

**PENTECOST:  
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

**Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Proper 23**

**October 11, 2009**

**Amos 5:6-7, 10-15**

**Psalm 90:12-17**

**Hebrews 4:12-16**

**Mark 10:17-31**

**How long?**

This past weekend, we held a “Leadership Retreat” for the Deacons and Church Council at which we seek God’s guidance for all our plans and goals for the next year – it’s an annual event. We pray and dream about all the things we think we are supposed to do and then we present those plans and dreams to the church to see if everyone else agrees! This is always an exciting time for us as we plan for the future and look to see what God might have in store for us.

We always want meaningful worship, sweet fellowship, stimulating discipleship and transformative service – oh, and of course, we want more people to come to these splendid things. In other words, we want to GROW! In many minds, growth is the evidence of a job well done – especially in church life. What does it mean, then, when you implement your strategic plan and nothing happens? It’s just not fair when you do all the right things and see no results!

This is echoed in the Psalm for this week: “Turn, O LORD! How long? Have compassion on your servants!” (verse 13, *NRSV*) “How long?” is a recurring question throughout the Psalms (Psalm 6:3; 13:1,2; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4 and our passage for this week, 90:13). The question certainly indicates that things are not right in the world. You can hear it in our Amos passage, “Ah, you that turn justice into wormwood” (5:7, *NRSV*). How long? How long before you give us relief, how long before you give us deliverance, how long before you give us healing, how long... how long... how long? How long before you give us GROWTH – it’s all for your kingdom, you know?

“How long?” is a difficult question to answer. People have been asking it for a long time. Hebrews gives an answer; although, it’s an answer we might not want or expect. It says that the Word (*Logos*) of God is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12). In other words, Jesus understands the nature of our question. It later says that we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

We serve one who knows us better than we know ourselves and who knows the depths of that age-old question, “How long?” I think he asks it a lot more than we do – “Father, how long will your children whine and complain and harass and steal and kill and destroy?” So, I guess the next time we start complaining about why our church isn’t growing as much as we would like it to grow, we need to remember that quote from the French philosopher and essayist Voltaire, “The biggest reward for a thing well done is to have done it.”

This week’s Reflection was prepared by the Rev. K. Jason Coker, an ordained minister with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and pastor of Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Connecticut. Visit [www.wiltonbaptist.org](http://www.wiltonbaptist.org) to learn more about the ministries of Wilton Baptist Church.

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: East Caribbean** – With thanks to God for success with debt management and with prayers for further progress, and with prayers that the next phase of planned projects will reap anticipated transformation and that the churches will become the leaders in this endeavor, and with prayers that young people will move toward enthroning the Lord in their lives; **Haiti** – With thanks for God’s blessings and for the ability to move to safer premises, and with prayers that God will continue to protect the Bible Society staff in their new location, and with prayers for distribution projects and for the translation of the Bible into Haitian Creole; **Suriname** – With thanks to God for the completion of the New Testament in Akawaio and for the New Testament revision in Patamuna, and with prayers for the New Testament translations in Sranan, Tongo, French Creole, and Wapishana, and for the development of Bible work, especially in Guyana and French Guiana, and with prayers for socio-economic stability and peace.

**Activity Corner:** “How Long?” Travel Log

Supplies needed: Bible; Bible map of Palestine in the time of Jesus; Bible encyclopedia (or computer with Internet access); writing paper; pens or pencils; drawing paper and crayons for younger children.

Refer to Mark 9:33; 10:1; 10:33 and find those places on the map (Capernaum, Jordan River, Jerusalem). Gather information about Palestine and about Capernaum and Jerusalem (the terrain, climate, etc.). Invite members of your household to trace Jesus’ journey from Capernaum to Jerusalem. Determine the distance between Capernaum and Jerusalem (the map should give a scale; i.e., 1 inch = 30 miles). Discuss how long it would take to make such a journey on foot. Encourage everyone to plan the journey and to create a travel log; e.g., what route they would take; what towns they would travel through; what they will “see” along the way; what items (clothing, food, etc.) they would bring; where they would spend the night, etc. Younger children may be encouraged to draw a picture that depicts the journey. Conclude with a prayer by reading Psalm 90:1-2, 14 and with a meal or snacks with food similar to the types of food eaten in Bible times. Invite everyone to share their thoughts about their “journey.”