

Sola Lectionary Text Study

Advent 2

December 10, 2023 (Year B)



Some here take the “land” in a single sense... to mean the blessed Virgin...I believe that the word of the Holy Spirit is not thus to be limited to one of these three earths but refers to all three at once: the Virgin, mankind, and the literal earth. For in fact all three have been blessed at the same time...

– Martin Luther –
Lecture on Psalm 85

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.

Isaiah 40:1-11

After dire warnings of the punishment that was about to be inflicted upon God’s chosen ones, Isaiah shifts gears in chapter 40 with a word of comfort. God’s wrath has an end date. He will not punish his people forever. And when their term of punishment is over, they will return to their homeland. The highways prepared by the Babylonians for their pagan festivals will give way to the royal highway of the Living God, and all the nations will see the glory of the God of Israel.

- *In what ways does judgment always come before comfort?*
- *Reflect on the context of our culture that despises “judgment.” Why is judgment necessary in our lives? How have you experienced God’s comfort in the face of your own sin or in the face of corporate sin?*

Isaiah compared God’s people to grass. Their faith was fleeting. It withered away when they came into contact with the breath of God. In contrast to the inconstancy of his people, God’s word endures from age to age. The punishment he inflicted on his people did not (and does not) mean abandonment of his people. God’s enduring promise will be revealed to God’s people once again; that is why it was necessary to send a voice into the wilderness – to grab the attention of God’s children and urge them to prepare for his coming into their midst.

- *Does this passage reinforce or undermine the notion that God is merciful? How does this declaration of God’s enduring Word bring comfort?*
- *How does this passage relate to the promise of the Messiah?*

Psalm 85

Part of being the people of God meant not only living in a covenant relationship with him, but also inhabiting his holy land. The psalmist praised the Lord for his providence concerning the house of Jacob and the land of Jacob. God’s forgiveness covered the sins of his people who had been serially unfaithful. To be apart from the land that was given to Israel was as much of a curse as to be separated from a relationship with God. Luther discussed the idea that “land” in this psalm referred to the Virgin Mary who was the fertile ground that bore the blessed fruit – Jesus. (Lecture on Psalm 85, LW, Vol. 11)

- *In what ways does God’s forgiveness and mercy create a mutual faithfulness between Creator and creature?*
- *In what ways is God’s sending of his Son a reflection of his mercy?*

2 Peter 3:8-14

Most of us do not specialize in waiting. Impatience and instant gratification have come to define us as a people. Waiting in traffic, waiting in the checkout line, or waiting for our problems to cease and desist bring out the worst in us. But Peter reminds us that our time is not God’s time. Our sense of how and when things ought to happen does not control God’s action. God works on his own timeline with his own purposes that are beyond our limited understanding. Our desire to speed things along is nothing more than original sin at work, pushing us, once again, to doubt that God actually knows how to be God.

- *What sinful inclinations reveal themselves in you when you are forced to wait? How do you handle that?*
- *How might you offer care for those who are playing an anxious waiting game themselves?*
- *Given our problem with waiting, when we stop to consider how long the church has been waiting for the new kingdom it causes us some concern. Sometimes it even causes doubt. What if our waiting is in vain?*
- *Does the delay in Christ’s return impact your faith in any way?*
- *How is our witness during the waiting shaped by our hope for the coming kingdom?*

Mark 1:1-8

Mark’s Gospel opens with a strange fragment of a sentence. “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” It sounds more like a chapter heading than an opening line to a narrative. And from there, Mark tells us, not about Jesus, but about John the Baptist. The beginning of the good news of Jesus actually begins with the story of John.

But that opening fragment tells us a great deal. The One whose story is about to be told is the Christ. He is the Messiah of God, the Anointed One, the One who will redeem Israel. And, more than that, he is the Son of God. He is no ordinary prophet. He is not one among many. Everything else we read in this gospel will be shaped by the fact that we, the readers, already know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

- *How does the knowledge that Jesus is the Christ affect your understanding of the events described in Mark’s gospel? Does it affect your views of the other people we meet in the gospel?*
- *If Mark didn’t begin his gospel this way would it be obvious to you that Jesus is the Christ based on the events that unfolded?*