

Pentecost 8 (Proper 10)

July 14, 2024



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.

On the vice of anger...we reason: "That fellow has done this and that to me; I would be doing wrong if I did not look sour and be angry about it. I would be encouraging in wrongdoing. I must let the rascal be softened a bit; otherwise he will not do any good as long as he lives." If the heart... gets the notion that it is doing right and well by being angry, then the devil has won his game...

– Martin Luther –

Amos 7:7-15

A plumb line is a simple tool consisting of a weight hanging from a vertical string. It is used for ensuring that a structure has straight and upright walls. Structurally, if a building has sagging beams or slanted walls, it is vulnerable to collapse.

God told Amos that he was setting a plumb-line amongst his people, Israel. The plumb-line would reveal Israel's moral degradation and religious failures.

- *In what ways does our disobedience to God cause our lives to be off-kilter like a building that isn't square? What happens when our lives are not straight and right with God?*

At a time when God's people were split into northern and southern kingdoms, this passage recounts the prophecy of Amos, speaking against the northern temple at Bethel. The vision God gave to him indicated the future destruction of the sanctuary, the religious center of Israel (the northern kingdom). Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, challenged Amos' words telling him to go away and prophesy in Judah (the southern kingdom) instead.

- *How can a prophet's words be directed to the religious center? Shouldn't the prophetic word come from inside the institution of religion rather than outside of it? Why or why not?*

Psalms 85:(1-7) 8-13

If someone you love hurts you, are you more apt to talk about it to others, or keep it to yourself? Sometimes, in order to protect the reputation of those we love, we simply keep the details of our loved one's failings to ourselves. They ask for forgiveness, and are forgiven. There is no need to make dinner conversation out of it.

The God of Israel is a forgiving God. Even though there was ample reason for him to be angry with his people, the psalmist recognized God's forgiveness and mercy. The sin of Israel was covered, hidden, and kept by God to himself. The result of that action was restoration initiated by the one who was wronged and who was gracious enough to forgive.

- *If something is forgiven, then should it be forgotten? Why or why not? When is it not okay to protect another person by covering up their sinful behavior?*

The word for 'anger' in this psalm is 'ap' — in Hebrew it expresses the appearance of the face and the heavy breathing associated with the emotion. This word can also be translated 'nostril' describing the way the nose gets red and the nostrils flare when a person gets upset. Literally, the phrase in verse 3 can be rendered "hot of nose."

- *Why would the psalmist attribute such a human characteristic, as heavy breathing, to God?*
- *How is God's anger different (or the same) as human anger? In what way is anger related to pain?*

Ephesians 1:3-14

St. Paul wrote to the Church in Ephesus, thanking God who blessed them with every spiritual blessing. He reminded the Ephesian Christians that they were chosen in Christ before the world was made, which was according to God's own will and not based on any merit of their own.

The Church has long argued the meaning of God's predestination of believers, chewing on questions of free will, universalism, human cooperation, and so forth. Biblically speaking, in matters of salvation, it is important to be clear about who does what.

- *As Lutherans we confess that we cannot come to faith on our own, but it is the Holy Spirit that calls us into a life with Christ. Whose "work" is it when we assent to this calling?*
- *How is this kind of faith different than what many people mean when they speak of "making a decision to accept Jesus" as their personal Lord and Savior? According to the Bible, are the decisions we make the cause or the result of faith in us?*
- *In what ways do you see that the Spirit has given every spiritual blessing to you? To your congregation as a whole? Is that blessing meant to be "for our own sake?"*

Mark 6:14-29

For being known as such a tyrant, it seems strange that King Herod Antipas wasn't one to stand up to his second wife (and former sister-in-law) when in anger she demanded the death of John the Baptist. The king immediately complied with her vindictive wishes. Recall that John had criticized Herod for marrying his brother's wife, Herodias, therefore she had a grudge against "the one whose voice had cried out in the wilderness." She used her husband's power (and her power over him) to eliminate the source of criticism by demanding to have his head put on a silver platter.

- *Do you think Herod really wanted to kill John? How can our personal relationships keep us from doing what is right?*
- *Unbelievers often express their feelings of "being judged" by Christians. How much of this is actual and how much is in the mind of the one feeling accused? How is speaking God's truth to a situation different (or the same) as being judged?*