



God loves and hates temptations. He loves them when they provoke us to pray to Him and trust in Him; He hates them when we despair because of them. If you feel well, sing and praise God. If you feel ill, call upon God and pray.

- Martin Luther -

From the Dietrich-Medler collection of Luther's thoughts (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.

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

Habakkuk began with a familiar question: How long? How long will God continue to allow violence, destruction, and wrongdoing? How long will God's people have to wait for an answer? All around him, the prophet saw the realities of a completely fallen world. All around us, we see the same thing. People are suffering, sin is dismissed in the name of love, there is so much division in society that we wonder how we can manage to come together for good. The prophet wondered, as many of us have, "How long can this go on?"

- *Have you ever found yourself wondering why God doesn't act more clearly to bring an end to violence and strife?*
- *Does it seem like there is more violence in the world now than when you were younger? Is that true or is it the instant communication and information that reaches us so quickly?*
- *How is the fallenness of the world a challenge to faith?*

God's answer might not be exactly what Habakkuk had hoped for. "If it seems to tarry, wait for it." God has an appointed time for what he intends to do, and we don't get to speed up the timeline to match our agenda or our concerns. This is part of what it means to live by faith. It means trusting that God knows what he is doing, even when we would like him to be doing something different.

- *How do you understand the relationship between faith and patience? God's time and our time?*

Psalm 62

In this Psalm of David we hear language we don't naturally associate with a king. The Psalmist describes himself as a victim, a leaning wall, a tottering fence. Far from the fearsome warrior who takes down his foes, David is under attack. He is on the verge of being taken down, and there is no one around him he can trust. He is surrounded by those who sing praises to his face, but are secretly hoping for his demise.

- *How does authority lend itself to being surrounded by flatterers? Do you suppose people in authority know who they can trust and who they can't?*

In the face of forces he perceives to be arrayed against him, David comes to recognize that God alone is his source of hope. God alone is his rock and salvation. There is no false flattery with God. There is no deceit. God alone can be trusted with absolute confidence.

- *How do you know that God can be trusted?*

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Paul wrote to his young friend and son in the faith, Timothy, with words of joy and appreciation for his sincere and genuine faith. No doubt young Timothy had been bolstered in the faith by his mentor and teacher, Paul.

- *Who in your life has encouraged you in the faith? Have you ever written to them or told them how their faith has strengthened yours?*

Paul tells Timothy to "fan into flame" on the gifts that God has given him. He wants to remind him not to take for granted the faith and love Christ has instilled in him. His witness is to be shared with the world so that people will know God's saving power and love.

- *What do you suppose Paul would tell you to "fan into flame?"*

Luke 17:1-10

Our Gospel reading gives us plenty to work on. It warns us of the temptations to sin that are all around us. We pray so often, "Lead us not into temptation," but how aware are we of those temptations as they creep into our mind, heart, and being? Jesus makes it very clear that if our actions cause others to sin then it would be a better situation for us if we had a millstone tied around our necks and were thrown into the sea. How terrifying!

- *If we really paid attention to Jesus' words about causing others to sin, what would we be doing differently? How might the world be different if everyone attended to this?*

With readings like this we have to be reminded that the Gospel is hard to find in the words that Jesus spoke here. Instead, we look to the one who is speaking. Jesus is showing us the reality of our situation, that we have failed, and are still failing, to fulfill the demands of the law. We don't meet the standard set here. So instead of looking inward in hopes of finding some spark that can be fanned into a flame of righteousness, we must look outward. We look to Christ, who is our only source of righteousness. He has gone far beyond the demands of the law, saving worthless slaves who hadn't done what they ought.

- *How many times must we forgive another?*
- *How is an unwillingness to forgive a barrier to our own faith and the faith of other Christians that we are in community with? (Think of how older Christians mentor younger ones.)?*