

Easter 4

May 3, 2020



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

"The whole Christ, according to both natures, is our righteousness, solely in his obedience that he rendered his Father as both God and a human being, an obedience unto death. Through this obedience he earned the forgiveness of sins and eternal life for us..."

– Formula of Concord –

Epitome, Article III: Righteousness

Acts 2:42–47

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

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

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

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

Psalm 23

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

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

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

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

1 Peter 2:19–25

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

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

John 10:1–10

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

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

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

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

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