



But the wise people met with a wisdom they neither knew of nor looked for; it was divine wisdom. Christ seizes the spear and club in their hands and turns their weapons against themselves, answering neither yea nor nay, but compelling them to give an answer which indicts themselves.

– Martin Luther –

House Postil: Matthew 22:15–22

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 45:1–7

The word of the Lord came to King Cyrus of Persia. Though Cyrus was an unbeliever who did not worship the God of Israel, God chose to use Cyrus as an instrument to achieve his divine goals. As we hear, God calls Cyrus by name and equips him for His own purpose: to free his people from their bondage in exile and allow them to return home.

- Does God's use of Cyrus necessarily imply that Cyrus had a saving faith in the one true God? In what ways can and does God use even those who do not know him or worship him?
- How are the good things in life a reflection of God's will and creative action, even if they are done by people who may not be doing things in God's name?
- What does verse 3 tell us about God's motive for "calling us by name"? How is this similar to what happens to us in Baptism?

In verse 1, Scripture uses the word "anointed" to refer to Cyrus. This word in Hebrew is *meshia* (what we know as the word "Messiah"). This title was generally reserved by the Hebrew people to refer to their own kings, chosen by God — such as Saul, David, and Solomon.

- What would it have meant to the Jewish people to hear God call Cyrus the Persian his "anointed"? How might their understanding of God's ways have grown? Who do we acknowledge as THE "Anointed One" who has delivered us from our bondage to sin and allows us to return "home"?

Psalms 96:1–9 (10–13)

In this psalm of praise, the greatness and majesty of God are extolled above all things, including the so-called "gods" of other nations. The people are enjoined to add their prayers and praise to God in worship. Even nature itself is called to give glory to God.

The word "ascribe" in verses 7–8 comes from the Hebrew root *yahav*, literally "give." Used as an imperative, it's a way of saying "attribute to" or "give credit to."

- When it comes to self-worth and success, why do people like to take credit for their own accomplishments and works? How about when it comes to faith?

1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

Paul writes the faithful in Thessalonica, that he, Timothy and Silvanus are truly grateful for their ministry and that they give thanks to God for them. Paul reminded them that the three men keep the whole group in prayer, acknowledging

that the Holy Spirit has been given to them for faith and the mission of the Gospel.

- Does the Holy Spirit have to be present for faith and for the mission of the church? (See Luther's explanation to the Third Article of the Creed.) How do you know the Holy Spirit when you see it?

Paul goes on to mention that the Christians became "imitators" of them and of Christ which made them an example to others of the life of faith. The Greek word used here for "example" is *tupos* which is akin to the English word "type" or "typical." Paul and his friends were representative of what faith in Christ looked like – they gave up everything for the Gospel. They travelled wherever the Spirit led them. They ended up in prison and abused and beaten for the mission of God.

- In what ways is our life in Christ atypical of the life of unbelievers?
- Why do we often suffer for the transmission of the Gospel message? Does that make it easier or harder? Why?

Matthew 22:15–22

The Pharisees set out to trap Jesus once again. This time they tried to flatter him with platitudes about being truthful and not caring about the opinions of others. Then they asked him about paying taxes to Caesar. Their ploy was to corner him into saying something objectionable. If Jesus answered, "No, we don't have to pay taxes," they could accuse him of anarchy. If he said, "Yes, of course we must pay taxes," they could accuse him of a lack of devotion to God. Jesus' profound response foiled their trap.

- In what way was the Pharisees' question an attempt to justify their own sinfulness? In what ways do human beings try to use God's words to make a case for our own sinful desires?

In Baptism God promises to mark us with his likeness as he calls us into a life of following Christ. On our foreheads we are branded with the cross of Christ and sealed with Holy Spirit forever. This is the ultimate truth of our lives! At the same time we are called to honor those in civil authority as an expression of our honoring of God who places people in positions of power.

- What does God want us to give to Caesar? What in us does God want for himself?
- How is Luther's explanation of the fourth commandment an acknowledgement of our duty to honor those in authority over us as a reflection of how we honor God?