

Third Sunday in Lent

March 7, 2021 (Year B)



“If we want to be wise, we must become fools and let God’s Word be the eternal truth.”

– Martin Luther –

Sermon on New Year’s, 1531

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.

Exodus 20:1-17

Despite their important place in our teachings, we don’t often read the Ten Commandments aloud in worship. They shape our understanding of the Law, and, yet, they are more often alluded to than actually addressed.

- How do the Ten Commandments shape our lives as a society and a church? To what extent is their power and use understood or misunderstood?
- In what sense does the Law (the commandments of God) exist in tension with the Gospel (the promise of Christ)? How do the two relate?

Linked with the other readings for the day, there are additional insights to glean about the Law. Today, the Ten Commandments are placed next to Paul’s words about the foolishness of the cross and Jesus’ work of cleansing the temple. Somehow both are linked to God’s Law.

- How does God’s Law serve to show us our human foolishness, and foil our desire to justify ourselves?
- In what sense does God’s Law break in and over-turn the status-quo of our lives?

Psalm 19

The psalmist speaks of the perfection of God’s Law. He talks about how it revives the soul and turns what the world sees as wisdom upside-down. The commandments of the Lord enlighten those who attend to them, for the ways of the Lord are more valuable than gold and sweeter than honey.

- In what sense or in what circumstances have you found what the psalmist says here to be true in your life?
- At the same time, how can it become a burden to live under a perfect standard? What is the “bad news” that the Law reveals to us?

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Few of us like to be seen as foolish. We don’t like to make mistakes or have our judgment questioned. It is much better to be recognized as wise and thoughtful than foolish and rash. This is no less the case when it comes to our beliefs.

- Why does it feel good for our beliefs to be recognized as true, right, and wise? How does it feel when this does not happen?

Paul reminded his readers that the message of the cross is foolishness. It makes no sense to the ears of the world. It is not rational or thoughtful by our standards. It is a reversal of the ways of the world. Foolishness replaces wisdom.

Weakness replaces strength.

- What makes the cross foolish? What are some ways we try to gloss over the foolishness, or make the Christian faith seem attractive and desirable to the world?
- Is foolish the same as irrational? In what sense is having faith a perfectly wise and reasonable approach to life?

Paul also took on the matter of boasting in this passage. He reminded his hearers that, apart from their being claimed by God as his own, they had nothing to boast about. They were not the strong and wise; they were not the elite of their society. But they had become the chosen ones of God, and that, alone, was their grounds for boasting.

- What challenges does this passage present for those Christians who are the elite and privileged in their society? Is that a sign that something is wrong?
- How can “pride” become a bad thing? What was Paul showing here about the nature of faith itself?

John 2:13-22 (23-25)

The popular view of Jesus as meek and mild, gracious and kind, is upended a bit by the story of the cleansing of the temple. What he did in his Father’s house may not be what we would expect. The money-changers, who made a business out of making religious observance as easy as possible, were expelled from the temple with no apology and no mercy. In John 2:16 the term “marketplace” (“house of trade”) is used to describe what the temple had been turned into. But in Mark’s telling, Jesus called it a “den of robbers.”

- What is the difference in impact between “marketplace” and “robber’s den”? What inference can we draw from these two terms about what was actually happening in the temple?

The changing of money from idolatrous Roman coins to temple-approved coins was an important business for the Temple. It allowed pilgrims who had traveled from all over the known world to make their worship preparations *after* they had arrived in Jerusalem. For most people this was a matter of convenience. The offering itself would have been the same, whether they hauled their sacrifice from home or purchased it in the temple.

- Why do you think this practice of changing money and selling animals for sacrifice was so upsetting to Jesus? Do we engage in any comparable practices in our places of worship?
- After causing an uproar with his actions, the religious leaders asked Jesus about his authority. What questions did they fail to ask?