

Pentecost 11

August 16, 2020



*She turns her eyes from all this unfriendly treatment of Christ; all this does not lead her astray, neither does she take it to heart, but she continues immediately and firmly to cling in her confidence to the good news she had heard and embraced concerning him, and never gives up.
We must also do the same and learn firmly to cling to the Word.*

– 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 56:1, 6–8

It's so much easier to live faithfully when we are able to detect God's presence and movement in our lives. When we don't feel that as strongly it becomes a bit more difficult to be obedient and to trust in the promises of the Lord. When we have to wait a long time to see the fruits of God's promises in our lives we tend to forget, get lazy, or even become sorely disillusioned.

As Israel awaited the fullness of their future salvation, the Lord gave instructions and encouragement to the prophet about how to live faithfully in the present time. God urged the people to “keep justice, and do righteousness” in the meantime. This word meant for them to keep the Sabbath day holy and to hold fast to God's covenant promises, to love and serve the Lord even as they await what God will do to bring others into the fold.

- *In both the biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew, the terms “righteousness” and “justice” come from the same root as the word for “what is right.” Is it possible for real justice to exist in a society where people have no sense of moral righteousness?*

The New Testament (especially Paul's writings) say that it is faith and trust in God that makes us right (justified) before God.

- *How does the Spirit's gift of faith make things right between us and God? What effect does that have in our relationship with others?*

Psalms 67

Drawing on the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:24–26, the psalmist chants a blessing to the people. When God's face “shines” on his people there is blessing and honor for them, and his name becomes known in all the earth.

- *When have you experienced someone's face “shining” on you? What does that mean?*

This God who looks so favorably on his people is referred to as both a “judge” and a “guide.” Because of this, he is worthy of their praise and thanksgiving. People like to say “Don't judge me; I don't need anyone to tell me what to do.”

- *Why is it that many people (including ourselves) often reject having a judge or guide in our lives? In faith, how are both of these actually a good thing?*

Romans 11:1–2a, 13–15, 28–29

In the early Church, those who had come to know salvation

in Jesus Christ wondered what would become of the Jews who did not know the Savior. Paul struggled with this, too. But he knew salvation — in Old Testament times — had always rested in the hands of God, and that God was faithful, even when we are not. Here, Paul expresses his hope that God's attention to Gentiles will somehow incite his own people to “jealousy” — not simply envy or resentment, but renewed zeal for the Lord.

As Christians, we believe that Jesus is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6) and that “there is no other name given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

- *How can we hold this truth with certainty, while at the same time, not putting ourselves in the place of deciding who is saved and who is not?*

Paul continues his teaching and discussion of Israel's place in the heart of God by saying, “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

- *How is this good news for us who believe in Christ, that God's gifts and promises are irrevocable? If God could back out of his promise to Israel, what would that say to us who rely for salvation on his promise in Christ?*

Matthew 15:21–28

Jesus was approached by a Canaanite woman whose daughter is afflicted with a demon. She came in sheer desperation, but Jesus doesn't say one word. His disciples are clearly very uncomfortable with the situation and beg Jesus to send her away. Jesus finally answers her claiming he was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.

- *Does it ever feel to you as if God does not care about your concerns, or that God has more important things than your life to be concerned about?*

We need to be clear about who is in charge in this story. Jesus is not mistaken or in need of correction. This is not an indication of a “lack of sensitivity” on his part. He knew exactly what he was doing. As in all things, Jesus' goal was and is faith. Though his response may seem harsh to our ears, Jesus spoke exactly the right words to illicit faith from the woman.

- *How is it that only in being judged that we understand mercy? Why is it that only when we are separated from God that we understand the true meaning of grace?*
- *In what sense did Jesus' harsh response to the woman actually put the words of faith in her mouth? That is to say, how was her confession of faith shaped by the Word of the Lord himself?*