



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.

Paul shows the danger of neglecting the grace of God. He boldly declares here that the preaching of the Gospel is not an eternal, continuous and permanent mode of instruction, but rather a passing shower, which hastens on. What it strikes, it strikes; what it misses, it misses. It does not return, nor does it stand still. The sun and heat follow and dry it up.

—Martin Luther—

Sermon on 2 Corinthians 6:1–10

Joel 2:12–19

The prophet Joel called God's people back to a life of faithful obedience. He reminded them that their God is steadfast and merciful, something they seemed to have forgotten. Joel also made a distinction between rending our hearts and rending our garments, calling on the people not to make displays of their piety, but to actually return to faithfulness.

- Can you think of a modern equivalent to outwardly “rending our garments”?
- God's steadfast love and mercy are recurring themes throughout Scripture. How does this love and mercy relate to God's judgment of sinners?

God calls Israel back to him, so that the covenant relationship will be restored. This turning includes fasting, weeping and mourning, all of which cannot be faked even if we tried.

- What are the obstacles that keep us from returning to the Lord? Is repentance something we can accomplish on our own?
- If repentance is like a car making a U-Turn, are we the driver or are we the car? In what sense is repentance the work of the Holy Spirit in us?

Psalms 51:1–13 (14–19)

Psalms 51 is traditionally understood as David's psalm of repentance concerning his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah. But in this Psalm he says, “against you only have I sinned.” Even though David's sin resulted in Uriah's death, Bathsheba's dishonor, and their child's death, David recognized that at the center of all of his actions is sin against God.

- What does it mean to say our sins are only against God? Does that mean the harm we do to our neighbors is of no consequence?
- How is all sin a sign of our rebellion and faithlessness? In what sense does this stem from lack of trust in God?
- What is the value in acknowledging our sin before our neighbors as well as our God? Who do you go to when you have sinned?

2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10

Jesus is described in Scripture as being without sin. He, alone, remained faithful and righteous before God. This is an important element in our understanding of what is accomplished in Christ's life, death, and resurrection. In 2

Corinthians, Paul says that God “made (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin.” He became sin on behalf of his people, and in becoming it, he defeated it for all of us.

- What does it mean to claim that Christ is both sinless and sin?
- Why would Christ do this for us? To put it crassly: What does he get out of it?

Paul goes on to describe the reality of Christ's witnesses. To be a follower of Jesus is to be regularly misunderstood and misjudged by the world. The way of the cross is not impressive by worldly standards. Followers of Christ are part of a new reality that many simply do not understand.

- In 2 Corinthians 6:10, what is the “everything” we possess? Why is this not recognized by the world?

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Lent can easily become a time of conspicuous piety. We wear our religion on our sleeves (or our foreheads). In Matthew, Jesus warns against such displays of piety. He points out that such acts are driven by our desire to be seen. When our focus is on appearing to be faithful, true faithfulness is hard to come by.

- What is the danger in pious behavior? Isn't displaying our faith a part of being a witness?
- How is Christ breaking through our religiosity to bring us to faith?

Instead of using prayer as a means to show off to others, Jesus encouraged his disciples to go to their “room” when they pray (v. 6). The Greek word ταμειον (ta-may-on) refers to a secret or hidden room, such as a place where one might keep valuables.

- How does Jesus' advice on prayer in verses 5–6 relate to what he says in verses 19–21 about laying up treasures on earth?
- When Jesus speaks of the “treasure” we have in heaven, is he talking about things or a person?

In this passage, Jesus addressed the motives behind pious acts. Our sin drives us to seek recognition for our good deeds. We want others to notice what good people we are and what good things we do. The result is that our motives always get mixed up. Our efforts to help our neighbor are also efforts to help ourselves.

- Can you think of any evidence that we, in practice, believe that our good works assist in our salvation?
- Why do the motives behind a good deed matter?

Lent 1

February 22, 2026



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{Eve's} eyes could not be satisfied with seeing. It was nothing to her now that she possessed the knowledge of God, and that she had a sound and perfect mind. She was not content without the addition of the knowledge of evil also. And this was the very essence of Satan's poison; her desire to be wise above that which God had spoken to her as his command.

—Martin Luther —

Luther on the Creation:

A Critical and Devotional Commentary on Genesis

Genesis 3:1-21

It didn't take much effort for the snake to lead Eve into doubt and faithlessness. The simple question, "Did God actually say..." was all it took to cause her to start wondering whether God really knew how to be God. That was all it took for her to conclude that there might be a better way for God and his creation to interact. She took the fruit, ate it, and gave some to her husband. She could see no reason not to. The prospect of being like God was simply too much to pass up.

- *Why would Eve think that God might not be telling her truth about the fruit on the tree? Did she have reason to doubt him?*

The condition humanity has lived with since the fall from grace is that we are not content to be God's creatures. We want to be our own gods instead. Sin, then, is not simply particular bad behaviors. It is the condition of being in rebellion against God. It is our desire to overthrow God's reign and be the lords over our own lives.

- *In what sense did the snake trick or deceive Eve? What's so bad about wanting to be like God?*
- *What are some ways this sinful condition is apparent in us?*

As soon as they ate the fruit, the people's eyes were opened. For the first time they experienced shame. They had a sense that, not only should their actions be hidden from God, but they themselves should hide from God and each other. They covered themselves up because of their shame.

Adam and Eve both tried to shift the blame for their actions. Neither wanted to admit that they were disobedient or faithless. While they willfully took of the fruit, they didn't want to be held responsible for what they had done.

- *In what ways do we try to shift the blame for our actions? What is the relationship between the human will and our bondage to sin?*

Psalms 32:1-7

Do you ever wonder if Adam and Eve would have taken responsibility for their sin, came to God in repentance and asked for his mercy, if things might have been different for them (and for us)? The psalmist says that it is a blessing to be forgiven. When guilt is removed from us by our heavenly Father, our lives are changed.

- *When have you been forgiven of a particular sin and felt the great grace of God wash over you? How did it change you?*

Romans 5:12-19

In our time we have tried to downplay the relationship between sin and death. Death is spoken of as a natural and necessary aspect of the created order; we even refer to death as just another 'transition' in life, on to a different place. But Scripture is consistent on linking death to sin. The link between sin and death is part of the fallen order. Death is not just a transition or phase. In this fallen world, it is the enemy of all enemies.

- *In what ways do we experience the link between sin and death? Do you think we can always link specific sins to specific deaths?*

In verse 18, Paul tells us that Christ's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for "all men." Just as sin is tied to death, righteousness is tied to life. By taking away our sin, Christ is taking us out of the realm of death and bringing us into everlasting life.

- *When Paul says Christ's act was "for all men" does that mean everyone is automatically saved? How can Paul's statement be true without implying universal salvation?*
- *How does Christ's righteousness get extended to us? In what way does life in Christ change our thinking about death?*

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness took place immediately after his baptism. The Spirit came upon him, identifying him as God's Son, and then drove him out into the desert. Far from a life of comfort and ease, Jesus' identity as God in the flesh placed him in the sights of the Tempter. God's Anointed One was not going to live a life of ease and power. The presence of the Holy Spirit upon him brought the Tempter straight to him.

- *What might Jesus' experience of temptation immediately after his baptism tell us about what we can expect as children of God in this world? Should we expect to be free from temptation?*

It doesn't seem like it would have hurt anything for Jesus to acquire some bread for himself. The reality of many of our daily temptations is that they often seem quite harmless. This first temptation of Jesus looks like something harmless, but underneath it is the question of whether Jesus really is the Son of God.

- *How do the temptations to "small" sins feed into more drastic sins? How are all sins tied to the original sin of faithlessness?*
- *If God is gracious and merciful, what would be the harm in Jesus taking the shortcuts offered to him by the devil?*



Faith is not that human illusion and dream that some people think it is. Faith is a work of God in us, which changes us and brings us to birth anew from God (cf. John 1). It kills the old Adam, makes us completely different people in heart, mind, senses, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it.

–Martin Luther–

Commentary on Romans

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Genesis 12:1–9

God called and Abram went. There was no discussion. There were no questions about where the journey might take him. There wasn't even a question about who was calling him. God spoke his Word to Abram, and that Word took root, bringing him to faith. God's promises to Abram moved him to action. Abram left everything behind to go on a journey to an unidentified land. God's promise moved him to abandon the known in exchange for the unknown. It makes sense that Abram was recognized by Paul as the model of what faith looks like (Romans 4:3).

- *Do you think God chose Abram because of his faithfulness or that God's choosing created Abram's faith? What difference does it make?*
- *What is it about God's Word that would move Abram to do such radical things? What is God's Word moving you to do?*

Psalms 121

A key aspect of faith is that it centers on what is not seen (Hebrews 11:1, 2 Corinthians 4:18). In this Psalm we see faith that trusts in God's unfailing presence, even in the face of difficulty. The Psalmist knows that his help comes from the Lord, even when he is surrounded by threats.

- *What kind of effect does adversity have on faith? How have you experienced this in your own life of faith?*
- *What makes the promises of God life-giving in the midst of distress? What makes them hard to believe?*

Romans 4:1–8, 13–17

In our relationships with one another, we are often keeping score, keeping track of what we are owed or what we owe. Whether it's keeping track of whose turn it is to take out the garbage or keeping track of how many times someone has hurt us, the tendency is there in all of us. We want to know where we stand in relation to those around us. Do we owe? Or are we owed?

We often assume that our relationship with God is also based on transactions. We figure that God is keeping track of everything we do, and our job is to offset the marks against us with acts of faith and righteousness. But here in Romans, Paul reminds us that the right relationship with God is the relationship of faith, trusting in God's promises which bring us grace.

- *If our righteousness comes through faith, what is the purpose*

of the law?

- *How does trusting in our ability to obey the law make the gospel null and void?*

Paul describes God as calling into existence the things that do not exist. Faith is one of those things that does not exist apart from God's calling it into existence. Apart from God's Word and God's Spirit, true faith, saving faith, cannot be. But God's Word brings faith into being, even in the likes of sinners like Paul and you and me.

- *How are we tempted to take credit for our faithfulness?*
- *How is the way we witness and evangelize shaped by our understanding of faith as a gift?*

John 3:1–17

Nicodemus came by night to visit Jesus. He wanted to know what Jesus had to say, but he didn't want to be seen talking with him or listening to him. Nicodemus was in the dark, and even after listening to Jesus he still didn't understand what Jesus was talking about. Nicodemus was hiding in the shadows, unable to comprehend the light in front of him.

- *How does Nicodemus' decision to visit Jesus at night symbolize our human bondage to sin?*
- *In what ways does Nicodemus' coming at night reflect our desire to have control over how God's Word comes to us? How is this desire a stumbling block to faith?*

In verse 3 Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born *anwqen* (another, pronounced *ah-know-thin*). This phrase is rightly understood as both "born from above," and "born again, born anew." Most English translations choose one of these meanings, footnoting the other. Overemphasizing one understanding at the expense of the other leads to missing this double meaning. There is both a time (again) and a place (from above) for the birth Jesus is speaking about.

- *What associations do you have with being "born again"? What associations do you have with being "born from above"?*

John 3:16 is one of the most beloved verses in Scripture, but verse 17 is equally stunning in its beauty and simplicity. God didn't come into the world to condemn, but to save. The work Jesus came into the world to do is for the sake of humankind. It is to save this world that is lost in sin.

- *How might these final verses lead us into universalism? Is that a problem?*
- *How does God impact our lives with the reality of salvation?*



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The Holy Spirit assures us that we are God's children no matter how furiously sin may rage within us, so long as we follow the Spirit and struggle against sin in order to kill it. Because nothing is so effective in deadening the flesh as the cross and suffering.

—Martin Luther—

Commentary on Romans

Exodus 17:1-7

It is difficult to imagine being saved from slavery in Egypt and then so quickly resort to complaining against God and expressing a desire to be back in Egypt. The people of Israel almost seem like a caricature in this section of Exodus. God has gone to great lengths to rescue them from Egypt, but their minds are filled with the thought that they were much better off in captivity. They are convinced that the God who just saved them has now forsaken them.

It isn't so unusual for us to question God's presence with us when we are faced with difficulty. Despite being saved from sin and death, we sometimes grumble, wondering why God doesn't do more for us.

- *Is it unreasonable for the people of Israel to think God will or should provide for their needs in the wilderness? What makes Egypt seem appealing to them?*
- *How do we get caught in sin when trials abound in our lives? Why are we so quick to forget all the good God has done for us?*

Psalms 95:1-9

The psalmist warns the people about hardening their hearts like their wilderness ancestors did at Massah and Meribah. He quotes the Lord who said his people put him to the test even though they knew of his goodness and had experienced it first hand. The Israelites' complaining only resulted in God's wrath.

- *Why is it important that we remain responsive and in touch with God's goodness and mercy in our lives?*

Romans 5:1-8

St. Paul explains that a result of justification is peace with God. This implies that, apart from being justified, there is not peace between us and God. As believers, we might have a hard time imagining not being at peace with God, but sin is exactly that. It is rebellion against God. It is destroying the peaceful relationship between Creator and creature.

- *What are some signs of the broken peace between us and God?*

Paul speaks of rejoicing in suffering. This is a rather baffling attitude. Few of us would pair up rejoicing and suffering. Suffering is something we go to great lengths to avoid. And yet, we are not successful in avoiding it. Suffering enters into every life. Paul's rejoicing is not driven by a love of suffering. Rather it arises from the hope that has been poured into him in the midst of suffering.

- *Does suffering automatically produce hope? What good Word do we have for those in whom suffering leads to despair?*

In some of the most shocking words of Scripture, Paul explained that Christ's work in the cross was work done for sinners. This was not carried out for the righteous — those who have no need of Christ. His death is for weak sinners who do not deserve it.

- *What does Christ's death for sinners tell us about God?*
- *Why does the notion that Christ died for those who do not deserve it bother us so much? What if even we are undeserving?*

John 4:5-26 (27-30, 39-42)

When Jesus came to the well, the Samaritan woman had no idea who she was talking to or what he was talking about. As we read this exchange we can see the many places she missed the point of what he was saying. He spoke of giving her living water and she pointed out that he didn't even have a bucket. He explained that those who receive his water will never thirst again and she was relieved by the thought of not having to haul water every day. She was deaf to the deeper meaning of Jesus' words.

- *How does this woman's certainty of what she knows get in the way of her hearing what Jesus is saying?*
- *How does our human "knowledge" get in our way when we are confronted with God's Word?*

In speaking to a Samaritan woman, Jesus defied many of the social conventions of the day. He demonstrated that the work he came to do was going to extend to people normally considered outside the realm of God's mercy. Even Samaritans, women, and people of low character would come to know God's mercy. The new life Jesus came to bring would not be reserved for a select few.

- *Who, in our time, might fall into the same categories as the Samaritan woman?*
- *What obstacles do we face in bringing the Word to people on the margins?*

Jesus spoke of a life-giving water that will quench thirst once and for all. Those who receive what he is bringing will have everlasting life. Jesus also explicitly identified himself as the Messiah. When speaking with this woman who had no reason to think she would have a place in God's plans, Jesus revealed a great deal about who he was and what he was up to.

- *What is this life-giving water? How do we get it?*



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“(Christ) makes it so that we consider it of no consequence, even though the whole world contends against us.

“The rule of the church is not located in pomp and appearance but in the Word, even in the spoken Word, on which we may stand firm against all insults.

For ‘if God is for us, who is against us?’”

–Martin Luther–

Lectures on Isaiah, LW 17

Isaiah 42:14–21

It seems that God’s plans would be more easily implemented if he chose better people to carry them out. But all he has to work with is a bunch of sinners. In this passage from Isaiah we see God taking upon himself the task he had first given to his servant Israel. Despite being chosen and beloved by God, his people proved no less blind, no less deaf, no less prone to idolatry than anyone else. These verses point us ahead to when God will take on flesh in Jesus Christ and his work of salvation will finally be complete.

- *In what ways are we like those who look but do not see, or those who listen but do not hear? How is that changed when God himself opens our eyes and ears?*
- *In what ways has God managed to open your eyes and ears in your life? What means does he use?*
- *What are some of the “cast images” we are prone to worship as our gods? What makes idolatry so easy to slip into?*

Psalms 142

The Psalms often give voice to our most joyous praise and our darkest lament. They hold nothing back in the name of decorum. In today’s Psalm, we hear a bold cry for help from one who is lost. The Psalmist’s unrelenting plea reflects confidence that God has the power to deliver his people.

- *What do the Psalms show us about how God would have us pray? Does it seem strange or uncomfortable to make such direct requests of God?*
- *Do our more timid prayers reflect less confidence in what God can do? How does God himself encourage us to be bold in our prayers?*

Ephesians 5:8–14

One of the greatest challenges that comes with our freedom in Christ is sorting out how to live in this life. Every day we are faced with decisions and choices in which we have to discern the right path.

In this passage from Ephesians we get a glimpse of what the Christian life looks like. For those who follow Jesus, life in this world is about living as children of light. We are called to put aside the ways of darkness and bear the fruit of light in the world. The problem for sinners is that we are not as good at discerning light and darkness as we need to be. And we’re not always great at discerning good fruit from empty calories. The Christian life is one of constant

seeking to determine what actions reflect Christ’s love to our neighbors. It isn’t easy. But the Christian life is also marked by the holy and certain hope that we are daily being forgiven for Jesus’ sake.

- *What are some things that make it complicated for us to sort out good fruit from empty calories?*
- *What is easy about loving our neighbor? What is difficult?*
- *What are some ways of speaking of the Christian life without undermining the promise of the Gospel?*

John 9:1–41

The question that Jesus’ disciples asked showed their ideas about how God works in the world. For a man to have been born blind, someone had to have sinned, or so they surmised. Either the man or his parents had to be responsible for his plight. Jesus, however, rejects their premise, stating that it is not nearly so simple as that. Instead, this man’s blindness is going to prove to be an opportunity for God’s power to be displayed.

- *How do you understand the relationship between particular sins and particular hardships?*
- *What do you think about the statement that the man’s blindness served a purpose for God? Does that seem just?*

When his neighbors saw the formerly blind man, they weren’t even sure it was really him. Their certainty that a person could not be healed of blindness was part of their confusion. But it is also possible that they had never truly seen the blind man. His presence among them had been such a source of discomfort that they couldn’t even look at him.

- *What sorts of people do we prefer not to notice? In what ways are we blind to people around us who are in need?*

A recurring theme in this story of the man born blind is that those who think they see clearly are the most blind to what is happening right in front of them. The man who is healed doesn’t claim to understand what has happened or how Jesus was able to accomplish this healing. He just knows that he had been blind and now he could see. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were certain they knew how God would act in the world, and Jesus didn’t conform to their model.

- *How does our religious “knowledge” sometimes get in the way of what God is doing in the world?*
- *In what ways do we claim to know more about God than we actually know?*



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"Faith closes its eyes and commits the manner and the way and the method of preserving to God. Thus, in all perils, Christian wisdom walks with closed eyes and does not take offense."

"The Christian way is to despair of all counsels and wisdom, to commit everything to God alone, and to walk the unknown way."

—Martin Luther—

Lectures on Isaiah, LW 17

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The Lord speaks to the prophet Ezekiel asking him if the bones that lay before him in this valley can live. Ezekiel replied, "You alone know, Lord." Humanly speaking, of course, some old dry, brittle, barren bones cannot be brought back to life. It is utterly impossible for humans to revive anything that is dead, but for God, nothing is impossible.

- *How is Ezekiel's response to the Lord's question a confession of faith?*

The Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones. "Tell them!" he said. God told the prophet to proclaim to the dead bones that He would bring them back to life, that their communal death would be no more, that Israel would be brought back to their land and live again as a nation. God's Word brings life out of death; all God has to do to bring about resurrection and new life is to speak it into being.

- *It is God's will that life should be brought out of death. But what does God want Israel to realize and confess in the face of their resurrection? What does God want us to confess about our lives?*

Psalms 130

The Psalmist cried out to the Lord and waited with hope and eager expectation for the Lord to answer his plea. The psalmist knew himself well enough to know that he could not stand before God based on his own merits. He knew that if God was tallying up sins, no one had reason for hope. But he also trusted that, finally, God would be merciful, and he was. It is God's mercy that separates him from all other supposed gods. As the psalmist cried out to God for relief, he awaited his answer in faith, trusting in the character of the Lord as one of lovingkindness and mercy.

- *Does the psalmist take God's mercy for granted, or are his expectations rooted in God's faithfulness? How do you know?*
- *What are some ways we live as if we think we can stand before God based on our own merits?*

Romans 8:1-11

Drawing on his previous argument in chapter 5:16-18, Paul proclaimed that there is no condemnation for those who live in Christ Jesus. As judgment arose out of the sin of Adam, a sin that all humanity shares in, so through one man's righteousness is the condemnation wiped away. Jesus, though he was sinless, made himself an offering for sin and

through that he condemned sin rather than condemning the sinful.

- *What does it mean to be condemned? In what ways are we now free from that condemnation?*

In a crucial theological move, Paul also makes clear that the law is powerless to bring salvation. God in Jesus Christ intervened in the world to accomplish what the law could never accomplish — the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

- *What are some ways we still seek salvation through the law? Why does it seem so much easier to accept the law rather than God's grace?*

John 11:1-45 (46-53)

Mary and Martha's brother, Lazarus, became seriously ill while Jesus was away from their home town of Bethany. The sisters sent for Jesus but he did not hurry back, instead he took his time returning, saying that this sickness will not lead to death, but will reveal the glory of God. However, when Jesus finally arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead and in the grave for four days. There is a theological significance to being dead for four days. The ancient Jews thought that a person's soul remained near their body for the first three days after death. According to Jewish Midrash, death was only final after the third day.

- *How does this story of Lazarus being dead for four days show God's power in light of Jewish thought?*

In conversation with his disciples, Jesus declared that Lazarus was dead and not simply asleep. Both sisters greeted him by saying, "If you had been here, our brother would not have died." They hesitated to allow him to open the tomb because of the stench of the dead body. Jesus responded to their uncertainty, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

- *Why can we only see God's glory when we truly believe?*
- *Have there been times in your life when you have thought God's presence has been delayed too long?*

Finally, after the experience of grief has already shrouded Jesus and his friends, Jesus does what he came to Bethany to do. With nothing but his word, he called Lazarus back from the realm of death. The power of his word breaks even the chains of death. From this moment forward the leaders of the people would look for ways to destroy Jesus.

- *Why would Jesus' power over life and death be such a problem for the religious leaders??*

Palm/Passion Sunday

March 29, 2026



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The only reason they (Christians) must suffer is that they steadfastly adhere to Christ and God's word, enduring this for the sake of Christ. No people on earth have to endure such bitter hate. No one has compassion on them; they are given myrrh and gall to drink when they thirst. And all of this is done... because they want to have none but Christ and no other God.

—Martin Luther—

Church & Ministry III, LW 41

John 12:12-19

As the crowds that had gathered heard that Jesus was coming into Jerusalem, they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him. Unlike in the other gospels (Mark 11:1-11, Matthew 21:1-11, Luke 19:28-44), Jesus finds the donkey that he rides into town on, hearing the excited cheers of those who saw him raise Lazarus from the dead, as well as others who knew of his works. This was the day that traditionally the Passover lamb was chosen and set aside for the Passover feast. As the Pharisees remarked at Jesus' growing popularity they said, "Look, the whole world (cosmos) has gone after him." The true Passover Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world, was being set apart.

- In what ways have you come to understand Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" which we sing during the liturgy of Holy Communion?
- What do you think was the deciding factor for the religious leaders to go ahead with their plot to kill Jesus? Was it simply the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back?

Isaiah 50:4-9a

The servant of God recounted his suffering but also his vindication by God. Though he was not rebellious he was still struck down, insulted, spat upon and disgraced. In spite of this suffering, the servant trusted that the one who would save him was near. No one could declare him guilty when the Lord God helps him.

- In what ways does the Lord aid the suffering and shamed?
- In what ways can we identify Jesus with this suffering servant?

Philippians 2:5-11

This text from Philippians is what is called the "Kenosis Hymn" after the Greek word *κενοω* (*keno'o*, pronounced ken-ah-oh) which means to make empty. Jesus Christ emptied himself of his power and divinity taking on our human form — the form of a slave — in all of our weakness and vulnerability. His humbleness and humility was exemplified by his obedience to God unto death. And not just any death, but a murderous, traitorous, violent death on the Roman torture instrument of the cross. The paradox of all of this is that, through his death, he is highly exalted and his name is above all names.

- Why is it so hard to understand that the suffering and shame that Christ endured has resulted in our freedom and eternal

life? Do we deserve such divine favor? Why or why not?

- What do you suppose St. Paul meant when he said regarding Jesus' name, "every knee shall bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth"?

Matthew 26: 1-27:66

The crucifixion narrative, when read in its entirety, has tremendous power. It can be almost overpowering to the hearer. The excruciating detail, the knowledge of where the road is going, the injustice, the suffering and betrayal, all describe the entire chain of events that led to Jesus' death. It can leave the listener bereft. One of the challenges of Holy Week is to faithfully preach Christ crucified, understanding that the Crucified Christ is the Risen Christ.

As the chief priests and the elders of the religious community gathered at the home of the high priest, they vowed to kill Jesus, but they wanted to wait until the festival had concluded. They didn't want to make a scene while there were so many visitors in Jerusalem.

- Why do you suppose they were so careful to wait until the Passover Festival was over before they arrested Jesus? What were they afraid of?

Matthew wrote that once Judas was promised a reward for betraying Jesus he "began looking for an opportune time." Judas was on a mission and he was planning his strategy as to how and where he would turn Jesus over to authorities and collect his blood money. Jesus was also on a mission and, for him, timing was very important as well.

- How do you see Jesus' perfect timing in all the stories you know about his mercy and miracles? In the cross and resurrection? In your own life?

Despite his certainty that he will remain faithful to the end, Peter proved unable to stand firm in the midst of the darkness that surrounded Jesus on the road to the cross.

- How can our pride become an obstacle to faith? Was Peter's denial the result of a character flaw, or is there more to it?

While the disciples slept, Jesus prayed in Gethsemane that, if possible, this cup might pass from him. While there has been much discussion about whether Jesus was wavering from his mission, his final prayer is that the Father's will be done.

- Do you think Jesus' prayer is a sign of doubt or a sign of faith?
- In our lives, why is it so important to know that we can bring all our secret cares and concerns to our Father?

Maundy Thursday

April 2, 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.

John 13:1-35

Jesus was fully aware that he was about to be betrayed, as he shared his last supper with his closest friends. Even so, he humbled himself and washed each of the disciples' feet, including Judas. For us human beings, this kind of sacrificial love is difficult to understand. Our pride and sense of how things are supposed to go get in the way of what Jesus is doing for us. The notion that the Living God would stoop down to save sinners who don't deserve it can be rather off-putting. We prefer some system of merits because that is the only thing we experience in our daily lives. But the self-giving love of Jesus Christ is our only hope.

- *Why did Peter find it inappropriate for his teacher to be washing his feet?*
- *Why is it much harder to allow someone to serve us than for us to serve another? What can we learn by letting others serve us in our times of need?*

Exodus 12:1-14

This passage, as well as the others for this Maundy Thursday, deal with the shedding of blood. After Moses had been on Mount Sinai the first time, he was with the leaders of Israel at the foot of the mountain where God invited him, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu along with 70 elders to come up and worship from afar. Before they ascended, Moses explained all of the rules of the covenant with God. The people answered in one accord that they would be obedient to God's will. There Moses built an altar at the base of Mount Sinai and erected twelve pillars. There they made sacrifices to the Lord. Blood from the sacrificed animals was thrown on the altar and on the people. Then Moses and the other men went up the mountain near the Lord and they saw God and had a meal there.

- *What exactly was the Sinai covenant all about? What were the two sides of the covenant promising to do for each other?*
- *Was this blood a foreshadowing of the bloodshed that Jesus would endure? If so how?*

Psalms 116:12-19

The psalmist makes a votive offering to the Lord as a sign of his gratefulness that God has answered his prayers and saved his life. He who once cried, "Save me!" now makes a solemn promise of devotion to the Lord and is thankful for

Now, what is the Sacrament of the Altar?

Answer: It is the true body and blood of the Lord Christ, in and under the bread and wine, which we Christians are commanded by Christ's word to eat and drink. It is bread and wine set within God's Word and bound to it.

—Martin Luther—

The Large Catechism

all that God has done.

- *In what ways do we show God that we are grateful for all he has done for us?*

Hebrews 9:11-22

The author of Hebrews explained in this passage how Jesus is the new mediator of the covenant between God and his people. Sins against the first covenant at Sinai were committed against the Lord, but Jesus' death on the cross redeems the people, or pays back the covenant debt.

- *How does Jesus' death, according to Hebrews, fulfill the covenant promise made between Israel and the Lord in the wilderness long ago?*

In Hebrews 9:9-10 we hear how under the original covenant, the high priest could make sacrifices for the people, but these sacrifices only served for atoning the sins of ritual purity. They did nothing for a guilty conscience.

- *How does Jesus' shed blood serve to grant forgiveness of the conscience as well as other sins?*
- *How does Jesus usher in the "New Covenant" while at the same time he IS the New Covenant? (Compare verse 15b with verse 26b.)*

Matthew 26:17-30

At their final Passover meal together, Jesus was at the table with his disciples and he told them that there would be a betrayal. It's as if a ripple of murmurs went around the table as everyone present said to Jesus, "Is it going to be me, Lord? Am I the one?"

- *Why do you suppose Judas asked Jesus if he would be the one to betray him? Didn't he already know what he was about to do?*

Even though Jesus predicted that his friends would betray him, he still instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion (our human label, not his) for them and for the future Body of Christ – the Church. He even says to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28) He informed them that this would be the last time they would partake of this cup until he comes again.

- *What did Jesus mean when he said that he would not drink again of this fruit of the vine until he is with them again in his Father's kingdom? Does it have anything to do with Holy Communion here and now? Or is it strictly about the end times?*

Good Friday

April 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.

So Christ is now crucified and hangs on the cross as the worst thief, scoundrel, rebel, and murderer who has ever been on earth; and the innocent Lamb, Christ, must bear and pay for someone else's guilt. For it applies to us: those are our sins that burden His neck. We are this kind of sinners... for even if we are not all so coarse as to carry them out in deed, we are still guilty of them before God.

—Martin Luther—

Sermons on the Gospel of John, LW 69

First Reading: Isaiah 52:13–53:12

Luther said that this reading from Isaiah is the “foremost passage on the suffering and resurrection of Christ, and there is hardly another like it” (LW 17:215). The Suffering Servant endured all sorts of violence against him, and yet he did not retaliate. In fact, he kept his mouth shut; he remained quiet in his forsakenness and affliction. Isaiah maintained that we are all sheep who have gone astray from the Shepherd, but it was precisely the Shepherd Servant who was the lamb led to the slaughter to bear our sin.

- *What sort of emotions arise for you as you read this passage?*
- *Isaiah said that the servant will be lifted high and greatly exalted. How does this reflect Jesus being lifted up on the cross? Where is the exaltation?*

Psalm 22

The psalmist cried out to God in anguish, “Why have you forsaken me?” He was consumed by the closeness of his death and was inconsolable in his utter abandonment. Jesus would cry out these same words from the cross of Calvary as the last breaths of life left his stricken body (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46).

- *Have you ever felt completely forsaken by someone? By God? What was that like and how did you make it through?*
- *What's the difference between feeling forsaken and being forsaken? Is the difference important here?*

Second Reading: Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:8–9

The author of Hebrews taught that Christ learned obedience through his great suffering. This high priest of ours understands what it is like to be human, with all of the temptations and distractions that keep us from a life of faithfulness to God. Yet, this One who suffered and died a shameful death was perfectly sinless and made himself the source of our eternal life in God.

- *Obedience can be a “bad word” in our culture. How do we learn obedience to God through the trials and suffering we experience?*
- *How is Christ our “help and refuge” in this life, especially in the face of trials?*

Gospel Reading: John 18:1–19:42

As Peter pulled out a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's slave, Jesus chastised him and commanded him to

put his sword back in its sheath. “Shall I not drink of the cup that my Father has given me?” Jesus asked. All along, Jesus and his disciples freely ate and drank together along with those whom no one else wanted to dine. This partaking of the bread and cup were signs of the coming kingdom of God, of the salvation that was at hand.

Jesus' ministry was characterized by eating, drinking and feeding the poor, proclaiming the coming wedding feast, doing miracles of bread and fish, and instituting Holy Communion at the Last Supper. For Jesus, taking the cup was part of his lot in this human life. Whether it was positive or negative, in judgment or in grace and favor, Jesus would not deny the cup that he was given. It was his fate. It was his legacy and he would not deny it or walk away from it.

- *In what ways does God show mercy and grace in the many feeding stories of the Bible?*
- *How does Jesus' drinking of the cup indicate his acceptance of the suffering he is about to endure?*
- *How is our Christian life also a drinking of this same cup as Jesus drank from?*

While questioning Jesus, Pilate asked a question that pointed to the very truth of who Jesus was and what he was doing. “What is truth?” Pilate wasn't particularly interested in the answer to his question; he didn't even wait for a response. The question of truth continues to linger. In every generation the church faces challenges to the truth of the Gospel. Through heresies, other religions, scientific discoveries, and scholarly pursuits, the church regularly finds itself trying to find ways to speak the truth of the Gospel in the face of such challenges. Something we too often forget in these attempts is that the truth is not simply a set of propositions or facts. The truth is a person — Jesus Christ. The truth was standing in front of Pilate, but Pilate couldn't see him. Pilate didn't belong to the truth.

The truth dwells in our midst, making himself known through the Holy Spirit. The truth of the Gospel is not that Christians have the best arguments and have an answer to every challenge. The truth of the Gospel is that this man, Jesus Christ, is God in the flesh, accomplishing God's will among us. Faith, then, is not being convinced that the Gospel story is most likely accurate. Rather, faith — saving faith — is the result of the self-revelation of the One who is the Truth grabbing hold of us, whom he has chosen.

- *How does this understanding of Jesus himself as Truth push against the ways we try to prove that something is true?*