

Sola Lectionary Text Study

Pentecost 13 (Proper 15)

August 18, 2024



I make this point for the sake of those who, so soon as they observe that all Christians are not perfectly holy, but will occasionally stumble and fall, imagine there is no such thing as a Christian and the Gospel is impotent and fruitless. Just as if to be a Christian meant the mountain already climbed and complete, triumphant victory over sin! The fact is, it is rather a contest, a battle.

– 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.

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

Joshua gathered the leaders of Israel together at Shechem to renew the covenant that God first made with Abram. It was the same place where God promised Abram he would give land to his numerous offspring (Genesis 12:6-7). Abram built an altar there at the oak of Moreh as a sign of his faith in the Lord and his trust in the promise. In remembrance of the faith that started it all, the Word of the Lord came to Joshua recalling the history of Abraham's descendants right up to that moment.

- *Why is it important to know and remember our family history? Our faith family history?*
- *In what ways was this plot of land "holy ground?"*

Years after Abram, when Jacob wrestled with God and was renamed "Israel," Abram's grandson would bury in this ground the false idols his family brought with them on their journey (Genesis 34: 1-4).

- *How is this place a sacred location where people came to pledge their allegiance to the God of Israel?*

Joshua commended the people gathered at Shechem to remember all that God had done for them, especially in recent history by delivering them to the promised land. He urged them to make their own commitment, asking them essentially, "Who will you serve?" Joshua confessed, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

- *What is the strength in being able to declare, "I am a servant of the Lord!"? Has there ever been a moment in your life when you had to make it clear to another person or people that your primary allegiance is to God?*

Psalm 34:12-22

Are you the type of person who once you set your mind on something, you are going to do it and put all your energy into accomplishing that which you set out to do? Perhaps it was learning a trade, or a language, or taking up a new hobby that you focused on with great zeal, not giving up until you reached your goal.

Psalm 34 is continued here from last week's readings. The psalmist urged the people to turn from evil and do good, "Seek peace and pursue it." The word used here in Hebrew for pursue is *radap*. It is not simply to go after something, rather it is to put extensive effort and diligence into obtaining that which one seeks. In this case it is *shalom*, peace, that the psalmist encourages people to go after.

- *What would the world be like if more people pursued peace with a passion for God's holy will? Can just one person with a strong focus for peace make a difference in the world?*

Ephesians 5:6-21

St. Paul continued his discourse to the Ephesian Christians urging them to walk in love, which is a reiteration of what he said to them previously in this letter, "walk in a manner worthy of the calling (of Christ)." (4:1) He warned them to watch their behavior and their language, not to fall into the practice of making crude jokes or impure comments which have no place in Christian community. That takes us up to this week's pericope where Paul cautioned them to "let no one deceive you with empty words." He doesn't want their words to be immoral, just as he doesn't want them to be swayed by the empty words of others.

- *Why do words matter? How do our words make a distinct impression upon others? Can our words be a barrier to someone else's faith?*

Paul was rightly concerned with truth and his teachings on speech focused on dwelling in the truth of Christ. Immoral behavior and speech do not belong in a Christian's daily walk. The fear is that it will lead to darkness, pulling us away from the light that dwells within us. This light is not our light but the light of Christ.

- *Paul wrote, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." (5:11) How is this an urging of the Christians to "walk in love?"*

John 6:51-69

Jesus continued his teaching about being the Bread of Life for the world. This bread is his flesh and blood and those who partake of it will live forever. "Feed on me," he said to his followers, but many could not hear that he was speaking of a deep abiding faith in him. They only heard something akin to cannibalism and turned and walked away from him in confusion or even disgust.

To feed on Jesus is to be strengthened by him as we follow him in the way of the cross. There will be suffering and sacrifice; but there will also be resurrection from the dead. Apart from a life of devoted faith in Christ, we have no life to speak of, only death and separation from the Father.

- *How do you hear Jesus' words making a strong connection to Holy Communion? How is it that we feed on him each Sunday in the meal, and are strengthened for the difficult but vibrant life of true discipleship?*