

Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 21, 2024 (Year B)



*The love of God does not find but creates that in which it delights;
the love of man is generated by what it delights in.*

– Martin Luther –
Heidelberg, 1518

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 4:1–12

Peter and John found themselves on trial for healing a lame beggar in the name of Jesus. The high priests demanded to know by what authority this happened. These words take us back to Luke 20:2, where the very same question was asked of Jesus himself. “Tell us by what authority you do these things,” the religious leaders demanded.

- What does “authority” mean in this context? What were the religious leader really wanting to know?

Believers in the 21st century still wrestle with those for whom God’s Word is not any kind of authority in their lives, much less the final authority. God’s Word is often relegated to the realm of nonsense or fairy tale. It is not simply that the world disagrees with the conclusions of faith, but they disagree with the very notion of faith itself.

In a culture of such cynicism and moral relativism, it can be difficult to stand up for the authority of Christ and his holy Word in our lives. Just as Peter and John stood firm on the Source of power that healed people, so we too are called to stand firm confessing our allegiance and obedience to the One who is the chief cornerstone of all life.

- When and where have you experienced the Word of God treated as foolishness? In what sense is this a matter of authority?
- In what ways are your decisions, both great and small, based upon the authority that Jesus has over your life? Is this a stifling power in your life or is it freeing?

Psalm 23

The words to Psalm 23 are so familiar to many that they often flow by without being heard. They are words of comfort and peace, and yet, there is a conflict that is central to the psalm. We hear of darkness and death, evil and enemies — though somehow, in the midst of it all, God is in charge. He takes care of us, as the good shepherd takes care of his sheep.

- Faith is often expressed in spite of present circumstances (e.g. “even though I walk ...”). Is this something we can only appreciate in retrospect, looking back on hard times? In what sense can it be a word of grace in the midst of difficulties?

1 John 3:16–24

In our world, the word “love” is often used when something less powerful might apply better, such as “like” or “admire.” It’s easy to betray that shallow kind of “love” because it’s not really sacrificial in nature. It’s just an expression. In contrast

to such a superficial definition, John draws a connection between love and the laying down of one’s life. Love is more than a feeling. It is shown in real deeds and actions for the sake of another. Anything less than this is just words. Jesus once said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

- In what sense has God proved his love for us in truth and action? In what sense has Christ made salvation more than just a word or idea for us?

Those who love God are called to look out for their neighbors in need, just as Christ has provided for our deepest felt needs. His sacrificial love is more than a smile or general “niceness” — his love was and is an intentional action that benefits others. We are called to follow in his ways, love the way he loved, and abide in him as he abides in us.

- What’s the difference between sentimental love and sacrificial love? Can they be the same?

John 10:11–18

Jesus said that there is a marked difference between the Good Shepherd and the hired hands who are paid to look after the sheep. This word in Greek is *misthotos* and it is only used five times in the entire New Testament, not to disparage those who are hired to do work for another, but to point to a difference between our relationship with God and the relationships we have with other human beings. Even the best of hired workers will not care for their sheep the way the Shepherd does, because the sheep ultimately belong to the one Shepherd alone.

- What is the difference between simply acknowledging that Christ has done you good, as opposed to saying that you belong to Christ?
- How do we faithfully live out our calling as stewards and servants of God, caring for one another — without setting ourselves up as masters or saviors of others?
- When are we tempted to look for salvation in human beings? How can this happen even in the Church?

Jesus emphasized that his life was not taken from him, but that he laid it down of his own accord (verses 17–18).

- How does this fact inform the way we hear the story of Jesus’ arrest, trial, and crucifixion?
- Similarly, what does it say about Jesus’ power to bring about resurrection and new life for us?