

Easter Day

March 31, 2024 (Year B)



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.

This is the first sermon our Lord delivered after his resurrection and, without doubt, also the most comforting; although in words very brief, but exceedingly kind and tender, and spoken first of all to his beloved Mary Magdalene, and through her also to his disciples after their deep woe, grief and sorrow...that he might comfort and gladden them by his resurrection.

– Martin Luther –

Sermon on Mark 16

Isaiah 25:6-9

In Isaiah's day it was common for people to wear a veil at a funeral. A dark mourning veil was an outward sign to others that a person was in a protracted state of mourning. It also served the practical function of hiding a person's emotions.

- What traditions do different cultures have when it comes to the observance of a family in mourning? (ie. sitting shiva in the Jewish tradition, or wakes and visitations in the Christian tradition.) What is important about being with others at such times? What makes that hard?

The good news that Isaiah proclaimed to the people was that God would lift from them the veil of death. Their pain will be wiped away and they will enjoy a lavish feast. Relief was coming and it would be a cause for rejoicing.

- In what way does Isaiah point believers to the future reality of Jesus' resurrection? What hope does Christ give us in the face of death?
- In 2 Corinthians 3:12-18, Paul speaks of the veil that covers unbelievers. How is that veil taken away according to the apostle?

Psalms 16

The psalmist proclaimed that he had no good apart from the Lord. Those who "run after" other gods, idols, or other shiny things that seek to distract us, do not give life. They only bring sorrows in the long run if they are the focus of our attention instead of the Lord.

- Why is this basic truth about our life with God (or without him as the case may be) often so hard to grasp?

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Paul reminded the Corinthians that central to the saving message of the Gospel is the proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection for our sake. Like the summary of Jesus' work that we confess in the Creeds, the emphasis is not on his teaching and miracles, but that he "was crucified, died, and was buried ... and on the third day he rose again."

- Why do you think Paul mentioned the many people who saw Jesus alive? Can you think of any more examples that Paul did not mention here?
- Why is it important to know that our Creeds are biblical statements of faith "in accordance with the Scriptures" (v. 15:4) and not just something we make up based on preferences? Is it important to you that we continue to use these ancient creeds?

Paul, whose Hebrew name was Saul, offered here a rationale for his name change. In Latin, *paulus* means small or humble — i.e. "the least" (as he says in verse 9). Paul compared himself to a premature baby, as "one untimely born."

- In what sense was Paul out of sync when compared to the rest of the disciples he mentions? What inferences do you take from Paul's description of himself?

Paul was not one of Jesus' original disciples, but Christ laid hold of him in faith through his encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:1-22). Though he is honest about his guilt in initially persecuting the church, in these verses he drew on that experience as a profound example of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

- Why is God's grace so important to Paul? In what sense does his life and experience show the depth of God's mercy?
- Is there a connection between understanding ourselves as sinners and our hope in Christ alone? How would you describe the importance of Christ's resurrection in your own life?

Mark 16:1-8

On their way to the tomb, the women worried about how they would roll away the large stone that sealed the burial place. Scripture makes it clear that the women didn't end up having to move it because when they arrived, it was already moved.

- In what sense was the removal of the stone not for Jesus' sake, but for ours? What did the sight confirm?

The way Mark ended his account of the resurrection story is different in its tone compared to the other Gospel writers. In Mark's telling, the women who received news of Jesus' resurrection left the tomb in great fear. According to Mark, they kept their mouths shut, "and said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." The earliest manuscripts of Mark's Gospel end on this negative note.

- Does Mark's account of this story evoke any feelings for you that are different than when you read the Easter story in the other Gospels? Why or why not?
- Even though the young man at the tomb told the women not to fear, why were they still distressed? When it comes to sharing our faith, how does fear often render us silent?

By all appearances, the women failed in their calling to convey the message they were given. And yet, we have the account of their experience written here in black and white.

- What does this tell us about the nature of the Gospel, and God's ability to use us as his messengers — even in our timidity?