



Faith is ever the actor, and love the act.

– Martin Luther –

Sermon on Romans 15

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 10:34-48

As sinful human beings, we are prone to making snap judgments about people and situations based on what we see or think we see. We are apt to categorize people without even thinking about what we are doing. Whether it is gender, race, or physical characteristics, we are often unaware of the biases that we react to unconsciously, and that includes the negative ones and when we show favoritism.

- How would you feel if the true feelings and judgments that cross your mind about people on a daily basis were exposed?
- How would you feel if you could know or hear everything that people thought about you?

In this text, Peter testified that God is not one who shows preference to individuals based upon their outward appearance, wealth, influence, nationality, or any trait that has to do with what the eye can see. Rather, God looks upon our hearts and sees the evidence of our respect and devotion to him. In verse 43, Peter affirms that, “everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”

- Is this good or bad news for you as you think of God not granting preference to certain people? In what sense is forgiveness always a gift of grace and mercy?

Psalms 98

Psalms 98 is another of Scripture’s victory psalms. The psalmist encourages us to sing our praises to God because of the wonderful things God has done and will do. Not only has God shown his faithfulness to his chosen people, but he has revealed it openly to the “nations” (*goyim* in Hebrew = the unbelieving Gentile peoples).

- Can you think of any examples from Scripture of when God revealed his glory to unbelievers?
- How does Paul affirm this same reality in Romans 1:19-22? What does Paul mean when he says “they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20)?

Many in our modern society (and in the Church as well) like to reduce the message of Christ to the simple statement: “You shall not judge.”

- In what ways do we, as biblical Christians, affirm both the grace of God and our human accountability to God?
- What does it mean that God will, “judge the world and the peoples with equity?” (Think about this question in light of Jesus’ offer of salvation to all.)

1 John 5:1-8

John continued his discourse on love by asserting that loving God means loving those who believe in God, and following his commandments. There is no greater evidence of our devotion to God than through the way we treat one another. This is not always an easy thing, yet John indicates that love and service for one another is a sign of our love for God.

- How are you doing with this in your congregation? What about in the larger expressions of the church of Christ? Where have you found such love lacking? On the other hand, where have you been surprised by the power of love at work in believers?

For the sake of this love we are called to keep God’s commandments. Those commandments are said to not be a burden to us. Jesus said a similar thing in Matthew 11:25-30, proclaiming that we are to allow him to yoke himself to us and help us bear the load.

- In what sense does Jesus’ love for us make all burdens light? How does that apply to the keeping of God’s commandments?
- Is this love something that we can ever do on our own? Why or why not?

John 15:9-17

Jesus instructed his followers to abide in his love, and by doing so, to bear the fruit of his love. The true mark of discipleship is love for one another that is rooted in the way that Christ loved his followers. This makes it something far deeper than mere affection. Jesus loved his disciples to the end, an end that happened on the cross of Calvary.

- In these verses, how does Christ show that all this is the result of his choice (election) in our lives, and not our own? In what way does faith go beyond personal likes and dislikes?

Jesus made a distinction between calling his disciples “slaves” and calling them “friends.” Friends are ones that we are vulnerable with, who know us and our deepest joys and heartaches. To call someone “friend” is not something we ought to take lightly. It is a commitment to another to be in relationship with them and to care for them with no ulterior motive.

- In what ways do we use the term “friend” when we might more accurately mean acquaintance? How many true friends, besides Jesus, do you really have?
- Does being no longer a slave of Jesus, but a friend, mean that there is nothing he asks us to do for him? In what sense are good works the fruit (the natural result/goal) of faith?