

Lent 3

March 23, 2025



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.

Hence the most devout prayer of this psalm is where he says, "Convert us, O God our Savior, etc." And this is the most intense plea, "Wilt Thou be angry with us forever?" For the soul is dreadfully afraid of being damned when it begins to feel its sin and to long for righteousness. And no doubt the church now chants this psalm in this sense.

—Martin Luther—

Luther's Works, Volume 11

Ezekiel 33:7-20

It was Ezekiel's task to warn the people on behalf of God. When God saw something he didn't like, he would tell the prophet and the prophet would be the voice of caution to the house of Israel. This was a great responsibility, but it was not a new thing. God often called brothers to care for brothers and sisters to care for sisters. Take for example when God came to Cain after he had slain his brother Abel, He asked him, "Where is your brother?" Cain's response was flippant and passive saying, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9)

We, like the prophets before us, live in a time where minding our own business is encouraged and getting involved in the lives of others is often considered "butting in." We have lost that sense of community where neighbors look after one another's children and take care of families in need. There is a great diffusion of responsibility for people around us. "Someone else will do it," we think to ourselves.

- In verse 7, God calls Ezekiel a "watchman" for the house of Israel. In what ways has God also made us a "watchman" for the people in our life?
- Why is it hard to be a voice of truth when it comes to the sin of our larger society? How can we "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) without simply complaining or being judgmental?

Psalms 85

When we apologize for some wrongdoing, don't we generally hope (at the very least), that we will be forgiven and taken back into the person's good graces? We know that if the person cares for us, they will find it in their heart to forgive.

So it is with the relationship between the psalmist and the Lord. The psalmist sang of God's forgiveness and how God turned from his anger against his people. He then asked, "Will you be angry with us forever?" It's as if he already trusts that the Lord will *not* be angry forever. This gives him comfort and confidence in being forgiven both now and in the future.

- In what ways are we relying on God's merciful nature when we come to him with a repentant and contrite heart? Would we actually come if we thought that God was merciless?

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

St. Paul recalls the time when Israel was delivered from Egypt and was led through the Red Sea by a pillar of cloud.

At times the cloud went before the people, and at times it followed behind. Paul said it is this same "cloud" that was leading the Corinthian Christians in their lives of faith. Likewise, as God instructed Moses to strike his staff on a rock to produce water in abundance (Exodus 17:6), Paul said this same rock is Christ himself.

- How is Paul connecting the Exodus experience to the life of Christ? What does this say about the nature of faith, even in Old Testament times?

Paul went on to warn the people that some Israelites did not find favor with God. They tested him in the wilderness and were thus scattered and died there. Therefore, as followers of Christ he says, we should not put Christ to the test.

- What does Paul mean when he talks about putting Christ to the test? When do we engage in that kind of behavior?

Luke 13:1-9

Death is the "great equalizer" as someone once said. This has often been repeated, especially where circumstantial and class systems create inequalities within the realm of life. Perhaps this is another reason why the thought of death is something our culture tries hard to resist.

- Compare what Scripture says in Ecclesiastes 9:1-6. Why does Scripture often remind us that death comes to us all?

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus addressed this same reality. People wanted to know about the Galileans who had been killed in a notorious incident where the Roman Governor, Pilate, had deliberately tainted sacrifices with blood. Or what about those who had died recently in the tragedy of a falling tower? Had the victims somehow deserved this?

- Why is it such a natural thought to think that an untimely death equals punishment? What do you know of Jesus himself that would convince you otherwise?

Jesus does not assign particular guilt in these examples. He denies that there was a cause and effect relationship between guilt and the negative events these people experienced. However, he does remind the people that we are all accountable to God nevertheless.

- How is our accountability to God different from a simple relationship of cause-and-effect punishment? How does Jesus' response to this question reveal insight into God's mercy?
- Compare Jesus' parable in John 15. Who is the merciful vinedresser in this parable? If the vine produces grapes, who gets credit for the fruit?