



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

—Martin Luther —

Sermon on Luke 2:21, 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.

Jeremiah 11:18–20

Jeremiah was faced with enemies who were against the Lord and refused to follow God's will. Israel and Judah had fallen into the old sins of their ancestors and were worshipping false idols such as Baal. Their unfaithfulness to the Lord provoked God to anger and so the Lord threatened to set fire to the "olive tree" that was his people (see previous vs. 16–17).

- What was the nature of the sin of Israel's ancestors? In what ways is that the root of all sin?

Jeremiah knew that the people would target him because they were angry with God for punishing them. Though all Jeremiah had done was speak the Lord's words to them as commanded, they would take it out on Jeremiah himself. When persecution came, the prophet pleaded with the Lord to follow through with his vengeance against the people.

- According to v. 19, why were the people trying to cut off Jeremiah's name? What do you think that means? In what ways does our life in faith not depend on our own name (which can easily be lost), but on the eternal name of Christ alone?

Jeremiah refers to himself as a sheep being led to the slaughter. He was like one who was naive and trusting of those around him, and "did not know" (v.19) that people were devising schemes against him.

- In what sense was Jeremiah's experience a foreshadowing of what would happen to Jesus, the Lamb of God? Do you think Jesus was caught by surprise in the same way that Jeremiah was? What did Jesus have that Jeremiah did not?

Psalm 54

This psalm is a prayer for salvation and deliverance. Like many Hebrew psalms, there is a repetitive parallelism built into the structure of each verse. Go through the psalm, and notice how the first half of each verse is expressed again in different words in the second half of the verse.

- How does one half of the verse help us to understand and interpret the other half of the verse? In what sense does this form of writing allow Scripture to serve as a "built-in commentary" of itself?

Such linguistic parallelism is a rhetorical device that helps speakers communicate and hearers to remember what they heard. It also allows a passage like this to be used liturgically as a dialog between leader and congregation.

- The psalms are a great resource for private devotions and prayer, but why might it be important to remember that the

psalms were originally written for public use? In what way is the public recitation of Scripture at the center of our worship?

James 3:13–4:10

Following his teaching on the evils of the tongue (v. 3:1–12), James asked a rhetorical question, "Who is wise and understanding among you?" It is still a poignant question for us today as we see many who fit James' description of "earthly" and "demonic" in the leaders of our world. Filled with all the answers, it seems many do not want to hear another side of an issue. Too many are set in their thinking and believe they have a corner on the truth.

- From the context of these verses, what does it mean to be wise, intelligent, and full of understanding in a biblical sense? Why is it important to remember that true wisdom comes from outside ourselves?

In the Augsburg Confession, the original Lutherans said: "Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel" (Article V).

- Why are religious people often tempted to assume their internal ideas and opinions are the same as God's? How open are you to the thought that God's external Word may challenge what you believe and think you know?

James says that true wisdom comes from one place: above. It is characterized by humility, peace, and gentleness — all attributes that many in our post-modern culture would simply label as "weak."

- Do we mistake loud opinions and pushiness as strength? What did Jesus teach his disciples about strength and weakness?
- In what way can "friendship with the world" make us enemies of God? (v.4) Should we expect the world to respect us as people of faith, or should we expect animosity?

Mark 9:30–37

When Jesus openly spoke of his mission in the cross, the disciples kept silent. Even when Jesus asked them point-blank about their discussion, they kept their mouths shut.

- Did Jesus really not know what his disciples had been talking about? How did his question convict the disciples while at the same time open up a teaching moment?
- Jesus confronted the disciples' assumptions about greatness. In the context of this passage, what does it mean to "receive a child" in Jesus' name? What is Jesus asking us to do?