



Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 2, 2021 (Year B)

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.

When I am converted by the Gospel, the Holy Spirit is present. He takes me as clay and makes of me a new creature, which is endowed with a different mind, heart, and thoughts, that is, with a true knowledge of God and a sincere trust in His grace.

– Martin Luther –

Sermon on John 15

Acts 8:26–40

In Judaism, eunuchs were not allowed to be full members of the religious community (see Deuteronomy 23:1). They could only worship from a distance. Now with the spread of the Gospel, those barriers created by the law were broken down. Eunuchs, Gentiles, Samaritans, and others who were on the outside of the Jewish religious life were included in the community of faith in Christ.

- How is what Christ has accomplished good news for all people, especially those who have been on the outside of the faith assembly in the past? Is this a matter of “inclusiveness” and “tolerance” in general, or something much more specific to faith in Christ?
- In what sense does this text directly connect faith to the Word of God? What are the various “means” (tools, instruments) that God used in this text to bring faith into the life of the Ethiopian official?

The story of Philip’s encounter jumps from “the good news about Jesus” (verse 35), directly to a request from the Ethiopian to be baptized.

- What does this say about the central place of Baptism in the teaching of the early Church? In what sense does the Gospel always assume both Word and Sacrament?

Psalms 150

The final psalm in the book, Psalm 150, ends this section of Scripture with active praise, to the sound of many different musical instruments.

- Martin Luther once said, “Next to theology, music is the greatest gift of God.” Why do you think he said this? Do you agree?
- The biblical word “Hallelujah” means “Praise the Lord.” How is this both a command and an expression of faith itself?

1 John 4:1–11 (12–21)

“Don’t believe everything you hear or read,” we might counsel those who seem to trust consistently unreliable sources. In this text, John encouraged believers to “test” the spirits so that they would not be misled. This is great advice for us today as well. There are so many agendas and messages out there and they all seek our attention and allegiance. Many sound so good that it’s no wonder we are lured into believing them, especially when others seem to believe them too. However, if we examine them carefully, we may find that they are at odds with the Gospel.

- In terms of our daily life, how can too much information or too many choices be a hindrance rather than a help?
- What does the apostle John mean when he says, “Test the spirits?”

As followers of Christ, we are not called to follow in blind faith — after all, Jesus said he came to open the eyes of the blind (Luke 14:21). Rather, we are encouraged to use our God-given intellect and reason to sort out the spirits of this world and to think critically about both the Gospel message and the messages that are anti-Gospel. What is at stake is our life of faith; when we simply believe everything we hear, we are not engaging our brains in connection to our faith.

- What are some of the subtle (or not so subtle) messages have you heard that sound good but are actually contrary to sound Christian theology?
- Do you find it hard to engage reason and logic with your faith? In what ways is faith not a matter of reason or logic? On the other hand, in what way is faith perfectly reasonable and logical?

John 15:1–8

Jesus spoke to his followers about the pruning task of the Father who cuts dead foliage from the branches of the vine so that they will produce healthy fruit. Though we who are believers remain a part of the vine which is Jesus, there are often times when something in our lives needs to be trimmed back so that we might become healthier, more mature, more fruit-bearing for the kingdom.

- When might God’s best gift to us not be found in what he gives, but what he takes away?
- How hard is it to see that there are times when life is difficult in which God may be pruning us and reshaping us for his purposes? Does understanding that as part of the faith journey help you through rough patches?

Jesus said that when his followers bear good fruit it glorifies the Father and proves to the world that we are his disciples. This fruit-bearing is a sign of God’s gracious action in our lives and a sign of increasing spiritual maturity. (Paul also spoke about the fruit that Christ-followers bear compared to those who are not in Christ, in Galatians 5:16–26.)

- How do the good fruits of Christians bear witness to the power of God in the world? How is this fruit-bearing an act of God’s mercy upon us and not something we accomplish on our own or by our own will? Do you give credit to God for the good that you do? Why or why not?