



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.

The sinner does not so much need to be washed as he needs to die, in order to be wholly renewed and made another creature, and to be conformed to the death and resurrection of Christ, with whom he dies and rises again through baptism.

– Martin Luther –

The Babylonian Captivity of the Church

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Ezekiel was a prophet at the time of the Exile in Babylon (586-539 B.C.), when the people of Judah had been conquered and carried off to the land of Babylonia, far from their homeland. Dejected and feeling sorry for themselves, the people cried out that God was not being fair. They began to repeat an old proverb that they thought explained their misery: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” The people believed that they were suffering for their parent’s sin when in fact they were suffering for their own disobedience and idolatry.

- *Why is it so easy to blame others for the suffering that is caused by the sins we commit? Why couldn’t (or wouldn’t) the Israelites in Exile see their own culpability?*

In response, the Lord says it is the people of Israel who are the ones not being fair and just. God insists that he has not only been just, but that he has also been gracious and merciful to those who are his own. Those who are righteous shall live, says the Lord, but those who turn away from righteousness will die.

- *In these verses, how does God express both his justice and his mercy? Instead of complaining and blaming past generations and even the Lord himself, what did God want the people to do? Why is this so hard?*

Psalms 25:1-10

This psalm is written from the perspective of a person who has been put down and treated badly by others, a person who feels shamed. It is not a boastful prayer, but an expression of dependence upon God. He knows he isn’t sinless, but he also knows where to turn in times of trial. When the psalmist said that he waits for the Lord, he is confessing that he waits with hope for the One who will rescue and shelter him from harm.

- *Are there times in life when we suffer the scorn of others legitimately? Does that make it any less difficult to bear, knowing that we deserve the shame we’ve received?*
- *What gives the psalmist hope? What does the writer believe God can do?*

Philippians 2:1-4 (5-13) 14-18

Paul here is speaking to people of faith — people who knew the promise of Christ in their lives. On that basis, he encourages them to live in a manner that follows from such a faith. He gave some practical advice on what a faithful life

looks like in a world of sin and evil. At the center of this passage (verses 5-13) is a section known as the “Kenosis Hymn,” a beautiful creed-like poem describing the suffering and exaltation of Christ.

- *In some lectionaries, the center verses (5-13) are listed as an optional part of the reading. How does the surrounding text in Philippians 2 sound different if these verses are left out?*

Paul knows that there is comfort in Christ. He knows that there is encouragement, affection, and heart felt sympathy in the Body of Christ. He simply appeals to what he knows and what the Philippians also know — that Christ grants love, unity, and support to his people for the mutual uplifting of one another. This is the foundation of the faith community and Paul appeals to this reality to continue to encourage believers to act in a Christ-like manner toward one another, with the mind and heart of the suffering servant Jesus, who emptied himself unto death for his beloved children.

- *How does this hymn strengthen your faith and desire to live a servant’s life? What do you hear in this passage that encourages you?*

Matthew 21:23-27 (28-32)

Upon entering the Temple, Jesus was confronted by the chief priests and the elders of the people regarding his authority. They want to know who gave him his authority. Jesus turns their question around and asks them about John the Baptist and where John’s authority came from.

- *What answer did the elders want to give Jesus? What prevented them from giving that answer?*
- *What was the correct answer to Jesus’ question? How is it also the answer to the elders’ original question to Jesus?*

It is interesting that Jesus responded to his accusers by referring not simply to John’s preaching, but to the baptisms that John performed at the river Jordan. Like Jesus after him, in baptism, John had actually dared to proclaim the forgiveness of sins.

- *What does this text say about the nature of baptism? Is baptism simply a human ceremony, as some claim, or does it convey a promise by God’s authority?*

As the reading goes on, Jesus drew the distinction between those who claim to obey God and those who actually do obey him.

- *What evidence of faith does Jesus want to see in us? What sort of “change” does he want to happen? In the end, by whose authority does faith happen in our lives?*