

Epiphany 4

January 28, 2024 (Year B)



*Is it not a plague that the wretch, the devil,
wants to accuse and judge us and is himself worse
than all human beings? What business of his is it that
I have sinned? I have not sinned
against him but against God.*

– 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.

Deuteronomy 18:15–20

In this passage, God is speaking to Moses, promising that He would raise up another prophet from among the people. The people of God had strayed away from listening to the Lord and his servant, Moses, and turned to fortune tellers and diviners. They thought they needed to know what the future would be — but a prophet is one who speaks for God, not one who simply foretells a people's future.

- *If you could, would you even want to know the future? Why or why not? Would you rather know that God is always with you or know how things will turn out in the end?*

God assured Moses that the people would not be left without someone to lead them. A new prophet will be raised up to speak God's Word, just as Moses had done.

- *Why is it essential that God raise up people to speak his Word? In what sense does God still do this among us?*
- *How do we recognize the true voice of God spoken through his servant? How do we discern when it's not God's voice?*

Throughout the Scriptures, we see that God sent many prophets, just as he promised. But over the years, this passage came to be viewed as a prophecy of a unique individual: THE Prophet who would come.

- *Read Luke 9:18–20. In what sense does Jesus fulfill the promise that God made to Moses? In what sense was Jesus even more than what people expected?*

Psalms 111

God's work is splendor and majesty; he is the God of justice and mercy, providing for the needs of his people and giving them what they all need for life. God has proven himself faithful again and again.

- *In what way does recounting God's past deeds help us face the present and the future in faith?*

Verse 10 says: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. All those who practice it have a good understanding." In a similar way, Martin Luther began the Small Catechism by saying "We should fear, love, and trust God above all things."

- *What does this mean to you? In what sense is wisdom and understanding the result of faith, rather than the other way around?*
- *How does "practicing" worship and fear of the Lord help us to better understand the wondrous ways of God? How does it help us to listen and be more obedient to his will?*

1 Corinthians 8:1–13

Paul reminded the people that they have a duty to those who are weak in the faith among them. It is not good to be puffed up with knowledge for the sake of knowing things, or to insist on one's rights just because one is entitled to something. Rather, the Christians are to care for the young and weak in faith so their faith would be built up and not destroyed.

- *In this lesson, who was Paul characterizing as "weak" and who was he calling "strong"? How might we be both of these at different times in our life of faith?*
- *Why is it so important in the community of faith to look out for those who are "weak in faith"? What is at stake?*
- *When should concern for others trump individual rights? Are you willing to make such a sacrifice for the sake of others?*

Mark 1:21–28

Casting out demons was one of the aspects of Jesus' ministry that Mark emphasized the most in his Gospel. But to say that Christ had the power to cast out the unclean spirits requires that we admit that such things as unclean and evil spirits do exist — which is not something we modern people are inclined to do. It is not uncommon among us to hear people say: "Certainly I believe in God, but I don't believe there is such a thing as the devil. That's just a primitive fairy tale."

- *What do you think motivates such a statement? Why do some people want to deny that there is a spiritual element to evil in the world? What is the danger in this denial?*
- *How does daily experience teach us that evil is real and present in the world?*

Ironically, in this story, it was the unclean spirit who made it most clear who Jesus was — calling him the "Holy One of God." The people gathered around had no real idea of Jesus' true identity but they were astonished, frightened even, that the unclean spirits knew him and were subject to him.

- *In what way is being able to identify Jesus as the Holy One of God different from having faith in him? Compare James 2:19.*
- *Do we, as biblical Christians, "believe in" the devil? Why or why not? How is this recognition of evil forces different from the way we believe in Christ?*
- *Is there any consolation in the fact that Jesus has total control over the unclean spirits of this world? How does that give you hope in the face of spiritual trials?*