

Easter 6

May 17, 2020



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

– Martin Luther –
Sermons on John 14, LW 24

PROCLAMATION POINTS

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

Acts 17:16–31

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

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

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

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

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

Psalms 66:8–20

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

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

1 Peter 3:13–22

If there was one attribute that characterizes Christians,

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

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

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

John 14:15–21

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

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

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

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

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