

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR SEPTEMBER 27, 2020

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

- Ezekiel writes during the Exile, when the people were asking why this “punishment,” this disaster, has fallen upon Judah. How would these words speak to those circumstances?
- Similarly, we also want to place blame rather than to take responsibility. As one example, some get more caught in who is to blame for Covid19 rather than asking what we can do in response.
- Today, we often seek to understand our behavior by looking at the family system we grew up with. When and how is this useful? When and how is it not useful?

Psalm 25:1-9

- This psalm is an acrostic psalm: each line begins with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order. Of course, we only see the first 10 letters/verses.
- Note how the psalmist recalls God’s love and mercy. When he calls on God to “remember not the sins of my youth and my transgression” (The Message has, “Forget that I sowed wild oats”), it is a reminder that we are not bound by our past behavior. By God’s grace and mercy, we move forward in God’s paths.
- Perhaps the most important thing we can pray is asking God to remember us only according to his steadfast love. We ask God to think of us and define us by grace. In so doing, we ask that we might think of ourselves in the same way.
- The psalm connects with the other readings in at least two ways. First, as in Ezekiel, the psalm calls for a personal responsibility and righteousness, here rooted in God’s love. Second, as in Philippians, the psalm calls for humility: “You lead the lowly in justice; and teach the lowly your ways.” What does humility or being “lowly” mean to you?

Philippians 2:1-13

- We live in a deeply divided society, country, and world. What then does it mean to “be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord, and of one mind”? How do we live and practice this in the church? How about in our society and country?
- Many scholars think that verses 6-11 is an early Christian hymn that Paul uses as a way to encourage Christ-like behavior within the church. What would it mean for the church to “empty” itself as Christ “emptied” himself?

What would it mean for the church to “be obedient even unto death” as Christ was? What would it mean for you?

- If you began to “empty yourself,” what would be some of the first things that would have to go? What would be the hardest things for you to release?
- We as Lutherans emphasize that we are justified by grace through faith. Given that, what do you think Paul means when he says, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”? Is this in conflict with our understanding of grace?

Matthew 21:23-32

- Jesus emphasizes that faithfulness/obedience is not in the words that we say but in the response and actions that we have. He points to the example of the tax collectors and prostitutes who “get it” when the leaders do not. Where can we see examples outside the church who “get it” often better than we do?