

Epiphany 4

February 2, 2025 (Year C)



God's will is done when he hinders and destroys every evil design and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature that would keep us from hallowing his name and prevent the coming of his kingdom.

–Martin Luther–
Small Catechism

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.

Jeremiah 1:4–10 (17–19)

This passage about God knowing us before we were in our mother's womb is awe inspiring. Before we were born we were set apart to be God's own precious children. Imagine the love of a creator who takes such care to create everything every detail about us and to know us so intimately that he calls us "holy" before we even take our first breath.

- How does this passage indicate the sanctity of all human life?

In verse four, God says that he "formed" Jeremiah in the womb. The Hebrew word used here is the same word that would be applied to a potter shaping a clay vessel.

- How does it make you feel about yourself to know that God created you like an artist creates a beautiful clay pot? How does this silence our excuses for not serving God, as it did for Jeremiah here?

Speaking the message of God and sharing our faith with others can be an intimidating prospect. But God promises that he will be with us and strengthen us in this task.

- What does it mean to say that God has "put words in our mouth"? How does God himself work through us to speak his Word? (See also Jesus' words in Mark 13:11.)

Psalm 71:1–6 (7–11)

We use the word "hope" frequently in our daily conversations. We hope for good weather, for enough rain to feed the crops in the spring and summer, for our children to be safe and healthy. We hope for jobs or opportunities to come to fruition, and we hope that things will go well. But in verse 5, the psalmist says: "You are my hope, O Lord God."

- How is placing our hope in God different from placing our hope in a particular result or outcome?
- How is hope in God (in a biblical sense) different from mere wishful thinking or optimism?

The Hebrew the word for "hope" here is *tiq-wah*. In a literal sense, this word refers to strands of rope or other string-like materials that are woven together (it is the same word used in Joshua 2:18 when Rahab was instructed to let down a red "cord" for the Israelite spies).

- In what sense is hope in the Lord like being held by a strong cord? How does God give us something to which we can cling as we yearn for safety, security, and salvation?
- In what sense is hope the "future tense" of faith? (See Hebrews 11.)

1 Corinthians 12:31b–13:13

The Christians in Corinth were impressed with themselves that they had the gift of speaking in tongues. This became a real issue in the Church as some were claiming superior status over others based on particular gifts. Soon there was an "in-group" of those who looked down on others who did not share the same gifts.

- Have you ever experienced this in the church? How can it happen in the case of spiritual gifts, as well as with more mundane talents and skills?

It is part of our human nature that we tend to lift up certain spiritual gifts over others. But Paul emphasized that the variety of gifts are all needed for the building up of the Body of Christ. Paul said that if we do not have love (i.e. the agape love that shows patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control) then we have nothing. Without the gift of love that builds one another up, does not seek its own way, and looks out for the needs of others, we are not exhibiting what is actually the greatest gift of the Spirit.

- How is a church without love, not really a church of Christ at all? How do you know if love is present within a community of faith? What evidence do you find?
- Who are the people that we often forget to treat with love and mercy in the church?

Luke 4:31–44

Have you ever wondered how the demons knew exactly who Jesus was, even when the others gathered around didn't? This is not to say that the demons had faith in Him, only that they recognized the authority he had over them.

- How does this help us to understand what it means to believe in God? How is true faith more than just an acknowledgment of God's existence?

The objective of a demon is to destroy the faith of the person whom it has taken possession of. It is interesting that the demons recognized Jesus as the One who had the power to destroy them.

- Are the demons simply projecting their own motives onto Jesus? Or are they right in their fear of Jesus?

Notice that Jesus does not let the demons proclaim his identity ("you are the Son of God"), but then he immediately goes out and proclaims the Good News himself.

- Why would Jesus not want demons to reveal his identity? Who does Jesus reserve that task for? Why is that essential?