



If you want to abolish sin, you not only wrong sin, but you also want to trespass on the office of Christ and say: I want to be Christ. ... This is the sin supreme! Let Christ be Christ; let Him keep His office. We have enough other sins to answer for.

– Martin Luther –

Easter Sermon, April 17, 1530

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.

Genesis 4:1–15

In one of the first instances of what will become a pattern throughout the Old Testament, the story of Cain and Abel finds God blessing the younger son. There is no reason given for God's regard for Abel's offering over Cain's. The reasons are entirely hidden within God. Here we find God's work of electing, of choosing. Our instinct is to come up with some reason to justify this election, to find some hint of what makes Abel more worthy than Cain. But to do so misses the point. God elects as he pleases, and our questioning of his decisions is the fruit of our original sin. That sin lurked at the door, finally taking control of Cain's heart and turning him to murder.

- *Does God's preference for Abel's offering seem fair to you? Do you find yourself wanting more of an explanation for this preference?*

When Cain is questioned by God as to Abel's whereabouts he asks what has become a famous question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Sin has taken such a firm grip on his heart that he thinks nothing of speaking disrespectfully to God himself. Like a petulant teenager, he shrugs and snarls in response to his sin being discovered. While Cain tries to deflect attention by pointing out that he can't possibly be held responsible for someone else's behavior, in reality his question becomes the basis for the command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

- *Are you your brother's keeper?*

Despite his grave sin and the serious punishment that goes with it, God stops short of punishing Cain with loss of his own life to match the life he took. God's mark remains on Cain, protecting him from those who would presume to take his life.

- *Why does God continue to protect Cain?*
- *What does this show us about God's judgment and mercy?*

Psalms 5

The psalmist utters a prayer that many people have likely thought but have not dared express. On the receiving end of the machinations of the wicked, the psalmist calls for God to judge his adversaries with no mercy. Confident in his own righteousness, he is bold to stand before God and plead his case against his enemies. Knowing that God "hates all evildoers," the psalmist prays that this hatred will result in condemnation. Transgressors will, of course, be put

to death, but for Christ's sake his chosen ones will not be defeated by this death.

- *Have you ever prayed or wanted to pray for God's judgment on your enemies? Where did you receive confidence in your own righteousness?*
- *How does such a prayer reflect our sin? How does such a prayer reflect our faith?*

2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18

As the epistle to Timothy is brought to its conclusion we learn that the author has "kept the faith." As he prepares for his death he reflects on the shape his life has taken. He is anxiously awaiting the crown of righteousness that has been prepared for him. But it is a strange thing to declare, before the end of one's life, that one has "kept the faith." The fight is not yet over. The race is not yet finished. The faith that is reflected in these statements is the confidence that Christ Jesus will continue to hold him close and bring him to the heavenly kingdom.

- *Is the Christian ever free of threats and temptations in this life?*

Luke 18:9–17

The sin that always lurks at the door pounces on the Pharisee who was praying in the temple. Standing before God he can do nothing but point to his own virtue, his own righteousness, his own superiority to the poor sinner across the aisle. The Pharisee comes to God not seeking his mercy and grace, but in order to provide a resumé of his virtues, evidence of his righteousness. The tax collector, meanwhile, is acutely aware that he has no righteousness of his own to bank on. His only hope is God's undeserved mercy and grace. Jesus warns his hearers that those who exalt themselves will be humbled when the reality of their condition is fully realized.

- *Where are some places that the dangers of spiritual pride lurk, waiting to pounce on believers?*

Part of the reality of being a child is the lack of independence. A child depends on adults for their very survival. So to receive the kingdom as a child is to receive it as one who has nothing to offer in return. It is to trust in God to provide the very faith he demands. This goes against our desire to be independent and take credit for what we have. Instead, this call to receive the kingdom as a child takes us back to our beginning, back to our baptism, where Christ comes to us, ready or not.