

Epiphany 5

February 4, 2024 (Year B)



*Just as there is no fire without heat and smoke,
so there is no faith without love.*

– Martin Luther –

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 40:21–31

This lesson expresses well what theologians refer to as the “transcendence of God” — God experienced as separate and distinct, holy and above all other existence, inspiring awe and praise. This is often contrasted with what is called the “immanence of God” — God experienced as close to us, like a friend who is part of our lives, with us in all that we do.

- *Why are recognizing both the transcendence and immanence of God important in our lives of faith? What is the risk in emphasizing one to the exclusion of the other?*
- *How does worship as part of a congregation allow us to experience what we read about here in Isaiah?*

There are still many in this world who do not know, who have not heard, and who have not been told since the beginning about God. In a world filled with idols that give nothing and can do nothing, the message of the prophet commissioning people to go and carry the news of this One remains relevant and important.

- *Who do you know that has never heard of God and his love for humanity? (Even if they have heard of God, they may not have ever heard of his love for them personally.) How might you share that love and intimate knowledge with someone today?*

Psalms 147:1–11

The Lord is worthy to be praised, sang the psalmist, for he builds up the weak, restores the exiles, and binds the brokenhearted. He has gathered the outcasts of Israel and lifted up the humble.

- *At one time or another, we have all felt out-cast. How is this good news for those who feel like they don't belong? Why is hard for some who search for belonging to accept that God loves and favors them?*
- *How is this psalm reminiscent of what Jesus said in Matthew 10:29–31 about the sparrows and the hairs on your head?*
- *We usually think of God's grace and mercy in terms of redemption. How is our faith in God as Creator also a recognition of God's grace and mercy?*

1 Corinthians 9:16–27

Paul discussed his duty to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Like the prophets before him, he spoke of his task as less of a choice and more of a compulsion (Compare Jeremiah 20:9). Paul's compulsion to proclaim Christ was driven by the hope that all people might know Jesus' saving grace. When we are

captured by the message, it is not something we can keep silent about. It is such good news that we want everyone in the world to hear it.

- *Have you ever heard some good news that you just had to share? Does telling others the good news about Jesus feel this same way in your life? Why or why not?*

In verses 24–27, Paul used athletic imagery to urge the Corinthians to “run the race” of faith with discipline and purpose, striving to reach the finish line.

- *When it comes to living the Christian life, in what sense do we need constant training, dedication, and self-control?*
- *In this race of faith, what is the finish line?*

Some misunderstand this passage by thinking that Paul was talking about striving hard to “earn” our own salvation. That is not the case. Paul clearly says that “only one receives the prize” (v. 24).

- *Who is the One human being who is capable of winning the race of faith? If we indeed will receive a victory wreath at the end of the race, whose wreath do we receive?*

Mark 1:29–39

Soon after Jesus called his disciples to come and follow him, he healed Peter's mother-in-law of a severe fever. After sunset many came to find him, bringing loved ones who were ill or demon possessed to be healed by Jesus.

- *Have you ever considered what an unending task Jesus had throughout his ministry? Do you tend to see requests for your time and efforts as burdens or opportunities?*
- *What discipline did Jesus have when demands on him became especially difficult? (see verse 36) What can we learn from this example?*

Sometimes it's just nice to go where no one knows your name, where you don't have to answer questions, and where no one wants anything from you. We all feel that way at times. Jesus could have retreated into seclusion and stayed there, but he didn't. He moved on to the next challenge, knowing that there were people who needed what he had to offer. He was never too busy to tend to the needs of his flock.

- *In our lives of faith, how do we get away without giving up? How does the concept of regular “Sabbath Rest” help in this regard?*
- *How do we teach others the discipline of resting in the Spirit, so that God might use them for his purposes?*