



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.

First Lesson: *Isaiah 58:3-9a*

“Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” The total lack of shame in asking such a question is remarkable. Where true humility seeks to divert attention from the self, God’s people have adopted “humble” acts with an expectation of getting God’s attention for them. In the chapter that precedes this lesson, God is angry and has hidden his face from Israel because of their wickedness and idolatry. In that context the people cry out to the Lord, “Why have you not seen our fasting?” God answers their cry reminding them that their fasting is not done as an act of true worship. Their piety is misplaced. Their humility is insincere. God’s fast is one that has a distinct purpose: to loose people from bondage, to free the oppressed, and to break unhealthy yokes that keep them enslaved.

- *How is our worship of God meant to be a reflection of our love for him and the whole creation?*
- *How do we often miss that mark and make worship about us rather than about true devotion to our Lord?*

Psalm 112:1-9

In speaking of how the righteous live in the world, the psalmist offers a rather optimistic picture. Those who fear the Lord, who abide by his word, are blessed. They have wealth and riches. They will not be forgotten. They will look in triumph on their foes. It sounds too good to be true.

As we read words like these we want to believe that they provide a formula for success in this life. Follow God’s commands and you will be rewarded richly. The problem is that this flies in the face of the theology of the cross. Passages such as this one do not negate what we have heard elsewhere about the adversity God’s people can expect.

Crucial to a proper understanding of this psalm is to recall that God’s ways are not our ways. God’s ideas about riches and blessedness are at odds with what we value. The ultimate fulfillment of the great promise found in this psalm must await the resurrection. In the new kingdom we are blessed with riches beyond measure. In the new kingdom our names are remembered forever by God himself. That is true blessedness.

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-18)

In Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth, he reminds them that he did not come to them with a superiority complex,

For the office of the ministry and the word of God are hence to shine as the sun, and not go sneaking and plotting in the dark, as in the play of blindman’s bluff; but all must be done in broad daylight, that it may be clearly seen that both preacher and hearer are sure of this, that the teaching is rightly done...

– Martin Luther –

lording over them his vast knowledge and deep faith. Rather, he came to them having “decided to know nothing among you except Christ crucified.”

- *What is the central thing we need to know about Jesus? How does that shape the way we talk about our faith to others?*

Paul continues his letter by admitting his weaknesses and fears, his inability to woo them with eloquent speech, and his full reliance upon the Holy Spirit. He says that this is what brought them to faith, not anything that he did.

He reminds them that together they speak in words that reflect the wisdom of God, which calls them to a greater maturity. This wisdom is a mystery that can only be discerned by the Spirit of God.

- *What is spiritual maturity? How do you know if you are becoming more mature in your faith?*
- *How are the most humble of leaders often the ones who are able to teach us the most?*

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 5:13-20

We’ve probably all grown up hearing the expression “salt of the earth” used to describe people. It usually refers to people who are honest, humble, and hardworking, people who can be relied upon.

- *Is this the same thing Jesus is talking about here?*

Jesus refers to salt that loses its saltiness. When have you ever had salt that wasn’t salty? The salt of the gospel of Jesus Christ never loses its ability to transform lives. As followers of Christ we are called to be salty for the good news, to let our light shine, and to never lose our zeal for the gospel.

- *When so many people in the world go without hearing the message of Jesus, is that the fault of the gospel? What can we, as individuals, do to share the good news?*

At our baptism we hear these words of Christ, “Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” The light that others see in us has nothing to do with our personality, intelligence, charisma, or generosity. Rather, it has everything to do with the light shining through us that comes from the Light of the World. Any good works we might accomplish are led by the Holy Spirit and not our human will.

- *In what ways do our lives point others to Christ?*
- *In what ways do you understand that light as something that comes only from God?*