

## Lent 4

March 30, 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.*

*Sin and conscience torment us, but Christ has overcome these fiends now and forever. Only Christians possess this victorious knowledge given from above. These two terms, grace and peace, constitute Christianity. Grace involves the remission of sins, peace, and a happy conscience. Sin is not cancelled by lawful living, for no person is able to live up to the Law.*

—Martin Luther—

Commentary of Galatians

### Isaiah 12:1–6

Think about those who have helped you when no one else seemed to be available, or those who dropped everything in order to come to your aid. There are cases where we know that people have gone out of their way to assist us and we may be especially grateful because we know that it was either a hardship for them, or we didn't deserve it.

- *When someone does something remarkably kind for you, does that affect the way you feel about them?*

This very short chapter in Isaiah is a song of thanks and praise to the God who did great things for Israel. There are four specific actions that Isaiah mentions that the Lord generously did for his people: he restored them from a broken relationship, comforted them, forgave them for their disobedience, and saved them from their enemies and from sin.

- *For what are you truly grateful when it comes to your relationship with the Lord? What action words would you use to describe what God has done for you?*

### Psalms 32

The psalmist sang of the goodness of God's grace and forgiveness. He confessed his sin to the Lord, holding nothing back in regard to his transgressions, and the Lord forgave him completely.

- *Have you ever experienced a genuine sense of joy at having been forgiven? What other emotions did you feel?*

God's forgiveness is not like our incomplete ability to forgive as human beings. We generally accept apologies from those who have hurt us, but there is often a residual bit of pain we tend to hold onto. But in God's forgiveness, Scripture tells us that the sin is completely wiped away.

- *Have you ever struggled with the remnants of your own sin, even though you know that God has forgiven you? Why do we tend to hold onto our own sin, even when we know it has been wiped away completely by God?*

### 2 Corinthians 5:16–21

St. Paul proclaimed that at one time we thought of Christ simply as a human being, but in his death and resurrection we have come to know him as much more than this. So too, those who believe and follow Christ are made new.

- *In what way have we been given a new self in faith? What does it mean to say that the "old us" is passing away?*

This language is difficult to wrap our minds around because we are flesh and blood creatures. What does it mean for us to no longer regard one another according to the flesh? Paul gives us a clue elsewhere when he says in Christ there are no longer distinctions that matter to human social conventions or culture: gender, social standing, wealth or poverty, and so forth. All are equal in the sight of God who sent his only Son to die for all people, not just those who have qualified in some tangible or visible way (as if there were such people).

- *How does this teaching help you to see others differently, especially those that perhaps you wouldn't have associated with otherwise?*

Paul is clear that God began the important process of reconciliation long ago and has now completed it through his Son, Jesus. Because the old has passed away in Jesus, it also passes away in us as we are brought back into full relationship with the Creator. The reconciliation continues as we are sent into the world charged with a ministry of reconciliation.

- *In what ways are we equipped to carry out God's ministry of reconciliation in our daily lives and in the lives of others?*

### Luke 15:1–3, 11–32

The charge of "hypocrisy" is a common criticism of Christians in general and of local congregations. Complaints often sound something like: "I would never go to that church because I know too many who do and they don't practice what they preach." Even those within the church criticize one another for the same reason. In today's Gospel, people wondered the same thing about Jesus.

- *Was it "hypocritical" for Jesus to dine and interact with sinners? Did his grace and hospitality mean he did not take sin seriously?*

The fact that Jesus welcomed sinners is good news for us. If we are honest, we know that we should be counted among those who fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Jesus went on to tell the story of the forgiving Father to give us a picture of ourselves.

- *How might we see ourselves both as the younger son and as the older son in Jesus' parable? How were both sons dependent upon the grace and mercy of the Father?*
- *How does this parable illustrate the circumstances that Jesus found himself in on that day? In what way does a story like this communicate Jesus' motives and mission?*