

Pentecost 15 (Proper 18A)

September 6, 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.

*“Owe no man anything, but to love one another.”
To me, clearly and simply it means: Not as men, but as
Christians, are we under obligations. Our indebtedness should be
the free obligation of love. It should not be compulsory and law-
prescribed... Love’s obligation enables a man to do
more than is actually required of him.*

– Martin Luther–

Sermon on Romans 13, Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Ezekiel 33:7-9

In an ancient city, the watchmen stood on the walls and kept an eye out for the sign of approaching enemies or natural disasters. They were responsible for the safety of all within the city — including themselves!

If the people of the city did not heed the sound of the warning trumpet and did not act, the watchman would not be held responsible, said the Lord. But if the watchman failed to do his duty to warn others of impending trouble, then the watchman would be held responsible for the bad that happened on his watch.

The Lord made the prophet Ezekiel a “watchman” over the house of Israel and gave him the great responsibility of sending a message of warning to the people concerning their wicked behavior. If Ezekiel failed to deliver the message from the Lord God then the Lord would make him culpable for the people’s iniquity. If the message was given to the people and the people did not listen, it would be the people’s own fault.

- *In what ways is it our responsibility to teach and admonish both unbelievers and fellow believers alike about disobedience to God’s will? Where does our responsibility begin and end?*
- *In what sense does a watchman’s job also require patience and obedience?*
- *How was this message not just a message for individuals, but a message for the whole community to repent and be obedient to the Lord so that he might restore Israel?*

Psalms 32:1-7

The Lord calls us to repentance but sometimes we are stubborn and refuse to submit to his will in our lives. With disobedience comes correction. When forgiveness comes to us it is a great blessing. The psalmist prays that all people would not be silent in the face of the Lord, but instead open their hearts and mouths to repent and seek reconciliation with God. When sin plagues our lives, it is a heavy, overwhelming burden. When forgiveness is granted to us, the weight it lifted and we can live in freedom, giving thanks to God and rejoicing in his holy presence.

- *Why are we so often reluctant to confess our sins and shortcomings to the Lord? Is it because we think we have no sin to confess?*
- *Has there been a time when you kept silent in the face of God and felt the terrible weight of unrepented sin? Did you confess eventually? How did that change things for you?*

Romans 13:1-10

St. Paul asserts that love is the fulfillment of the law. Doing good to others is the epitome of obedience to the laws of God. Yet he begins this chapter with instructions about being obedient to the civil government. Paul says our obedience is required because those who have positions of authority are put there by God himself. But note that Scripture mentions nothing about whether those authorities are even “Christian.”

- *How does God work through the civil government to make his ways known to all the earth — even when that government is not explicitly Christian?*
- *In this society where it is easy to criticize governing authorities — and on a daily basis, people openly show disrespect to elected leaders — in what ways does it challenge you to think about your Christian responsibility to respect the civil authority?*

Simply reading this text aloud will immediately give rise to questions about the limits of our obedience and which governing authorities we must or may not obey. Certainly, Scripture shows there are times when “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

- *When Scripture commands obedience to authority, why are we so quick to want to talk about “exceptions to the rule?” In what ways do people try to get around this Romans text based on “religious” excuses? Have you seen this in our culture recently?*

Matthew 18:1-20

In this passage, the disciples want to know who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. When Jesus speaks of the “kingdom,” he is describing what faith is like in our lives. Faith is not about being the greatest in an earthly sense, rather he points to the little children around him to show his followers that they must become humble and trusting like children to be the greatest in his kingdom. Being like children, receiving them, and protecting them from harm (including spiritual harm) is what is required of Jesus’ followers.

- *How do we get tripped up in “bigger-is-better” thinking in our faith communities and in our own lives?*
- *How are we asked to turn from being “big” to being “small” again in our journey with Christ? What does genuine Christian humility look like?*
- *In what sense does our life of discipleship reflect a child-like faith?*
- *As a congregation are children truly important to you?*



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, if there were no one on earth who forgave sins, but there were on Law and works, how timid and miserable a poor distressed conscience would be! But now, when God has filled everyone's mouth so that he can say to another: "Your sins are forgiven," no matter where you are, the golden year has begun.

—Martin Luther—
Church Postil

Genesis 50:15-21

This text comes at the end of a very long story in Scripture, beginning back in Genesis 37. Joseph, the favored son of Jacob, was sold into slavery by his brothers who were jealous of his relationship with their father. Joseph faced many trials in the foreign land, including false accusations and imprisonment. When God brought him to Pharaoh's attention, Joseph was placed in charge of the granaries of Egypt to prepare for an impending drought. It is that same drought that eventually brings Joseph's brothers to Egypt hoping to buy some food for the family.

When Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, he is forgiving and merciful and even brings the whole family down to live with him in Egypt. But now their father Jacob has died, and the brothers are not sure if Joseph considers himself free to take revenge. Once again they beg for his forgiveness and mercy.

- From what you actually see in Scripture, how did Joseph feel? Was he plotting revenge, or was he already in a different place?

Joseph's profound statement, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good," is a remarkably wise and faith-centered analysis, looking back on his life. This is not an easy conclusion for us to reach on our own. Amidst the hurts and trials of life, it is God alone who can work forgiveness in our hearts.

- When have you experienced this same reality of God at work, even in the midst of human sin?
- Why do you suppose our God is so concerned with mercy and forgiveness?

Psalms 103:1-12

In Hebrew terminology, to "bless the Lord" means to praise and give thanks to God. Biblically, to say a "blessing" before we eat a meal, for example, does not mean we are doing anything to the food; we are giving our thanks to God as the giver of the food.

- What are some of the many things that the psalmist is thanking God for here? Which are material benefits, and which are spiritual benefits?

Strictly speaking, the Hebrew language does not have the same past, present, and future tenses that English has. Instead, Hebrew speaks in terms of completed and uncompleted actions.

- In this psalm, how is God praised both for what he has done,

and what he has yet to do? How are the two connected?

Romans 14:1-12

Paul makes a careful distinction between law and gospel, and touches upon what is referred to as *adiaphora*. While this Greek word (meaning "indifferent things") does not appear here in the biblical text, it is a term that is often used by theologians to speak of subjects that are debatable, but not essential to salvation.

In these verses, Paul uses the example of religious dietary restrictions and the celebration of religious holidays. Under the Jewish law, such things literally were "written in stone" and a person was held accountable for obeying them. But with the coming of Christ and the institution of the New Covenant, our Lord set aside a number of the old ceremonial laws.

- When it comes to things that are neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture, in what sense are we (as people of faith) free to use our own discretion? Does this have to be a source of contention when we don't agree?
- In cases where we are free to use our own discretion, why might we refrain from exercising that freedom out of concern for the scruples of others?

Matthew 18:21-35

The question of forgiveness comes up as Peter wants to know how many times he should forgive another person when sinned against. Jesus answers with a riddle of sorts, "Not seven times but seventy-seven times."

Jesus is serious about forgiveness — even if keeping count all the way to seventy-seven is nearly impossible. Perhaps that's the point! We are called to forgive as many times as it takes and stop keeping count or keeping score.

- Why is it so hard for us to forgive repeatedly? Would Jesus say there is a time when we stop forgiving? How is that the same or different from what relationship professionals might say?

Jesus tells a parable using large sums of money and some very unforgiving characters. One servant who was forgiven much was unmerciful toward a fellow servant who owed him a debt smaller than the one he owed his master. When the master found out about the injustice, he was furious for the servant's lack of grace.

- Why is Jesus so adamant that we practice forgiveness repeatedly and extravagantly?



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.

Therefore we must not consider this parable in every detail, but confine ourselves to the leading thought, that which Christ designs to teach by it... what the householder had in mind and what he aims to teach, how he desires to have his goodness esteemed higher than all human works and merit, yea, that his mercy alone must have all the praise.

– Martin Luther–

Sermon on Matthew 20

Isaiah 55:6-9

There is a sense of urgency in the prophet's words: "Seek the Lord while he may be found ..." It's as if the grace and mercy of God are just a limited-time offer. Perhaps they are, in a sense. We all have but a finite time on this earth, and as all our lessons today show, there will be a time when the day draws to a close. We are called to forsake any ways of ours that don't coincide with God's ways. The Word of the Lord came to Isaiah describing the lofty ways of God which are far from human understanding.

- How do we get our ways mixed up with God's ways? Do we ever have this "faith business" fully figured out?
- What does it mean to "return to the Lord?" In what way does this assume there is already a relationship between us and God to return to?

Psalms 27:1-9

The Lord is our shelter and protection. There is no need to be afraid, declares the psalmist, for the Lord will care for his people in times of trouble. The only thing the psalmist asks for is to dwell in the Lord's house and to gaze upon His beauty. For us, as Christians, to consider these things is to bring to mind heavenly dwellings and the future time when we shall see God face to face (1 John 3:2). But for the original psalmist, this was a reference to the earthly Temple in Jerusalem.

- In what sense is our worship here on earth a foreshadowing of our future in the life to come? When do we get to be with God here and now?

Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30

Paul begins this letter by making reference to his arrest and imprisonment which has advanced the Good News of Christ. In an unlikely place and unpleasant experience, Paul proclaims that his hardship has given him the opportunity to witness to the whole imperial guard. Paul felt increased boldness in his witness about Christ because of his difficult situation.

- When you have been in the midst of trying times, have you ever thought of it as an opportunity to bear witness to your faith in a special way? Has it given you greater boldness to proclaim Christ and him crucified?
- Like Paul, how might we use our own negative experiences to "advance the gospel"? In what way does speaking from our pain make our witness more honest?

Paul says he is "hard pressed" to decide whether it would be better for him to live or die. He trusts in the promise of the resurrection in Christ and knows that death is not the end of his relationship with the Lord. And yet, he also knows that the Lord still has work for him to do.

- What does Paul mean when he says in verse 21, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain?" In what sense is Paul already "with" Christ? Can you say the same?
- Speaking as one who knew he was drawing nearer to the end of his life, does Paul sound dejected? Or does he sound enthusiastic? What is it that drives him on?

Matthew 20:1-16

Once again, keep in mind that when Jesus speaks of the "kingdom," he is talking about what faith is like in real life, — both now and in the life to come. In this parable, Jesus compares the kingdom to workers hired at various times in the day, though all receive the same pay in the end. Faith is not a matter of "how long" or "how much" we have, as if any of that can be measured or compared.

- Do all people come to faith at the same point in their lives and under identical circumstances? If we know that, why are we tempted to measure and compare the faith of others with our own?

Some of the laborers acted as if the master did something unjust in the way he paid the workers. In verse 15, he speaks of his right to give what belongs to him, saying, "Are you envious because I am generous?" Literally, the Greek phrase reads: "Is your eye evil because I am good?"

- In what sense does the reality of God's grace and mercy expose our sinfulness?
- Do we think ourselves worthy of God's blessings because we are Christians? Or is it the blessing of God that has made us Christians to begin with?

Martin Luther wrote in his Small Catechism, "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and live a godly life now and in eternity." God's gift to us is the gift of faith. It is not something we can conjure up on our own, rather it is something that the Holy Spirit works within us.

- In what way, as people of faith, are we already workers for hire in God's kingdom? What is our pay? Is it something we earn on our own, based on how well we do our job?
- How is the "reward" of faith always a matter of grace, rather than payment we deserve?



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 sinner does not so much need to be washed as he needs to die, in order to be wholly renewed and made another creature, and to be conformed to the death and resurrection of Christ, with whom he dies and rises again through baptism.

– Martin Luther –

The Babylonian Captivity of the Church

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Ezekiel was a prophet at the time of the Exile in Babylon (586-539 B.C.), when the people of Judah had been conquered and carried off to the land of Babylonia, far from their homeland. Dejected and feeling sorry for themselves, the people cried out that God was not being fair. They began to repeat an old proverb that they thought explained their misery: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” The people believed that they were suffering for their parent’s sin when in fact they were suffering for their own disobedience and idolatry.

- *Why is it so easy to blame others for the suffering that is caused by the sins we commit? Why couldn’t (or wouldn’t) the Israelites in Exile see their own culpability?*

In response, the Lord says it is the people of Israel who are the ones not being fair and just. God insists that he has not only been just, but that he has also been gracious and merciful to those who are his own. Those who are righteous shall live, says the Lord, but those who turn away from righteousness will die.

- *In these verses, how does God express both his justice and his mercy? Instead of complaining and blaming past generations and even the Lord himself, what did God want the people to do? Why is this so hard?*

Psalms 25:1-10

This psalm is written from the perspective of a person who has been put down and treated badly by others, a person who feels shamed. It is not a boastful prayer, but an expression of dependence upon God. He knows he isn’t sinless, but he also knows where to turn in times of trial. When the psalmist said that he waits for the Lord, he is confessing that he waits with hope for the One who will rescue and shelter him from harm.

- *Are there times in life when we suffer the scorn of others legitimately? Does that make it any less difficult to bear, knowing that we deserve the shame we’ve received?*
- *What gives the psalmist hope? What does the writer believe God can do?*

Philippians 2:1-4 (5-13) 14-18

Paul here is speaking to people of faith — people who knew the promise of Christ in their lives. On that basis, he encourages them to live in a manner that follows from such a faith. He gave some practical advice on what a faithful life

looks like in a world of sin and evil. At the center of this passage (verses 5-13) is a section known as the “Kenosis Hymn,” a beautiful creed-like poem describing the suffering and exaltation of Christ.

- *In some lectionaries, the center verses (5-13) are listed as an optional part of the reading. How does the surrounding text in Philippians 2 sound different if these verses are left out?*

Paul knows that there is comfort in Christ. He knows that there is encouragement, affection, and heart felt sympathy in the Body of Christ. He simply appeals to what he knows and what the Philippians also know — that Christ grants love, unity, and support to his people for the mutual uplifting of one another. This is the foundation of the faith community and Paul appeals to this reality to continue to encourage believers to act in a Christ-like manner toward one another, with the mind and heart of the suffering servant Jesus, who emptied himself unto death for his beloved children.

- *How does this hymn strengthen your faith and desire to live a servant’s life? What do you hear in this passage that encourages you?*

Matthew 21:23-27 (28-32)

Upon entering the Temple, Jesus was confronted by the chief priests and the elders of the people regarding his authority. They want to know who gave him his authority. Jesus turns their question around and asks them about John the Baptist and where John’s authority came from.

- *What answer did the elders want to give Jesus? What prevented them from giving that answer?*
- *What was the correct answer to Jesus’ question? How is it also the answer to the elders’ original question to Jesus?*

It is interesting that Jesus responded to his accusers by referring not simply to John’s preaching, but to the baptisms that John performed at the river Jordan. Like Jesus after him, in baptism, John had actually dared to proclaim the forgiveness of sins.

- *What does this text say about the nature of baptism? Is baptism simply a human ceremony, as some claim, or does it convey a promise by God’s authority?*

As the reading goes on, Jesus drew the distinction between those who claim to obey God and those who actually do obey him.

- *What evidence of faith does Jesus want to see in us? What sort of “change” does he want to happen? In the end, by whose authority does faith happen in our lives?*

Pentecost 19 (Proper 22A)

October 4, 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.

By faith, as St. Peter says, we acquire a new and clean heart, and God will and does account us entirely righteous and holy for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. . . And such faith, renewal, and forgiveness of sins is followed by good works. . . We say, besides, that if good works do not follow, faith is false and not true.

– Martin Luther–

Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article VIII

Isaiah 5:1-7

At the time in which Isaiah lived, the glory days for the kingdom of Judah were over. The Assyrians had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, and it would not be long before the Babylonians would do the same in the kingdom of Judah to the south.

As a parable of this judgment, the prophet speaks of the vineyard of the Lord, his “beloved.” The vineyard, which represents the houses of Israel and Judah, is destroyed after it yields wild grapes. The Lord, who did everything he could to create a beautiful haven for his people cried out to the vineyard tenants, “What more could I have done for you?”

- What is the difference between fruit that is “cultivated” and fruit that is “wild?” Compare Paul’s description of the Works of the Flesh vs. the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.
- Why must we depend on God to cultivate good fruit in our lives? Left “wild” to ourselves, what do we produce?

In verse 7, the fruit that God expects from his people is contrasted with what he actually finds through a play on similar-sounding Hebrew words:

God Wanted:

Mishpat = Justice

Zedekah = Righteousness

The Vineyard Produced:

Mispach = Bloodshed

Ze’aqah = Outcry

God calls the people of Jerusalem and Judah to judge the vineyard, and in doing so, they are convicted of their own sins. During Holy Week, on Good Friday, there is an ancient set of prayers called the Solemn Reproaches. These laments mirror the good that God has done for his people since the beginning of time up to the crucifixion of Christ. As each reproach is said we hear, “O my people, O my church, what have I done to you? How have I offended you?”

- In what ways is understanding God’s radical grace in our lives a result of first understanding our sin and its consequences? Why is it important to recognize that we are responsible for our sinful condition? Where is the good news in God’s sorrowful words?

Psalms 80:7-19

The psalm for today picks up the same imagery of God’s people as his beloved vineyard. It serves as a fitting reflection and response to the first reading from Isaiah, this time from the perspective of God’s people.

- What are some of the things in this psalm that match the vineyard parable in Isaiah 7? In what sense does Isaiah

answer the questions asked in this psalm?

- Under the reality of judgment, what does the psalmist pray for? If the life of God’s people is to be restored, who must make it happen? In what sense is our prayer the same?

Philippians 3:4b-14

Paul responded to those who were tempted to brag of their own self-righteousness by saying that if anyone could justify himself by his works, it would be the apostle himself. Paul is righteous according to the law — he calls himself “blameless” when it comes to keeping the law to the letter. But this, he tells the Philippians, is “rubbish” compared to what Christ Jesus has done for him. “Rubbish” is a polite way of translating the Greek word *skubala*, which literally means “crap” or “dung.”

- Why would Paul refer to the good he had done in his life as “crap?” Compare Isaiah 64:6. What is he saying here?

In our desire to justify ourselves we often cling to the accomplishments that we can boast about, but none of these is anything when it comes to our life in Christ. It is only through Jesus that we are righteous.

- What things have you been prone to clinging to in your life that have made you feel good about yourself? How are those unimportant when it comes to our salvation?

Matthew 21:33-46

Given the familiar biblical image in the Old Testament, the religious authorities would have known right away that Jesus was referring to God’s people as his “vineyard.” But here, in this parable, the accusation is not against the vineyard itself, but of the caretakers of the vineyard — the “tenants” who had been charged by God with caring for God’s people.

- What are the similarities between Isaiah’s parable and Jesus’ parable? What are the differences?
- What sin was at the root of this parable?
- This parable foreshadows the condemnation and death of Jesus. What part did the Jewish religious authorities play in his death? Who are the “other tenants” (v. 41) that Jesus refers to?

Psalms 118:21 — “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone...” — is the singlemost Old Testament verse quoted most often in the New Testament.

- What do you think is so important about this verse in helping us understand the central message of Jesus?

Pentecost 20 (Proper 23A)

October 11, 2026



*One thing, and only one thing,
is necessary for Christian life, righteousness,
and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the
gospel of Christ, as Christ says, "I am the resurrection
and the life; he who believes in me,
though he die, yet shall he live."*

– Martin Luther–

On Christian Liberty

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.

Isaiah 25:6-9

On the mountain of the Lord, Zion – God’s chosen dwelling place in Jerusalem, God will make a rich feast for his people. The hope-filled apocalyptic vision expressed in these verses foreshadows similar New Testament imagery of righteous judgment and salvation. As in Revelation 21:4, we hear the promise that when God puts an end to death, he will “wipe away tears from all faces” (Isaiah 25:8).

- *What does it mean to you that God will eradicate death one day? Why must we “wait”? In what sense is waiting on the Lord at the very heart of faith?*

At the scene of a crime or accident, dead bodies are covered by the police. Verse 7 refers to a “covering” and a “veil” that is cast over all people.

- *In what sense do we all live our entire lives in this world under the veil of death? For better or worse, how does the fear of death shape the way we live?*

Verse 8 says that God will “swallow up” death. The Hebrew word, *balatz*, is the same word used in Jonah 1:17, in reference to the prophet being “swallowed” by a great fish.

- *Read Jonah 2 for Jonah’s description of the experience of being swallowed by death. What is the irony in Isaiah that death itself will be swallowed by God?*

Psalms 23

The depth of these well known words makes them so much more widely applicable than just on the occasion of a funeral where we hear them most frequently. This psalm vividly reminds us of God’s abiding presence in this life. He provides for all our needs and accompanies us on our journey of faith. He leads us in peace and before our last enemy.

- *In what ways does this psalm speak to you in your present life situations? How can it comfort you in daily life and not just in times of trial and grief?*

As in Isaiah 25, in Psalm 23:5 the blessing of God is described in terms of a banquet.

- *What does it mean that God spreads a table “in the presence of my enemies” (i.e., those who trouble me)?*
- *Does this say anything about the regret unbelievers will experience when Christ returns?*

Philippians 4:4-13

Paul wraps up his pastoral letter to the church in Philippi, admonishing a pair of local women to get along for the sake

of the gospel. He asks the rest of the faith community to help them do so in order that their important Gospel work may continue.

- *In what ways does internal church conflict impair the mission of the church? How is the entire community of faith responsible for smoothing things over so the mission of God can flourish?*

Paul goes on to say, “Rejoice in the Lord always!” Be reasonable. Do not be worried about things you cannot control. Pray! Do whatever is of God. We are able to follow Paul’s advice because of the promise he iterates, “The Lord is at hand!” With the Lord at hand, we need not worry about things so that conflict ensues amongst us. These are nuggets of advice from which every congregation and every Christian can benefit.

- *Which pieces of Paul’s advice about how to live in Christian community catch your attention the most? Why do we fail to attend to these teachings until things get out of control?*

Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus tells a parable that describes the urgent nature of the kingdom of God. He describes God’s kingdom as a wedding feast he was hosting for his son. Specific people were invited by the King, but the people gave all manner of lame excuses for why they couldn’t attend. Rather than grieving their absence, the King sent out servants to invite guests from among the roadside travelers.

- *How does this parable help to explain the inclusion of Gentiles in the promise of the Gospel, in terms of the rejection of the Gospel on the part of the Jews?*
- *Compare how Paul addresses this same subject in Romans 11:1- 24. What conclusions does he draw? What is Paul’s warning to the Gentiles in Romans 11:21?*

To those who are inclined to see the King’s actions in this parable as an example of “cheap grace,” there is an additional twist at the end of the story. One of the last-minute invitees comes to the banquet but is not dressed appropriately for the occasion. He showed up, but he did not appear to understand the importance of what was happening — and he was thrown out.

Once again, keep in mind that when Jesus spoke of the “kingdom,” he was talking about faith. Martin Luther said: “Faith does not free us from good works, but from false opinions about good works.” (On Christian Liberty)

- *Does the grace of God make void our accountability to God? What does God expect of us as people of faith? What sense do you get from this parable that the time to act on faith is now?*

Thanksgiving (CA)

October 12, 2026



Behold, so powerful is faith, to obtain all it wants of God, that God considers it done before the asking.

—Martin Luther —

“The Ten Lepers,” 1521

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 8:1-10

The author of Deuteronomy posits that the hardships Israel suffered in the wilderness was to test them, to see what was in their hearts. The Lord God demanded and still demands singular loyalty from his people. This is spelled out very clearly in the First Commandments, “You shall have no other gods before me.”

- How does the First Commandment set the tone and expectation for the other nine?
- How would people today respond to the notion that God tests his people to see where their hearts really are? Would modern people balk at that idea, or do they understand God’s intention?

The potential problem for Israel was the same potential problem for believers today, namely that the more we possess, the less we trust in our Creator. The accumulation of wealth and possessions causes human beings to forget about the goodness of the Lord and rely on ourselves instead.

- How does any success we have or any thing we have gained, come from the Lord God?
- Why is it so important to remember where we came from so that we know where we are going?

The historian mentions that “man does not live by bread alone,” and all that Israel suffered on their journey to the Promised Land was to remind them of God’s providence. God gave them manna to sustain them, but they hoarded it and it rotted.

- Why did Satan test Jesus with the challenge to turn rocks into bread? What was Jesus’ response? (Matthew 4:4) How did Jesus succeed whereas the Israelites failed in this regard?

Psalms 67

In this thanksgiving psalm, the psalmist gives thanks for a bountiful harvest with hope of continued bounty in the future. This song is like a sung prayer where the singer invokes God’s blessing but at the same time acknowledges it. “Let all the peoples praise you, O God,” he sings.

- In what ways is this psalm a confession of faith?
- What does it mean to you that God is fair and just?

Philippians 4:6-20

Do not be anxious about anything, St. Paul wrote from prison. If a guy who was in prison, having been persecuted for the faith, having endured a “thorn in the flesh,” and

having been abandoned and criticized by many, can say that, then perhaps we ought to listen.

- Why is life so anxiety producing? How does faith address all of this uncertainty and worry?

Paul encouraged the Christians at Philippi to turn all their worries over to the Lord, that he would grant them peace. Peace is not just an absence of conflict; it is an abiding sense of well-being, even when all isn’t actually well. Not only are we to give everything over to God in prayer, but we are also to give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

- Do you find it easy or difficult to give thanks for the trials and sufferings in your life? Why?

Finally, Paul commended the Christians to keep their eyes on “whatever” (hosos in the Greek) is of God: things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise. These things will keep us going when life gets rough!

- When you need a good pep talk, does focusing on the things and ways of the Lord help you? If so, how?

Luke 17:11-19

This story of the ten lepers asking Jesus for healing is a familiar one. It is the appointed Gospel text for Thanksgiving every year. We often focus on the lack of lepers who returned to give thanks to Jesus, but wasn’t it their faith that brought them to him in the first place? Apparently they believed he could do something for them, so they approached him and asked for his mercy. They did not assume that they were worthy of his assistance, they simply trusted in his power.

- Could Jesus have avoided the lepers and been justified? Why?
- What made him take the risk of going near them AND interacting with them?

Once they were healed, they hurried on to the temple to receive the proper cleansing from the priest so that they might be restored to the faith community. Jesus instructed them to do so! But one man received a second blessing. He chose to return to Jesus and express his heartfelt thanks. This one was a Samaritan.

- What is St. Luke trying to convey by reporting that the only leper who returned to give thanks was an “enemy” of Israel?
- In what ways do we receive a second blessing when we live a life of gratitude?
- How do faith and thankfulness go hand in hand? Can there be one without the other? If so, what does that look like?

Pentecost 21 (Proper 24A)

October 18, 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.

*"All things are yours whether ... life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's...."
This is not to say that every Christian is placed over all things to have and control them by physical power – a madness with which some churchmen are afflicted – for such power belongs to kings, princes, and other men on earth.*

–Martin Luther, On Christian Liberty–

Isaiah 45:1–7

The word of the Lord came to King Cyrus of Persia. Though Cyrus was an unbeliever who did not worship the God of Israel, God chose to use Cyrus as an instrument to achieve his divine goals. As we hear, God calls Cyrus by name and equips him for His own purpose: to free his people from their bondage in exile and allow them to return home.

- Does God's use of Cyrus necessarily imply that Cyrus had a saving faith in the one true God? In what ways can and does God use even those who do not know him or worship him?
- How are the good things in life a reflection of God's will and creative action, even if they are done by people who may not be doing things in God's name?
- What does verse 3 tell us about God's motive for "calling us by name"? How is this similar to what happens to us in Baptism?

In verse 1, Scripture uses the word "anointed" to refer to Cyrus. This word in Hebrew is *meshia* (what we know as the word "Messiah"). This title was generally reserved by the Hebrew people to refer to their own kings, chosen by God — such as Saul, David, and Solomon.

- What would it have meant to the Jewish people to hear God call Cyrus the Persian his "anointed"? How might their understanding of God's ways have grown? Who do we acknowledge as *THE* "Anointed One" who has delivered us from our bondage to sin and allows us to return "home"?

Psalms 96:1–9 (10–13)

In this psalm of praise, the greatness and majesty of God are extolled above all things, including the so-called "gods" of other nations. The people are enjoined to add their prayers and praise to God in worship. Even nature itself is called to give glory to God.

The word "ascribe" in verses 7–8 comes from the Hebrew root *yahav*, literally "give." Used as an imperative, it's a way of saying "attribute to" or "give credit to."

- When it comes to self-worth and success, why do people like to take credit for their own accomplishments and works? How about when it comes to faith?

1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

Paul wrote to the faithful in Thessalonica, that he, Timothy and Silvanus are truly grateful for their ministry and that they give thanks to God for them. Paul reminded them that the three men keep the whole group in prayer,

acknowledging that the Holy Spirit has been given to them for faith and the mission of the Gospel.

- Does the Holy Spirit have to be present for faith and for the mission of the church? (See Luther's explanation to the Third Article of the Creed.) How do you know the Holy Spirit when you see it?

Paul goes on to mention that the Christians became "imitators" of them and of Christ which made them an example to others of the life of faith. The Greek word used here for "example" is *tupos* which is akin to the English word "type" or "typical." Paul and his friends were representative of what faith in Christ looked like – they gave up everything for the Gospel. They travelled wherever the spirit led them. They ended up in prison and abused and beaten for the mission of God.

- In what ways is our life in Christ atypical of the life of unbelievers?
- Why do we suffer for the transmission of the Gospel message? Does that make it easier or harder? Why?

Matthew 22:15–22

The Pharisees set out to trap Jesus once again. This time they tried to flatter him with platitudes about being truthful and not caring about the opinions of others. Then they asked him about paying taxes to Caesar. Their ploy was to corner him into saying something objectionable. If Jesus answered, "No, we don't have to pay taxes," they could accuse him of anarchy. If he said, "Yes, of course we must pay taxes," they could accuse him of a lack of devotion to God. Jesus' profound response foiled their trap.

- In what way was the Pharisees' question an attempt to justify their own sinfulness? In what ways do human beings try to use God's words to make a case for our own sinful desires?

In Baptism God promises to mark us with his likeness as he calls us into a life of following Christ. On our foreheads we are branded with the cross of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit forever. This is the ultimate truth of our lives! At the same time we are called to honor those in civil authority as an expression of our honoring of God who places people in positions of power.

- What does God want us to give to Caesar? What in us does God want for himself?
- How is Luther's explanation of the fourth commandment an acknowledgment of our duty to honor those in authority over us as a reflection of how we honor God?

Reformation Sunday (A)

October 25, 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.

*That word above all earthly powers,
No thanks to them, abideth; The Spirit and the
gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth: Let goods
and kindred go, This mortal life also; The body
they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His Kingdom is forever.*

– Martin Luther–

A Mighty Fortress is Our God

Revelation 14:6–7

In these two verses of the last book of the Bible we hear the words of the first of three angels with messages for John. In this vision, the first angel tells John of an “eternal gospel” that is to be proclaimed to all peoples of the earth. The time of judgment has come. It is time to worship the one God, creator of heaven and earth. The ultimate goal of God’s final judgment is that the whole creation would glorify him. The time for repentance is here.

- *How does this call to a final judgment apply to each moment of our present lives?*
- *Is this message something we are to fear? Or is this a comforting word for those who love the Lord and have suffered at the hands of the evil?*

Psalms 46

In the face of great hardships, the Psalmist proclaimed that the Lord God is our shelter and strength. He helps us in times of trouble. The trouble he mentions is trouble indeed: the earth giving way, mountains being moved and pushed into the sea, and nations raging in warfare. The Lord is with us in these major crises but also in our personal struggles. He shields us like a fortress, walling us off from pain and misery.

- *If the psalmist is indeed correct, why are there still so many trials and struggles in this life?*
- *How is Jesus the answer to all of life's crises? How will the Lord protect his holy church through his power and might?*

One of the most beloved of psalm verses to meditate on in prayer is found in verse 10. “Be still and know that I am God.” Notice how those words follow imagery of crashing waves, and the noise of destruction.

- *How easy or difficult is it for you to keep still and silent in the face of distressing events? How does God come to us in the silence of our prayers?*

Romans 3:19–28

As St. Paul described how the Law of God works, he explained that it only works on those who are “under the law.” Meaning, it only affects those who are working diligently to keep the law. When we live under the law we are accountable to God by the law. Unfortunately we cannot keep the law perfectly.

The good news that Paul sought to drill into their heads was that we are made right with God through Christ, and not

through the law. We all fall short of living up to the law, but we are tempted to work harder and harder to fulfill that which does not give life. Even though the law gives us an understanding of what sin is — no one can be justified by following the law.

In God’s perfect time, he revealed his righteousness in his Son, Jesus. The Gospel was shown apart from the law, precisely because the law cannot save.

- *Scripture is clear that it is only through faith in Christ that salvation is given. So, why do we try so hard to keep the law perfectly?*
- *How does Christ's love and forgiveness make us “right” with God? Is this something we can procure for ourselves?*
- *How do we have to be in touch with our sin in order to be able to understand the depths and meaning of God's grace for us in Jesus Christ?*

John 8:31–36

Shortly after Jesus told his disciples that he was going away, he told a group of Jews who had followed him that if they would abide in his Word, then they would truly be his disciples. Their response indicates their lack of understanding about what Jesus was offering them. Jesus’ point was that they were unaware of their blind-spots. They had no clue that they were slaves to sin or that they even needed to be freed by the mercy of Jesus.

- *Do you think the Jews who “believed” in Jesus really wanted what he was offering them or did they simply not understand?*

We can infer from Jesus’ words the negative of what he said: If you don’t abide in my Word, then you will not be a part of what I am doing. Further, you won’t be a part of what the God of Israel is doing — since Jesus is one with the Father.

- *Considering what Paul wrote in our second lesson, what do you think the Jews here assumed about the law? How would that kind of thinking impede their willingness to follow Jesus?*

The word for “abide” in the Greek is *meinete* (from the verb *meno* meaning “to stay or remain”). By remaining in Jesus’ Word, the disciples and all who would listen were promised the Truth which would set them free. They would be truly liberated from all that holds humanity captive: sin, death, and the devil.

- *How was Jesus not just the speaker of truth, but is the Truth from God himself?*
- *Pontius Pilate once asked, “What is truth?” (John 18:38) How would you answer that question if someone asked you?*

All Saints Sunday (A)

November 1, 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.

(On neglecting the Word of Christ...)

Therefore we are duly punished for our ingratitude and contemptuous treatment of these words by getting little enough from them, and never feeling or tasting what a treasure, force and power there is in the words of Christ.

– Martin Luther –

Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount

Revelation 7: (2-8) 9-17

The vision given to John is one of the saints from all nations gathered around the throne of the Lamb of God. The servants of God were to be sealed on their foreheads before they gathered around the throne. They were dressed in white and sang praises to God as the angels stood at attention. The good news for all who heard this message was that there would come a time when there will be no more hunger or thirst; a time when God promised to wipe away every tear.

- *What consolation does this passage give you as you think about life, death, the loss of loved ones, and your own future with Christ?*
- *In what sense is this prophetic picture already true among us as we gather together to worship God? How have we already been “washed white” by the blood of the Lamb?*

The words of praise found in verse 7:12 (and other places in Revelation) are echoed in the traditional doxology at the end of the Lord’s Prayer: “For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.”

- *What does “forever and ever” mean to you? Why is this central to our understanding of God and the promise he has made to us?*
- *Why is All Saints Sunday such an important day in the life of the church? What hope does it bring to the worshipping community and to individual people?*

Psalms 149

The psalmist cried out for all to sing praises to the Lord in the assembly of the believers. Singing is a vital part of worship. By raising our voices in praise to our Lord, we are confessing our faith. When we sing, we also have more time to think about God – what he has done for us, how he loves us, and what he is calling us to be and do. We learn more of the Scriptures by heart through singing, thanks to those hymn writers who put their faith into music.

Singing also has a wonderful effect on our minds and bodies. It lowers stress hormones in our bodies and helps us relax. It increases oxygen in our lungs and thus to our brains. Overall it simply makes us feel better. So when we sing our praises to God, he hears our thanks and worship, and we also benefit physically and spiritually.

- *When you think of the benefits of singing praises to God, does it make you appreciate more about how we are fearfully and wonderfully made? (Psalm 139:14)*

- *Does singing in general make you feel good?*
- *How does singing to the Lord compare to other types of singing?*

1 John 3:1-3

In these verses, John drew a distinction between those who belong to Christ and those who are a part of the world. The word “we” refers to fellow believers in Christ. When Christ returns, John says that “we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (v. 2).

- *Why don’t those who are a part of the “world” see Jesus as he is? What is missing in their sight?*
- *Compare this to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12. Throughout our earthly lives, in what sense do we only know Jesus in part and not in full? In what sense does the promise rest in the fact that we are “fully known” by God?*

Matthew 5:1-12

Jesus challenges our earthly assumptions of what being blessed or happy really means. According to Jesus, those who are in the best places in life are those who are most in need of recognizing God in their lives. When we are down and out there is more room for Christ to enter into our lives and support us. He wants us to lean on him always, but when we are strong, we often find it harder to do so. This is nothing new! Sin today is the same as it was in the Garden of Eden – humanity striving for total control over all aspects of our lives. The paradox of Jesus’ teaching is that it is only when we have lost all control and are willing to allow Jesus to love and care for us, to take over our lives, do we find true makarios (happiness/ blessedness).

- *How do we often get this “happiness” thing wrong in our culture of self-centeredness? Why do we think being happy concerns all that what we possess?*
- *We are often told to “count our blessings.” Why do we look at trials and struggles as everything other than being blessed?*
- *In terms of faith, why would being in need be a good thing?*

Jesus’ words cover the whole gamut of human trials: grief, loneliness, obedience, peace-making, and even persecution. Some of these things are done to us and some of them are simply aspects of life.

- *Which of the Beatitudes have you experienced first-hand? Which one has been the most difficult? The most joyful?*



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.

We should learn to cling to the Word with patience and not let go of it even though the period of waiting for help last a hundred years. For God delays action out of grace, in our best interest, that our faith may become strong and great and He may give more abundantly what He has promised.

– Martin Luther –

Comment on Genesis 31

Amos 5:18–24

The word of the Lord is biting and harsh. “I hate your offerings and solemn assemblies,” says the Lord. Our God is more concerned with his people truly seeking him and the way in which we care for others. In the verses leading up to this text, God expressed his displeasure that his people have failed to hear the truth and live according to his will, but rather have lived in sin and evil. He urged them to be faithful and to seek justice.

The Hebrew word for “justice” (*mishpat*) is a term associated with the courtroom and the punishment of criminals — as in “the criminal justice system.” In the context of God’s judgment, it was a word used to indicate that sinners would “get what they deserve.”

- *How does this definition of the word justice help explain the images in verse 19? In what sense does God’s justice pursue us, even when we think we have escaped?*

In modern religious circles, the word “justice” has taken on a very different meaning from the way it was originally used in Scripture. “Justice” is often used as a catch-all word to refer to acts of charity toward and assistance of those in need, or to policies that favor the disadvantaged.

- *Why did the Lord indicate that he hated the “solemn assemblies” and “offerings” of his people? How would God remark about our worship and offerings today?*
- *In what sense does doing justice — i.e., doing what is right and fair in the eyes of God — require us to address inequities, especially in legal matters? Has this word changed over time?*
- *In a courtroom context, what would it mean to ensure justice for those who are poor? Compare Exodus 23:6.*

Psalms 70

The psalmist cried out to God to come quickly and put to shame those who “delight in my hurt.” It can seem, at times, like there are those who do take joy in hurting others. Evil is a reality of human existence.

- *Where have you seen such evil that delights in the harm of persons? What, if anything, is done about it?*

The psalmist claimed to be poor and in need, and urged the Lord to act quickly on his behalf. Those who seek the Lord will not be disappointed.

- *How is the request of David a cry for justice from the Lord?*
- *Have you ever cried out for God to come quickly and to serve his righteous justice in your midst? What was that like for you?*

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

St. Paul taught the Thessalonians about the last day, when Jesus would come again in glory with the angels of heaven, and the dead would be raised to stand before him in judgment. Since many assumed Jesus’ return would happen in their lifetime, they had begun to worry about Christians who had already died and what their ultimate fate would be at Christ’s return. In order to clear up their misconceptions, Paul reiterated the promise of Christ.

- *In what ways does our “ignorance” about the things of God cause us anxiety and even fear? Why does that happen?*
- *In the midst of our fears, why is a promise from God often more powerful and necessary than an explanation?*

Verse 14 says, “God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep” (ESV). The Greek word *axei* — usually translated “will bring” — can also have more of the sense “will go and get” (literally, “will take into custody”).

- *How might the translation “go and get” better show the similarity between our resurrection and the resurrection of Jesus, where God “raised him up” days after his death?*

Many modern Christians believe in something called the Rapture — a human-invented teaching that says God will secretly take living believers up into heaven prior to the Resurrection on judgment day.

- *Why is it important to read this passage in the context of Paul answering a very specific question? How has this been used to create an entire theology based on the idea of Rapture?*
- *How is a secret, pre-resurrection Rapture specifically denied in this passage? According to verses 15–16, will the living be taken up into heaven prior to the dead being raised on the last day?*

Matthew 25:1–13

Enthusiastic believers often warn us, “The end is near!” as their lives focus on being prepared for destruction. In a similar way, those who appear to take the return of Jesus most seriously are those who are certain the end is coming within our own lifetimes. Jesus turns this assumption around by telling a parable about ten virgins — some wise and some foolish — giving us some insight about what it really means to be ready for our Lord’s return.

- *Were the wise virgins those who assumed the bridegroom was coming immediately, or those who were prepared for a wait? In everyday life, how do you plan differently if you are anticipating a short wait as opposed to a long wait?*

Pentecost 25 (Proper 28A)

November 15, 2026



God does all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him.

– Martin Luther –

Explanation to the Third Article of the Creed

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.

Zephaniah 1:7-16

In the decades before Judah was conquered by the Babylonians in the 6th century B.C., God sent many prophets to his people. In this text, the prophet Zephaniah speaks about the approaching “day of the Lord.” God warned that his wrath would be unleashed on those in Jerusalem and Judah who were complacent and denied his almighty power. Their idolatry and disobedience, even under the influence of the good king Josiah, left them with no excuses. They could not blame their evil on their king! In response to their evil God promised to show his power by complete and utter devastation of the earth.

One of the Lord’s major complaints against the people was their complacency. We are no strangers to complacency in our culture.

- *What did the people mean when they said: “The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill”? What is the source of such fatalism and complacency in faith? Have you ever experienced that kind of attitude?*

As with many Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming Day of the Lord, this passage can be understood on different levels. In one sense, it applies to the historical destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred not long after the prophet spoke these words. It can also point forward to the consummation of all things, when Christ returns in glory on judgment day.

- *How are both the historical and future Day of the Lord related? What do both have to do with the spiritual upheaval brought about in Jesus’ first coming, in his death, and resurrection?*

Psalms 90:1-12

The psalmist sang about the steadfastness of the Lord welcoming his people to be with him, “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.” The Lord is our everlasting sanctuary, in him we find rest and shelter.

- *In what ways do we honor our dwelling place with God similarly to how we tend to our houses?*

The psalmist acknowledges in this hymn that a thousand days for human beings is like a single day for the Lord. His wisdom and understanding are too vast for us to comprehend. Things change so quickly for us, but the Lord God does not change.

- *Does the thought of God’s power ever cause you to pause and simply be in awe? How does this psalm point you to such wondrous thoughts?*

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

As he wrapped up his letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul said that the day of the Lord would come like a thief in the night. He likened it to when a woman is pregnant and goes into labor before the expected time. The infant comes when the time is right; there is no forcing the child to be birthed, and the pain must be endured until the baby is born. There is simply no way around it!

So it is with the coming of the Lord; he will come in God’s good time, and though there will be signs and labor pains, the exact moment is only known by God.

- *Why is it so easy for us to forget that we are waiting for the return of Christ? Are there any signs present today?*
- *What are the “labor pains” we experience as we wait for Christ’s return?*

Paul played on the images of day and night, saying “You are all children of light, children of the day” (v. 5), which he contrasted with people who indulge in the “night life.”

- *In a spiritual sense, what does it mean to “keep awake and sober” (v. 6)? What is Paul encouraging us to do?*
- *Paul used the same metaphor in a different way in verse 10. What does he mean by “awake” and “asleep” here?*

Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus told a parable about a man who entrusted his property to some of his servants, that they would do business for him in his absence. The servants received different amounts of talents (money), all of which were according to their abilities.

Each of the servants increased the number of talents given to him except for one. The servant who received only one talent buried it in the ground and refused to work with it to increase its original value. Upon his return, the master was pleased with the other servants for being faithful stewards of what they were given, but he chastised the one who buried the master’s talent and did nothing with it. The master commended the faithful servants and granted them even more, but the unfaithful servant was cast into outer darkness.

- *How does faithful stewardship require great responsibility? In what sense does our trustworthiness in small things demonstrate our trustworthiness in larger things?*
- *Are the things we have in life ours to do with as we please? Do we deserve all of the things we have acquired? How does the answer to that question show where our hearts really are?*

Christ the King

November 22, 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.

[God] therefore will do the same with Christians that he did with Christ, whom he raised up from the locked and sealed grave in the twinkling of an eye, so that in the selfsame moment he was in it and out of it.

– Martin Luther –

Sermon at the Funeral of Duke John of Saxony

Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24

A shepherd's job description includes feeding sheep and making sure they don't get lost or in trouble. In contrast with the shepherds of Israel, who have been taking care of themselves rather than God's people while in exile, God himself promises to come and be the Shepherd who will care for his sheep. The Lord promised to find his beloved sheep, feed them, and lead them to good land.

- What are some of the ways in which the "shepherds" were abusing their positions? (See the beginning of Ezekiel 34.) What does this passage tell us about the role of pastors in the life of the congregation? Even so, who can do this best?
- Compare what is said here with what Jesus himself says in John 10:11–16. What are the similarities between the two texts? What are the differences?

In verses 20–22, God declared that he will judge between the fat sheep, who are the rich oppressors, and the lean sheep, who are the poor and humble.

- Discuss the richness of the image found in Ezekiel 34:20. What do you see in your mind's eye when you read this?

In verse 24, the Lord says: "I will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them." But this verse was written long after David was dead and gone, and his kingdom has long since been divided.

- How does this prophecy point toward the person and work of Christ, the Good Shepherd? In what sense is Christ the Lord both God and a Davidic prince among us?

Psalms 95:1–7a

The Lord God is king, and in his hands are the heights and depths of the whole creation. The psalmist sang that the Lord's name is to be exalted "above all gods." The image of God as King in this psalm paints a glorious picture of a creator who rules with compassion and tenderness. The psalm mixes metaphors by combining the images of king, craftsman, and shepherd. He urged the people to have warm hearts toward the loving God, not like the ancestors who fussed and complained at Massah and Meribah (Exodus 17:7).

- What do kings and shepherds have in common? How do both professions require attention to a group of many?
- Does disobedience toward God result in any consequences today? Has that changed in Jesus Christ or do we still suffer when we go against the Lord?

1 Corinthians 15:20–28

Paul explained that Jesus was the "firstfruits" of the dead. This term means that his death and resurrection was the beginning of something that would happen for all who believe in him.

- How does Paul's interpretation of Christ's death and resurrection give you certainty of your own eternity?
- How is Christ's death and resurrection a sign of God's willingness to give his people a priceless offering? Does God's sacrifice encourage you to live more sacrificially?

Matthew 25:31–46

At the final judgment, the Son of Man will come with all the angels and sit on his throne as King, to separate people the way a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Notice again that the metaphors of King and Shepherd are combined, but here the flock includes "all nations."

- Is Christ the King only of those who believe in him? Who is included in this end-time flock?

The sign of who will inherit the kingdom is evident in how the people treat those in need around them. They will be the ones who fed the hungry, visited the imprisoned, and welcomed the stranger.

- In what ways do we serve Christ himself when we serve the "least of these?" In what ways do we neglect Christ by neglecting those in need? Do you ever feel convicted if you cannot meet all of these opportunities?
- Going through the list of actions ascribed to the sheep, how did Christ himself do all these things? In what sense do we, as the sheep, imitate and follow the Shepherd?

In verse 34, the King says to his faithful sheep that the kingdom was prepared for them "before the foundation of the world" and that they are the ones who have been "blessed by my Father."

- In what sense does that firmly tie both justification and sanctification to God's sovereign election? Is God simply responding to our works, or is God actually fulfilling his work in us?

The Reformers penned in the Formula of Concord, On Good Works, "Truly good works are done, not from our own natural powers, but when the person by faith is reconciled with God and renewed by the Holy Ghost..."

- What proof do you find in the biblical text that shows the sheep did not do these good works in order to be saved, but did good works because they were saved?

Thanksgiving USA

November 26, 2026



Behold, so powerful is faith, to obtain all it wants of God, that God considers it done before the asking.

– Martin Luther –
“The Ten Lepers,” 1521

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 8:1-10

The author of Deuteronomy posits that the hardships Israel suffered in the wilderness was to test them, to see what was in their hearts. The Lord God demanded and still demands singular loyalty from his people. This is spelled out very clearly in the First Commandments, “You shall have no other gods before me.”

- How does the First Commandment set the tone and expectation for the other nine?
- How would people today respond to the notion that God tests his people to see where their hearts really are? Would modern people balk at that idea, or do they understand God’s intention?

The potential problem for Israel was the same potential problem for believers today, namely that the more we possess, the less we trust in our Creator. The accumulation of wealth and possessions causes human beings to forget about the goodness of the Lord and rely on ourselves instead.

- How does any success we have or any thing we have gained, come from the Lord God?
- Why is it so important to remember where we came from so that we know where we are going?

The historian mentions that “man does not live by bread alone,” and all that Israel suffered on their journey to the Promised Land was to remind them of God’s providence. God gave them manna to sustain them, but they hoarded it and it rotted.

- Why did Satan test Jesus with the challenge to turn rocks into bread? What was Jesus’ response? (Matthew 4:4) How did Jesus succeed whereas the Israelites failed in this regard?

Psalm 67

In this thanksgiving psalm, the psalmist gives thanks for a bountiful harvest with hope of continued bounty in the future. This song is like a sung prayer where the singer invokes God’s blessing but at the same time acknowledges it. “Let all the peoples praise you, O God,” he sings.

- In what ways is this psalm a confession of faith?
- What does it mean to you that God is fair and just?

Philippians 4:6-20

Do not be anxious about anything, St. Paul wrote from prison. If a guy who was in prison, having been persecuted for the faith, having endured a “thorn in the flesh,” and

having been abandoned and criticized by many, can say that, then perhaps we ought to listen.

- Why is life so anxiety producing? How does faith address all of this uncertainty and worry?

Paul encouraged the Christians at Philippi to turn all their worries over to the Lord, that he would grant them peace. Peace is not just an absence of conflict; it is an abiding sense of well-being, even when all isn’t actually well. Not only are we to give everything over to God in prayer, but we are also to give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

- Do you find it easy or difficult to give thanks for the trials and sufferings in your life? Why?

Finally, Paul commended the Christians to keep their eyes on “whatever” (hosos in the Greek) is of God: things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise. These things will keep us going when life gets rough!

- When you need a good pep talk, does focusing on the things and ways of the Lord help you? If so, how?

Luke 17:11-19

This story of the ten lepers asking Jesus for healing is a familiar one. It is the appointed Gospel text for Thanksgiving every year. We often focus on the lack of lepers who returned to give thanks to Jesus, but wasn’t it their faith that brought them to him in the first place? Apparently they believed he could do something for them, so they approached him and asked for his mercy. They did not assume that they were worthy of his assistance, they simply trusted in his power.

- Could Jesus have avoided the lepers and been justified? Why?
- What made him take the risk of going near them AND interacting with them?

Once they were healed, they hurried on to the temple to receive the proper cleansing from the priest so that they might be restored to the faith community. Jesus instructed them to do so! But one man received a second blessing. He chose to return to Jesus and express his heartfelt thanks. This one was a Samaritan.

- What is St. Luke trying to convey by reporting that the only leper who returned to give thanks was an “enemy” of Israel?
- In what ways do we receive a second blessing when we live a life of gratitude?
- How do faith and thankfulness go hand in hand? Can there be one without the other? If so, what does that look like?