



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.

But we say, that we are to hear that word from the mouth of Christ only. He that hears and believes this, has rightly the truth of God which sanctifies without any hypocritical show: for if you believe his word, then you can hold fast no hope or confidence in your own reason and wisdom, nor in your strength and works...

– Martin Luther –

Great Confession on the Lord's Supper, 1528

Acts 1:12–26

As Luke recounts the choosing of a replacement among the twelve disciples for Judas, it seems like their methods of choosing are as random as some of the childhood strategies we employed for deciding things. The casting of lots was a tried and true process for discerning the Spirit and will of God in the Old Testament. For example, in 1 Samuel 1:40 and following, Saul asked God to decide between himself and his son, Jonathan in a matter concerning sin. The prophet used special stones called Urim and Thummim which were believed to be a way that God revealed his divine will in a given situation.

- Does it seem superstitious to think about the casting of lots as a way to make decisions? How might God actually use something like this to instruct his people on the false assumptions of “human control”?

Some interpreters suggest that God's real choice for a successor to Judas was neither Justus or Matthias, but in fact was the Apostle Paul himself, which is only revealed later in Acts, where the Lord says, “he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

- In what sense might both these successors be the will of God?

When it comes to the discernment of God's will, we are encouraged to pray – to be in touch with God. In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther wrote, “God's will is certainly done without our prayer, but we ask that it may be done among us.”

- How or why does this promise serve to encourage us to pray? What are we really asking for in all our prayers?

Psalms 1

Psalms 1 serves as an excellent introduction to the entire Book of Psalms. It is a statement in praise of God's Word, and the power and strength that comes from resting our hearts in the Lord.

- How do the biblical psalms do the very thing that Psalm 1 is talking about? How do the use of the psalms in our devotional life help to make us “trees planted by streams of water?”

The psalm contrasts the wicked and righteous. Blessed are the ones who do not walk in the ways of the wicked, says the psalmist.

- In ways does associating with “bad people” such as the scoffers and sinners mentioned here, make our lives less than happy?

- What does this mean in light of the fact that believers are, “simul justis et peccator” – simultaneously saint and sinner?

1 John 5:9–15

John argued that unbelief was not simply the rejection of a human construct or idea, but an accusation against God's own faithfulness. To reject faith is to make God a liar.

- In what sense does unbelief turn God's promise into a lie, and God himself into a liar?
- How does faith tie together both objective reality (what is) with subjective reality (how we are affected by what is)?

Some people define faith simply as an optimistic hope, or worse, as naive wishful thinking. But John said that faith allows believers to “know” some things with certainty.

- How can knowing be the result of faith, when at the same time faith is not based upon knowing?

John emphatically asserted that if we believe in the promises of God through Christ and ask of him anything that is according to the will of God, he will hear and answer us.

- Do you believe this to be true? Why is the phrase, “according to his will” an important part of this promise?

John 17:11b–19

This text is just one small part of a much larger section in John where Jesus, in the context of the Last Supper, prays for his disciples before his death. In these verses, Jesus prayed to the Father that his disciples would be protected from the evil one and sanctified in God's sight. The word “sanctified” is normally translated “made holy.” However, the literal meaning is to be “set apart” by God.

- How does the literal definition of being sanctified as “set apart” demonstrate what God does to us as Christians? What are we set apart from? What are we set apart for?

Luther taught that sanctification was a part of justification by grace through faith alone, and not a separate process.

- How does sanctification as a process seem to depend on our own good works and growth? How does it better fit with justification by recognizing that through Christ we are “set apart” by him, for his purposes?

Jesus went on to pray that his joy would be made full within his followers.

- Is the “joy” that Jesus refers to here the same as happiness? Why or why not? Where does joy come from? How can we be joyful even in the midst of hardship and suffering?