both brothers have a problem with greed. As long as both brothers are suffering from greed no settlement would be satisfactory.

Jesus tells him that the most important thing is not for him to solve his problem but that his heart be changed. But if we are honest, "How often have we gone to God asking him to change our situation rather than asking him to change our heart?"

The way we become rich towards God is to invest in His church and in the lives of His people.

We began this study by noting that daily we are pulled in many different directions and are left wondering “What is really important in life?” The answer is found in verses 20-21: “God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.” Life in spite of all its complexities can be reduced to the very simple decision “Are you going to live life for yourself or are you going to live life for God?”

AMEN!!