

Easter Sunrise

April 5, 2026



For us more than half of our resurrection is already accomplished, because our heart and head are already above, and only the smallest part remains to be done, namely, that the body be buried in order that it too may be made new.

– Martin Luther –
Sermon from 1532, WA 36

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.

Exodus 14:10–15:1

Upon seeing the Egyptian army chasing them down, God's people must have begun to wonder if the salvation Moses had brought to them was any kind of salvation at all. The cost seemed too high to bear and they started thinking, "We could have gotten along just fine without Moses' interference." Yet, even in the midst of their doubt about God's power to save, their instinct was still to call out to him. They called out to the only one who had the power to rescue them from their distress. The word Moses gave them in response to their cries was a word of hope. God had no intention of leaving them to perish in the wilderness. He had plans for his people, and those plans did not end at the Red Sea. They were his chosen ones, and Pharaoh's army was no match for the Lord.

- *Does it ever seem to you that God's salvation, or life as a Christian, is not as great or easy as you thought it would be—or as you think it should be? Have you ever found yourself questioning whether being a follower of Jesus is really worth the bother or cost?*
- *How is the dramatic display of God's power at the Red Sea like or unlike your experience of God's saving power?*

The crossing of the Red Sea brings to mind baptismal imagery. God works salvation for his people through means of water. At the Red Sea, God's people were saved from the Egyptian army. In baptism, God's people are saved from sin. At the Red Sea, the Israelites were rescued from death. In baptism, we are saved through death. The salvation at the Red Sea was temporary, but the salvation that comes through Christ in baptism is forever.

- *What is the relationship between our baptism and the reality of death and resurrection in our life?*
- *What does it mean to "die to ourselves" on a daily basis? How has God delivered you from yourself, and given you new life?*

Psalms 118:15–29

In the words of the psalmist we can hear what Israel might have said to the Lord as they were freed from the terror of Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, "The right hand of the Lord does valiantly," and "(We) thank you that you have answered us and become our salvation." (Psalm 118:15, 21) In modern language, we might paraphrase the ending of the psalmist's praise to the Lord as, "You are on my side!"

- *How important is it to know the God is on our side? What all does that mean?*

1 Corinthians 15:1–11

Paul often had to justify his place as an apostle. He was not counted among the twelve. He wasn't even among the first 500 to see the Risen Lord. Even worse, Paul had been a persecutor of the church, seeking to destroy it. When he found himself in conflict with Peter or James, this status of being "untimely born" — not being part of the inner circle — was a problem. Why should anyone listen to him?

But Paul remained clear about one thing: This faith was not about him. It was about the Gospel he proclaimed. It wasn't important whether Paul was popular or if his biography had the most impressive details. Of first importance was the gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation through Him. Christ gave Paul the task of proclaiming this Word, and that is what made him worthy to be called an apostle.

- *What would make Paul's background a stumbling block to his effectiveness as an apostle? Are we ever guilty of being more concerned with someone's credentials than with the truth of the Word they bring?*
- *What might Paul's story tell us about who God chooses to be his witnesses? What does that say about you?*

John 20:1–18

From our side of the resurrection, it's difficult to understand the behavior of the followers of Jesus. He had told them what was coming. He had told them he was going to be killed in Jerusalem. He had promised that the grave would not hold him. Still, when they discovered the empty tomb, they had no recollection of that promise. It didn't cross their minds that Jesus had risen. His body was simply gone. That early Easter morning was not a joyous celebration as we observe it today. It was a time of confusion, disappointment, sorrow, and doubt. The disciples left the empty tomb and went home, not knowing what else to do.

- *Why do you think the disciples still didn't understand about the resurrection? What was blinding them?*

While the others went home, Mary remained weeping at the tomb. She stuck around long enough to see something that the others had not seen and to hear something the others had not heard. She saw the angels in the tomb. She saw the Risen Lord. She heard the first word of the one who had defeated death.

- *Do you think Mary stayed behind because she was more faithful than the others? In what sense was the Word of Christ different after the resurrection than it was before?*

Easter Day

April 5, 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.

For if you believe that by this seed the serpent has been slain, then it is slain for you; and if you believe that in this seed all nations are to be blessed, then you are also blessed. For each one individually should have crushed the serpent under foot and redeemed himself from the curse, which would have been too difficult, nay impossible for us.

– Martin Luther –
Sermon for Easter Day

Acts 10:34–43

The extension of God’s promises and mercies to the Gentiles marks a radical new direction for the message of the cross. The salvation brought about in Christ Jesus, through his death and resurrection, is not only for a small group of people or a single nation. Rather, it is the salvation of all — people of every race and tongue. Biblically, the word for “nations” (eJne: ethne) was the same word used to refer to the unbelieving “Gentiles” (i.e., non-Jews).

Peter’s speech in Acts highlights this extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles. God, who raised Jesus from the dead, shows no partiality to a certain race or tongue. He chooses people from all peoples, making them his own through the preaching of Christ.

- *Why is it significant that the Gospel is extended to the Gentiles? Where does that leave the people of Israel?*
- *What is our role in bringing the Good News to the nations?*

Psalms 16

The psalmist declares that he has no good apart from the Lord. God alone is the source of his strength, protection, and blessing. It is easy for us to come up with alternative explanations for the good things that happen to us. Our hard work, our endurance, our skill, and even our luck — these are all given credit for the good we experience. But the psalmist knew that none of that counts for anything apart from God. Salvation is found only in him.

- *Is our hard work or endurance or skill irrelevant to our experiences in this life? What does God have to do with that?*
- *Why is it important to recognize and confess that, ultimately, all our blessings come from God?*

Colossians 3:1–4

Christians are often tempted to float off into the realm of the spiritual, to cast off earthly concerns in favor of higher pursuits. At first glance, passages like this from Colossians might seem to encourage such endeavors. As Christians, we are exhorted to set our minds on the things above, rather than the things of this earth. It is easy to fall into the ditch of “spiritualism.”

But this passage must be understood in its proper context. The Colossians are being courted by those who encourage a “philosophy” that will lead to a higher understanding. This philosophical quest is turning the Colossians away from

the one in whom life is truly to be found. The exhortation we find here in Chapter 3 is to give up earthly pursuits of spirituality in favor of clinging to Christ. It is Christ who has defeated death; it is in Christ that believers find their lives.

- *In what ways does “spiritualism” continue to provide a temptation for Christians? How can attempts to seek a “higher understanding” turn us away from Christ?*
- *In what sense do we already participate in the resurrection? In what ways is it also still a future reality for us?*

Matthew 28:1–10

When we consider the long and detailed gospel accounts of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion, the brevity of the Easter story is rather shocking. The event that is at the heart of the Christian faith is summed up in a handful of verses. The simple declaration that Jesus has been raised from the dead is only a few words. But that is no accident. Once death has been defeated, once Jesus has broken free from the tomb, there is little more to say. God’s ancient promise of salvation is fulfilled in this remarkable event. It is as simple and as profound as that.

- *Do you think the resurrection accounts are brief because they are less important than the crucifixion? Explain.*

The angel in the tomb had two instructions for the women: come and see; go and tell. The women were invited right into the burial chamber to see the place Jesus had occupied. They were invited to see for themselves that Jesus was no longer there. Once they had seen, they were to go and tell. They were to bear witness to Jesus’ defeat of death. They were to be the ones who first delivered the Good News to Jesus’ beloved disciples.

- *What do you think it would have been like to walk right into Jesus’ empty tomb? What significance do you find in the women being given the task of bearing the news of the resurrection to Jesus’ other disciples?*

The angel tells the women not to be afraid. Even though they are witnessing something beyond their understanding— even though the guards at the tomb are frozen in fear —these women are told not to fear. When they leave the tomb to go and tell, Matthew tells us they went with “fear and great joy.” The wonder of the resurrection was still a mystery to them, but the joy of salvation had started to creep in.

- *Have you ever experienced joy and fear simultaneously? What kinds of circumstances create that combination of emotions?*
- *Does the resurrection story still capture your heart?*

Second Sunday of Easter

April 12, 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.

Now, this one fact, that one so exalted as Christ himself, the only and eternal Son of God, has trod the path of suffering before us, enduring unlimited distress, agony transcending the power of humanity to experience—this alone should be enough to admonish and urge anyone to patiently endure affliction.

— Martin Luther —
Sermon on 1 Peter

Acts 5:29–42

After being flogged by the religious leaders, the disciples were given one restriction: they were not to speak in the name of Jesus. All that was required for them to get along peaceably among their own people was to be quiet about what they believed. Instead, they were ceaseless in their teaching about Jesus. Their witness could not be contained.

- *Why didn't the disciples just keep quiet and stay out of trouble? What are some ways we are tempted to remain silent about what we believe?*

Gamaliel, a respected teacher among the Pharisees, was pretty certain that he had the situation figured out. He had seen would-be messiahs come and go before. There was never a shortage of charismatic figures leading people down a rosy path, only to disappear as quickly as they arose. Gamaliel figured Jesus was just another one in a long line, and if his disciples were left alone, they would quickly lose interest in following one who was crucified as a criminal.

But Gamaliel also offered another insight. It occurred to him that if Jesus really was who he claimed to be, there was no way this movement could be stopped. In fact, those trying to stop it would find themselves fighting against God. Gamaliel concluded that the safest course of action was to simply let things unfold.

- *Do you think the success of Christianity is proof of the truth of the Gospel? If something is successful, does that automatically mean God is blessing it?*
- *Is suffering or failure an indication that God is withholding his blessing? How does the theology of the cross shape our understanding of success and failure?*

Psalms 148

The entire creation praises the Lord! From the highest heaven to the deepest sea, praises come forth for the awesome Creator.

- *Can you imagine such praise as rocks and hills, stars and sea creatures worshipping the Lord of all? What would that look and sound like?*

1 Peter 1:3–9

An imperishable inheritance is hard to imagine. Everything that we work so hard for, save, invest and tend in order to have something to pass on to our heirs eventually passes away. Farms are sold off in pieces. Heirlooms get lost or broken. Even if the inheritance is not squandered or lost,

eventually the heir will pass away.

What we have been given in Christ, however, is an imperishable inheritance. It has staying power. In this way, it is wholly unlike any other inheritance. Nothing in this world lasts. But the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ lasts forever. God himself is watching over and protecting the heirs he has chosen, until at last we claim our inheritance — the salvation of our souls.

- *What is the difference between an inheritance and a wage? Why is it significant that salvation is described as our inheritance? Do you think it is possible to squander or waste or lose the inheritance you've been given through Christ?*

John 20:19–31

It's difficult to imagine the kind of darkness that surrounded and filled the disciples in the days after Jesus' crucifixion. They had pinned their hopes and dreams on this one individual, and now it all was lost. This was more profound than losing a friend or loved one. These disciples had altered their lives to conform to what they thought Jesus was going to do. They had left behind their old way of being to prepare for the new way Jesus was supposed to usher in. And then he was executed without even putting up a fight. The disciples were lost in the darkness of grief and despair.

Then into the midst of that darkness, Christ, the very one they were grieving, appeared among them, shining the light of new life — a new reality. Jesus, whose death they had witnessed firsthand, was now among them, alive and well. Simply by appearing in their midst, Jesus changed the disciples' concept of what was possible and what was true. They could suddenly see that God was acting in the world in a way they had never before imagined. God was bringing life out of death.

- *When have you been the closest to despair? What kind of word or action broke through your despair? How is Jesus still breaking through our doubts and fears and sorrows?*

Thomas wasn't there to witness this life-changing, death-defying light. The darkness that surrounded him was a shield against the joyous proclamations of his friends. He couldn't conceive of the kind of world they were describing. He couldn't imagine that things could be so different from what he had always known. He couldn't just will himself out of the darkness of his despair and grief.

- *Do you think Thomas's doubt was unreasonable? How could he be expected to believe something as unheard-of as the Resurrection without seeing it first hand?*

Third Sunday of Easter

April 19, 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.

Now when we are called again to the Word of God, our hearts burn and are kindled as the Scriptures are opened to us; but we recognize Christ first only when he breaks to us the bread of his Word, that is, when he becomes a teacher in every heart, and he sets before us the bread, i.e., his Word.

– Martin Luther –

Sermon on the Chief Article of Our Faith, 1524

Acts 2:14a, 36–41

Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah cut his hearers to the heart. This revelation caused them to see that they were in rebellion against God. They had rejected the one God had sent.

It's easy to condemn the people of Israel for this blindness. But before we let ourselves go down that road, we must recall that prior to the Resurrection, the hold that sin, death, and the devil had was complete. It was unchallenged and unrecognized. It is only in the light of Christ's rising from the dead that this hold is broken.

In that light — when the people hear who Jesus really is and what he is really doing — they are moved to repentance immediately. The Holy Spirit grabs hold of their hearts as Peter delivers the Good News to them.

- *What does this episode in Acts show us about the power of preaching the law, and how it holds us accountable for our sin? (Compare Romans 3:19.)*
- *Was it necessary for Peter to add, "whom you crucified" to his identification of Jesus? What effect did that have?*

It's hard to imagine seeing 3,000 people baptized in one day. Few of us will see 3,000 baptisms in a lifetime. The work of evangelism in our contexts is a bit slower, a bit less dramatic, somehow not quite as spectacular — or, at least, that's how we tend to think of things. But if we think again about what is happening among us, we realize that every single instance of baptism is dramatic, spectacular, wondrous. In every instance, a sinner is put to death and raised up to newness of life. Sins are forgiven. The Holy Spirit takes hold. All whom the Lord calls to himself receive these wondrous gifts.

- *What are some ways we try to control the work of the Holy Spirit, rather than simply trusting that the Spirit does indeed have the power to call and forgive?*

Psalms 116:1–14

The psalmist reminds us that God hears our prayers and our cries for help and he answers us, bringing us out of death to new life.

- *How might this particular psalm be helpful to use when talking to someone who isn't sure they believe in God?*

1 Peter 1:17–25

IWe often stumble or even fall when we run into passages

like this one from 1 Peter. If the Father judges all people according to their deeds, what becomes of the Gospel? What becomes of our conviction that we are saved by faith and not according to our deeds? If we stop with the first verse of our reading, we will have real difficulty preaching the truth of the Gospel. We get hung up wondering if we are sufficiently obedient, sufficiently genuine, sufficiently faithful.

It is then that we must be reminded that our lives are no longer our own. In baptism, we are born anew in Christ. As a result, we are seen by the Father as possessing the righteousness of Christ himself. We have the faith of the one who was faithful even unto death. That is the Word and promise that endures forever.

- *What kind of theological trouble do we get into when we focus on a single verse without considering the whole context of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?*

Luke 24:13–35

There's something quite comical about the scene on the road to Emmaus. The disciples, downtrodden and filled with doubt, have a firsthand encounter with the risen Lord but don't recognize him. They even mock Jesus a bit, marveling that he doesn't seem to be aware of what has happened in Jerusalem. Finally, they presume to tell Jesus the story of himself! Unfortunately, in their hands, the story of Jesus stopped short of Easter. They couldn't bring themselves to boldly tell this stranger that their Lord had risen from the dead. They just weren't sure yet.

- *Why couldn't these disciples recognize Jesus? Why were they reluctant to proclaim that Jesus had risen from the dead?*
- *Do you ever find it difficult or strange that our faith rests on the literal resurrection of the dead? Are there other aspects of Christianity that are easier to focus on?*

Jesus teaches his disciples as they continue down the road, but they still do not recognize him. It is not until they share in the breaking of the bread that their eyes are opened. For those of us who weren't there that first Easter morning and didn't get our own firsthand encounter with Jesus, we have been given a different assurance of his presence with us. In his Supper he comes to us, once again, and shares all of himself with his chosen ones.

- *How is our experience of the Lord's Supper like or unlike the experiences of the first disciples?*
- *Do you ever wish for a more clear presence of Christ among us, or more concrete proof of our faith? What if you never get it?*



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.

"The whole Christ, according to both natures, is our righteousness, solely in his obedience that he rendered his Father as both God and a human being, an obedience unto death.

Through this obedience he earned the forgiveness of sins and eternal life for us..."

– Formula of Concord –

Epitome, Article III: Righteousness

Acts 2:42–47

Luke paints a beautiful picture of what the Church looked like in its infancy. The believers all lived together in harmony. They shared all their goods in common. They enjoyed spending time with one another. They were devoted to the Word they had received and the fellowship that had formed around that Word.

Luke doesn't tell us that the believers had to be told to increase their commitment or share of their belongings or participate in learning. It's just how they did things. It's the fellowship that took shape through God's work on their hearts. The power of God's work and Word among them formed them into a new community and new people.

Of course, we need only turn the page to the Epistles to see that this perfect vision of the church did not last very long. Trouble emerged almost immediately because sin continued to be at work among God's chosen ones. The zeal of conversion gave way to the challenges and difficulties of communities of sinners.

- *Why does the church today look so different from the church Luke describes? Is the church today in worse shape than what we see in the Book of Acts? Is God working differently, or less, among us today than he used to?*
- *How are the faithful actions we see here not the result of commands (or threats), but the natural result of faith? In what sense are good works the spontaneous expression of a trusting relationship with God?*

Psalms 23

The image of the Lord as a faithful shepherd who watches over his flock is exactly the word of comfort and peace we so often need in the midst of sorrow and hardship. The promise is not that we will never face enemies or that we will never find ourselves in the valley of the shadow of death. Rather, the promise is that even in those circumstances — especially in those circumstances — we are safely in the care of the Good Shepherd.

But this psalm also has an important word to speak to us when we're not in the midst of hardship or distress. The Lord, our Good Shepherd, watches over us all of our days. He provides for our every need, food and drink, shelter and protection.

- *How does this psalm sound different to us when we are in the midst of the joys of life rather than the sorrows?*
- *What does it mean for our daily lives to be constantly under*

God's care and provision? Compare with what Luther says in his explanation to the First Article of the Creed.

1 Peter 2:19–25

Peter explained in his first letter that there is no particular virtue in enduring the pain of punishment when it comes as a result of disobedience and sin. However, when we are persecuted for no good reason, it is valuable and gives glory to God that we endure such suffering because Jesus did exactly the same. When Christ was beaten he endured the suffering without a thought of retaliation. Instead of reviling those who hurt him, Jesus entrusted his whole self to his heavenly Father. Peter reminds us of our calling to follow Jesus in suffering for the faith saying, "By [Jesus'] wounds you have been healed." (v. 24b)

- *In what ways does Jesus show exactly how to live, even in the face of unjust suffering?*

John 10:1–10

We continue with the image of the Lord as our shepherd in the Gospel reading. The picture drawn in Psalm 23 is expanded upon in Jesus' words to the Pharisees. Central to this image is that the sheep know the voice of their true shepherd. They know the one they belong to. They know the one they are to follow, and they will not follow another.

It is noteworthy that Jesus speaks these words to the Pharisees, not just to his own disciples. The Pharisees don't recognize the voice of Jesus to be the voice of their shepherd. They don't see him as one they are to follow. They question, doubt, argue with and seek to trap Jesus, but they don't heed his voice as their shepherd.

- *How does a sheep come to recognize the voice of the shepherd? Is there a certain quality to a sheep that makes one a better listener than another? Do they pick out a shepherd to claim as their own, or is it the other way around?*

Jesus makes a crucial distinction between the purpose of the shepherd and the purpose of the thief. The thief comes to destroy the sheep. The shepherd's purpose is abundant life. The work the shepherd does is for the benefit of the sheep. The work the thief does is for his own benefit. Christ's work on our behalf was not to bring glory to himself or to lay heavy burdens upon us. He came that we might have abundant life — more life than we can begin to imagine

- *What are some ways we turn the abundant life Jesus came to give into a demand or hardship? What are some of the thieves that steal this life from us? How is Jesus different?*

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 3, 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.

It is, however, a matter of great moment, and utterly necessary, that to new-born and infant Christians, sincere and uncorrupt milk should be given. This milk is nothing else than the Gospel itself.

– Martin Luther –

Comments on 1 Peter 2:2

Acts 6:1–9; 7:2a, 51–60

Last week, our reading from Acts showed us a picture of a nearly perfect early Church, but today's reading shows us how quickly things became troubled. Luke described two distinct groups in the church: the Hellenists and the Hebrews. The Hellenists were probably Greek-speaking Jews from outside of Judea, while the Hebrews were speakers of Aramaic. This basic distinction of geography and language resulted in a bit of conflict in the community. The food, which was so generously being held in common in chapter 2, is now not being distributed fairly between the Hellenists and the Hebrews. The focus has shifted from a desire to be generous to a concern with making sure one gets one's due.

- *Does this seem like a legitimate thing for the Hellenists to be concerned about? What are some ways the church continues to have these types of concerns?*

Spending very little time on the specifics of the distribution of food, Luke focused instead on the systems of authority and responsibility that were taking shape in the church. The twelve, who were tasked with preaching and teaching, do not see food distribution as part of their job description. Instead, they appointed seven others to take on this responsibility. The organization of the church was starting to take shape.

- *How does this decision about varying roles and responsibilities continue to shape the church today? Does it mean that there are roles of greater and lesser importance?*
- *How can conflicts like the one described here tear churches apart? What is the aim of effective, faithful leadership in the midst of such conflict?*

Our reading shifts gears to the dramatic story of Stephen, one of the first deacons. His bold, impassioned response to the charges brought against him only further inflame his opponents, finally resulting in his death. To the end, Stephen remains steadfast in faith, trusting in God's power to redeem, even calling upon God to forgive those who are killing him.

- *What do Stephen's words and actions suggest about his faith? What kind of example is he for us? What is our responsibility to brothers and sisters in the faith who suffer for their witness?*
- *How does Stephen's vision of heaven remind us of who, finally, will be recognized as Lord of all?*

Psalms 146

The psalmist reminds the people that princes and rulers

cannot save them. Only the Lord can save. There is no salvation in princes or presidents. When they die their plans die with them. Our hope is in the God of Jacob, the creator of all that is, the one is faithful forever.

- *How do we often get caught putting undue trust in political leaders? Is that fair to them? What does it take to snap us out of our dependence upon rulers for salvation?*

1 Peter 2:2–10

Milk is like a miracle substance God made for mammals to give to their offspring! Strong bones, healthy teeth, protein, muscle repair, and a great source of calcium and potassium. Peter surely didn't know all of that when he called the Gospel, "spiritual milk." The Holy Scriptures are a source of spiritual sustenance for us who follow Christ and desire to become more mature in the faith. Peter draws on Psalm 34:8 urging those who have tasted that the Lord is good to seek spiritual milk. The Lord feeds us on his holy Word and makes us stronger for our life in him.

- *Peter calls the spiritual milk of the Gospel unadulterated or pure. How is the Good News of Jesus Christ pure sustenance for you?*

John 14:1–14

Jesus has just finished telling the disciples that they would all forsake him and he would die. He had a rather harsh word with Peter in particular. It had been a difficult evening. Then he tells them not to let their hearts be troubled. It's a rather jarring transition. "You will deny me three times ... Do not let your hearts be troubled." It's hard to see how they could be anything but troubled.

Jesus' words to his disciples point to the reality that there is something happening here that is beyond their understanding. As far as they can see, everything is falling apart. All of their hopes and dreams of what following Jesus would mean are crumbling around them as he tells them what is actually going to happen. But Jesus knows that their abandonment, their rejection, and their faithlessness are not going to be the end of the story. There is more going on than meets the eye.

- *How do you think the disciples received Jesus' encouragement not to be troubled? Do you think his words would have sounded reasonable to them after all that he had just told them?*
- *What is Jesus' explanation to his disciples why they need not be troubled? How is knowing that Jesus has prepared a place for us a comfort in this life? What freedom does that give us?*

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 10, 2026



But to us he is called a Comforter, and a comforter is one who makes a sad heart glad and joyful toward God and tells you to be of good cheer for your sins are forgiven, death is slain, heaven is open, and God smiles upon you.

– Martin Luther –

Sermons on John 14, LW 24

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.

Acts 17:16–31

Paul described the Athenians as “extremely religious.” Their piety seemed to be without limit. They even created altars for unknown gods, just in case the gods they think they know didn’t cover all of the bases. This altar to an unknown god points out the basic problem in the Athenians’ religion. It is all left to their imagination. The number of gods and their specific purposes and activities are limited only by what the people can think of.

Paul came to them with something else. He came with a Word about the One God who created all that is and took on flesh in the particular person of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God shows his people who he is. The Athenians’ religion can only show them who they imagine the gods to be. In Jesus, we see God as he wants to be seen.

- What’s the difference between religion and faith?
- What does Paul’s way of speaking to the Athenians show us about how we might share the Good News with those who practice other religions?
- What is the danger in religion based on our imaginations, assumptions, theories, or philosophies about what God must be like?

Paul focused on Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Such notions caused some of the enlightened Athenians to scoff. They couldn’t believe in something so far-fetched and outside their experience as one being raised from the dead.

- Why would Paul put such emphasis on the Resurrection when speaking to those so likely to scoff at such ideas?
- How are we tempted to downplay those aspects of our faith that are the most far-fetched or hard for people in our own culture to believe?

Psalms 66:8–20

The psalmist proclaimed that the Lord daily bears our burdens. Not only did the Lord lead his people out of slavery in Egypt, but he provided for their every need. In war with those who desired to conquer Israel, the Lord defeated foreign armies. All of this was done by God even when the people were unfaithful.

- How is God’s faithfulness not dependent upon human faithfulness? How many times do we see this truth repeated in the scriptures?

1 Peter 3:13–22

If there was one attribute that characterizes Christians,

according to Peter, it would be hope. One of the gifts that goes hand in hand with the promise of forgiveness and new life is hope for the future. This is not hope based on our capacity to improve our situation. Instead, it is the hope that comes from knowing our lives are in the hands of our merciful Father.

Being able to account for that hope when confronted by nonbelievers is part of our witness. We are reminded that when we give an account of what we believe, we are to do so with gentleness and reverence. The hope that inhabits us is not of our own making. It is the Spirit’s work upon us.

- If you were asked, how would you explain the hope that is in you, given all the darkness that fills the world?
- How is hope linked to faith? How is hopelessness or despair linked to faithlessness?

John 14:15–21

Jesus’ words of assurance to his disciples strike at the heart of one of our deepest fears as human beings: the fear of being abandoned, to be left as an orphan. Jesus had just finished telling his disciples that he was going to suffer and die at the hands of those who found his teaching intolerable. The disciples had every reason to feel that they would soon be alone. Certainly these men who had left behind their normal lives to follow Jesus on his path had to be a bit worried about these words. Jesus had become the one they trusted for guidance and support. He was the one they depended on to lead them in right paths. He had become like a father to them. And then he told them he was soon going to die.

- What evidence do you see in our world that being “orphaned” is one of our most basic fears? What does it do to our sense of belonging to be abandoned by those we love?

Recognizing their fear, Jesus assured his disciples that he was not orphaning them. He was sending someone in his place who would look after them. The Holy Spirit will abide in them and keep them in his Word. He will counsel and support them in their daily lives.

All too often, the sin in us tempts us to attribute to the Spirit those things which are actually our own will and desire. But Jesus assures us that the work of the Spirit is to show us who God is. The Spirit is revealing God’s gifts to his chosen ones. These gifts are visible to the eyes of faith, even when they are obscure to the world.

- What are some of the ways we try claim our plans as the work of the Spirit? What are some of the ways we try to claim the work of the Spirit as our own work?

Ascension of the Lord

May 14, 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.

And the gospel should really not be something written, but a spoken word that brings forth the Scriptures, as Christ and the apostles have done. That is why Christ himself did not write anything but only spoke. He called his teaching not Scripture, but gospel, meaning good news.

– Martin Luther –

A Brief Instruction on What to Look for in the Gospel, 1521. LW 35

Acts 1:1–11

In these opening verses of Acts, Luke establishes the distinction that exists between what Jesus began in his life and ministry and what the Holy Spirit will continue to do through Jesus' disciples. The first book (the Gospel of Luke) tells what Jesus did and taught. The second book tells how that work would be carried on into the new age. The transition between the two times begins with Jesus' ascension into heaven.

The disciples who had followed Jesus are now apostles, "sent ones." They were sent out to declare the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ. As they stand, watching Jesus disappear into the heavens, they are quickly brought back to earth by the appearance of the two men dressed in white. The apostles have work to do. They cannot simply stand there, staring at the sky, waiting for Jesus to return. They are to be about the business of sharing the Good News.

- *What are some ways that we do the equivalent of staring at the sky waiting for Jesus? In what ways are we tempted to ignore this world by searching for the next?*
- *In what way are we "sent ones," too?*

Psalms 47

The psalmist sang of God's victory and described the future glory of Jesus' ascension saying, "God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." The Lord is king over the whole earth, indeed the whole creation. His love for his people is recalled with praise and thanksgiving.

- *How is the ascension of Jesus one more example of God revealing his true identity to the disciples? Did they need to see this moment to believe it?*

Ephesians 1:15–23

When we meet someone and their response to hearing our name is, "Oh, I've heard about you," most of us probably have a mixed reaction. We wonder what someone could possibly have heard about us. Was it good or bad? True or false? A flash of panic can accompany such a statement.

Our reading from Ephesians includes just such a statement: "I have heard about you." But what's been heard is that the Ephesians are people of faith in Jesus Christ and love toward all the saints. This is the reputation the church in Ephesus has achieved. It would be nice to think every church has such a reputation.

- *If someone told you they had heard about your church, what*

would you think they had heard?

- *When you speak of your church to others, what do you say? What would you want people to know about your church?*

Paul prayed that the Holy Spirit would open the eyes of the Ephesians to see more clearly who Jesus is and what he is accomplishing.

- *How does increased knowledge of Christ help the Ephesians in their work of being the church? How does it help us?*

Luke 24:44–53

The vision of Christ's ascension contains a clear statement of the task being handed over to the Church. Jesus' followers are to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all the nations. The Church is to bear witness to the saving work of Jesus Christ.

In the intervening years since Jesus spoke these words, the Church has taken upon itself, or has had placed upon it, all sorts of additional tasks. While many of these additional tasks are worthwhile and desperately needed by the world, at times these tasks can distract from or even take the place of the primary calling of the Church: to proclaim Christ.

- *What are some secondary tasks in which your church is involved? Do these tasks ever take priority over the proclamation of the Gospel? What are some ways the daily demands on a pastor can impinge upon the work of proclaiming Christ?*

The disciples were told to stay in the city until they received power from on high. This foreshadowed the events of Pentecost while also serving as reassurance that what they were about to witness was not the end of the story. It isn't easy to stay put and wait for God's time when we have our own ideas about timing. This word to the disciples is a helpful reminder that we are not in charge of the mission of the Gospel and that it is only through the power of the Spirit that we can faithfully serve as Christ's witnesses.

- *Can you think of times when you have not wanted to wait for God's will to unfold? Why wouldn't the disciples be told to go out immediately and tell everyone they met?*

The high point of this reading comes as Jesus' ascends into heaven. This moment could have been seen by the disciples as the end: Jesus' work was done and he was going back to whence he had come. But through the Holy Spirit, Christ's work continues. The forgiveness of sins continues and the resurrection wasn't just an historical event. Forgiving sins and raising the dead is what Christ continues to do and what the church proclaims in his name.

Seventh Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2026



Whoever does not know God hidden in suffering
does not know God at all.

– 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.

Acts 1:12–26

The fulfillment of Scripture is a recurring theme in the book of Acts. All sorts of things that might appear to be random or contrary to God's plan are understood to be in accord with Scripture and part of God's plan.

In this episode, Judas' betrayal of Jesus and his eventual death are understood as fitting into God's overall plan of salvation. Luke does not explore here the relationship between divine necessity and human responsibility. He simply states that Judas' actions were a fulfillment of Scripture.

- *What significance do you find in the differences between this recollection of Judas' death and the version in Matthew 27:3–10? If Judas' actions were part of God's plan, how can Scripture say he was responsible for what he did?*

The remaining eleven determine that they must replace Judas so that their number will again be complete. They have clear requirements for the replacement. (Note that these requirements rule out Paul, whose story will fill half of the book of Acts).

- *Why do you think it was so important to replace Judas? What do the specific qualifications the eleven were looking for tell us about what they considered important?*

Eventually, it will become important for believers to be able to witness to what they have not seen. As time passes and the church grows, the witnesses of the Gospel will include people who never heard Jesus teach, never witnessed a healing, never saw him risen from the dead. But for now, the eleven find it important for the replacement to be a first-hand witness, and they determine that the best way to choose between the two candidates is through the casting of lots. They assume that God will make his will known in this way.

- *Do you think there is any significance to the fact that we never hear another word about Matthias?*

Psalm 68:1–10

The psalmist celebrates the righteous judgment and the abundant gifts that the Lord gives. He looks out for the needy and protects his people from their enemies. His love for orphans and widows is a defining characteristic of his nature.

- *Why is it important to praise the Lord for his goodness and equity? Does it help us to appreciate the Lord when we think about his works?*

1 Peter 4:12–19; 5:6–11

Peter is clear about telling believers that they will suffer for the faith. Jesus suffered and so shall we. He was insulted, persecuted, and killed so why would those who love and follow him think it would be any different for us? Peter explains that suffering such as this, for Christ's sake, should not cause us to be ashamed. Instead it brings God glory.

- *No one asks to suffer, to be sure. But how does our suffering for Christ indicate our faith in him?*

Peter urged believers to cast all of their concerns on Jesus who protects them from the prowling enemy. We are to resist the devil and be aware of his tempting ways even as we await future glory in Christ.

- *How often do you think about Satan prowling around like a roaring lion seeking to eat you alive? How does that drive you to the comfort of Jesus?*

John 17:1–11

Today's gospel reading is from Jesus' prayer on behalf of his disciples. It comes just before Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. In it we see Jesus' request of the Father, his will for his followers and his faith that God the Father will protect and sustain them. It may seem rather strange to hear Jesus asking to be "glorified." It does not fit neatly with how we tend to think of Jesus, as humble and self-denying. We also have in our ears the witness of the other gospels, and Jesus' desire to have the cup pass from him if possible. But here we see Jesus calling upon the Father to glorify the Son, with a clear sense that what has taken place and what is about to take place are not to be avoided. In glorifying the Son, in raising him from the dead, the Father will be glorified because the world will see who he really is.

- *Is Jesus, after all of his self-giving, now seeking his own gain? In what way does Jesus show the nature of true glory?*

Throughout this prayer, the events of the past, present, and future are brought together in this "hour." Jesus spoke of future events as if they had already happened ("I am no longer in the world") and past events (being glorified in his followers) as not yet complete. Jesus' prayer is on our behalf too, and not just for those near him. Jesus appealed for unity among his followers, the same unity that is shared between God the Father and God the Son. It is Jesus' will that his followers would be one, as Father and Son are one.

- *What do you think it means for a diverse people to be "one"? In what sense are the Father and the Son "one"? How does that help us understand what Jesus is talking about here?*