

Pentecost 14 (Proper 17)

August 30, 2026



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.

*So, too, pure love is a rare thing on earth.
Not that love in itself is impure, but too often it is mere pretense.
John implies as much in his words (1 Jn 3, 18), "My little children,
let us not love in word, neither with the tongue;
but in deed and truth."*

*– Martin Luther –
Sermon on Romans 12, Church Postil*

Jeremiah 15:15-21

Certainly, Jeremiah was a man who knew what it was like to be persecuted as a servant of the Lord. Here, the prophet calls upon God to take vengeance on those who tormented him and he would like it to happen as quickly as possible. The prophet protests to the Lord, citing his own innocence and faithfulness, and asks why God has not protected him.

- *Have you ever felt like Jeremiah? Have you felt as though God's promise has not come true for you, in spite of your commitment to Him?*
- *How is Jeremiah's ego at work in his complaint? In what sense does his lack of satisfaction come from his focus on himself?*

Beginning in verse 19, God responds to Jeremiah's prayer with a promise, assuring the prophet that he has not been abandoned. God says to the prophet, "If you return, I will restore you." (Jer. 15:19) That word is שׁוּב (*shuv*) meaning to turn back or repent — i.e. return to a prior belief.

Imagine God saying to the prophet, and to us when we are struggling, "If you turn back to me, I will turn back to you." Jeremiah had to repent of his self-pity and failure to trust that God was truly with him and that things would work out in God's time, not Jeremiah's.

- *Why is it important to know that God remains committed to the work of his Word, even when circumstances don't seem to indicate any success? In what sense is the life of faith always a matter of turning back to trust in the Lord?*

Psalms 26

Like Jeremiah, the psalmist calls upon God as one who has been a faithful servant. He says to God, "Judge me and see if I have lived with integrity. Test me, Lord, and try me; examine my heart and my mind."

- *Do you find the psalmist to be a little arrogant or presumptuous in these verses? Would you be so bold as to pray in such a way?*
- *Assuming the writer is sincere in the way he describes his life, what do you think is at the center of his concern? What does he want from God? In what sense does the manner of his life show that God has already been at work in him?*

Romans 12:9-21

Scripture assures us that God's grace actually produces something in us, seen in the fruit of our words and deeds. People of faith will exhibit certain traits that we are reminded of again and again. Though they are not yet

perfected in us, the arc of the Christian's life will be marked by the attributes Paul describes here.

One such attribute is love. We are reminded in 1 John 4:19 that we are only able to love because God first loved us. We are not permitted to exact vengeance upon our enemies — that role is reserved for God alone. Instead we are to share, love, and show kindness to our enemies; our love is to be "sincere." The Greek word here is *an-hypokritos* which means "without hypocrisy."

- *What are some of the personal character qualities that are highlighted in the verses? Which do you tend to exemplify the most? Which do you not?*
- *Do you ever struggle with loving someone that is hard to love? How do you love "without hypocrisy?" To whom do you turn when you struggle with this?*

Matthew 16:21-28

Right before this part of the chapter, Jesus had instructed his followers to beware of the "leaven" of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He wanted them to be discerning of their law-based teachings. Then he showed them a different way.

He spoke of God's forgiveness as "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," asserting that whatever they bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever they forgive here will be forgiven in heaven.

- *Why did Jesus need to give the disciples these specific instructions to contrast the teaching of the Jewish leaders in comparison with the approach they were to take in regard to sin?*

Immediately after this, Jesus began to tell his disciples what was about to happen to him. He would be arrested, tried, and put to death, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead. Peter took great offense to Jesus' words and pulled him aside to chastise him. Jesus reacted strongly to Peter — calling him "Satan" and scolding him fiercely. Jesus showed his disciples the way of his own cross, and that we are to follow him no matter what it costs.

- *Why did Peter have such a hard time with Jesus' prediction of his own death and resurrection? Why do we?*
- *Why are Jesus' words about his death such an affront to the world? Why are they difficult even for those who are followers of Jesus?*
- *What does it mean in our own life of faith to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Jesus unto death?*