



Whoever does not know God hidden in suffering
does not know God at all.

- Martin Luther -

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Acts 1:12-26

The fulfillment of Scripture is a recurring theme in the book of Acts. All sorts of things that might appear to be random or contrary to God's plan are understood to be in accord with Scripture and part of God's plan.

In this episode, Judas' betrayal of Jesus and his eventual death are understood as fitting into God's overall plan of salvation. Luke does not explore here the relationship between divine necessity and human responsibility. He simply states that Judas' actions were a fulfillment of Scripture.

- *What significance do you find in the differences between this recollection of Judas' death and the version in Matthew 27:3-10? If Judas' actions were part of God's plan, how can Scripture say he was responsible for what he did?*

The remaining eleven determine that they must replace Judas so that their number will again be complete. They have clear requirements for the replacement. (Note that these requirements rule out Paul, whose story will fill half of the book of Acts).

- *Why do you think it was so important to replace Judas? What do the specific qualifications the eleven were looking for tell us about what they considered important?*

Eventually, it will become important for believers to be able to witness to what they have not seen. As time passes and the church grows, the witnesses of the Gospel will include people who never heard Jesus teach, never witnessed a healing, never saw him risen from the dead. But for now, the eleven find it important for the replacement to be a first-hand witness, and they determine that the best way to choose between the two candidates is through the casting of lots. They assume that God will make his will known in this way.

- *Do you think there is any significance to the fact that we never hear another word about Matthias?*

Psalms 68:1-10

The psalmist celebrates the righteous judgment and the abundant gifts that the Lord gives. He looks out for the needy and protects his people from their enemies. His love for orphans and widows is a defining characteristic of his nature.

- *Why is it important to praise the Lord for his goodness and equity? Does it help us to appreciate the Lord when we think about his works?*

1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11

Peter is clear about telling believers that they will suffer for the faith. Jesus suffered and so shall we. He was insulted, persecuted, and killed so why would those who love and follow him think it would be any different for us? Peter explains that suffering such as this, for Christ's sake, should not cause us to be ashamed. Instead it brings God glory.

- *No one asks to suffer, to be sure. But how does our suffering for Christ indicate our faith in him?*

Peter urged believers to cast all of their concerns on Jesus who protects them from the prowling enemy. We are to resist the devil and be aware of his tempting ways even as we await future glory in Christ.

- *How often do you think about Satan prowling around like a roaring lion seeking to eat you alive? How does that drive you to the comfort of Jesus?*

John 17:1-11

Today's gospel reading is from Jesus' prayer on behalf of his disciples. It comes just before Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. In it we see Jesus' request of the Father, his will for his followers and his faith that God the Father will protect and sustain them. It may seem rather strange to hear Jesus asking to be "glorified." It does not fit neatly with how we tend to think of Jesus, as humble and self-denying. We also have in our ears the witness of the other gospels, and Jesus' desire to have the cup pass from him if possible. But here we see Jesus calling upon the Father to glorify the Son, with a clear sense that what has taken place and what is about to take place are not to be avoided. In glorifying the Son, in raising him from the dead, the Father will be glorified because the world will see who he really is.

- *Is Jesus, after all of his self-giving, now seeking his own gain? In what way does Jesus show the nature of true glory?*

Throughout this prayer, the events of the past, present, and future are brought together in this "hour." Jesus spoke of future events as if they had already happened ("I am no longer in the world") and past events (being glorified in his followers) as not yet complete. Jesus' prayer is on our behalf too, and not just for those near him. Jesus appealed for unity among his followers, the same unity that is shared between God the Father and God the Son. It is Jesus' will that his followers would be one, as Father and Son are one.

- *What do you think it means for a diverse people to be "one"? In what sense are the Father and the Son "one"? How does that help us understand what Jesus is talking about here?*