Sola Lectionary Text Study

Pentecost 23 (Proper 26)

October 31, 2021



For a person does not live for himself alone in this mortal body, as if to work for it alone; he lives for all men on earth; in fact, he lives solely for others and not for himself.

– Martin Luther –

Treatise on Christian Liberty, 1520

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.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

God gave Israel a set of commandments so that their life would be ordered and holy when they arrived in the Promised Land. Moses was put in charge of teaching these statutes to the people so that they would honor God and pass on their faith and knowledge to their children and their children's children for all generations. In these words, known as the *Shema*, Moses said to the people, "Hear, O Israel…" (v.3)

- *Why do we need to hear in order to obey? Is a life of faith following our own path, or a path that God has set before us?*

Moses attributed practical benefits to following the will of God, that "your days will be long" and "it may go well with you," and "you will multiply greatly."

- *Why would things tend to naturally "go well" with us when we put God first and love our neighbors as ourselves?*
- *Is this always the case? If so, in what way? If not, why not?*

In a way, Moses was the first catechist. He taught the people God's laws so they could teach their children. He told them to literally write the Word of God on their doorposts and affix it to their foreheads as a sign of obedience to God. From ancient times, Jews have had the tradition of making small boxes containing Scripture to hang near their door (called a *Mezuzah*) or wrap them with ribbons and affixed to their forehead (called a *Phylactory*). In a similar way, many Christian households have a family Bible that sits in a prominent place in their home.

- *Does having the Word of God in a visible place necessarily mean we adhere to its teachings? Why or why not?*
- *In a more symbolic way, what might having the Bible on your forehead represent? What about having it on the entry and exit to your house?*

Psalm 119:1-8

The longest single psalm in the Bible is a psalm about the benefits of God's Word. According to Psalm 119, walking in God's ways, in his law and by his commands, creates a blessed life. Those who seek the Lord with their whole heart and who do no wrong will be blessed by God.

- *What are some of the different terms used in these verses to refer to God's Word of Scripture? What aspect or function of the Word is emphasized here?*
- *Why is it so important to know God's Word? Can we really live a life seeking the Lord if we never open or spend time in his Word?*

Hebrews 9:11-14 (15-22)

The author of Hebrews explained that Christ is the mediator of a new covenant between God and his people. The Jews of the past had offered regular sacrifices in the Temple. Now Jesus has made a once and for all sacrifice on the cross of Calvary.

- *Imagine you were asked by an atheist, "If you Christians believe in the Bible, why don't you offer the animal sacrifices that are commanded in the Bible?" What answer would you give? How would you explain this?*

The author of Hebrews goes on to ask the obvious question, in comparison with Old Testament sacrifices, "How much more will the blood of Christ purify us from dead works to serve the living God?" *(paraphrase of v. 14)*

- *What did the shedding of Jesus' blood on the cross actually accomplish for us? How is it that we receive the benefit of this sacrifice only through faith?*
- *In what way does the sacrifice of Christ fulfill the first covenant even as it creates a new covenant between God and humanity? Where do you get to hear the promise of the "new covenant in his blood" on a regular basis?*

Mark 12:28-37

One of the scribes heard Jesus' answer to the Sadducees about the Resurrection and chimed in with his own question, asking Jesus which commandment was the most important of all? Jesus answered him by recalling the *Shema*, from our Old Testament lesson for today, saying, "Hear, O Israel… love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength" (v. 30). He followed that up with "love your neighbor as yourself."

- *All our lessons for today demonstrate the unity of the Old Testament with the New Testament. Why is that important for us as Christians?*
- *Why do you suppose Jesus added the phrase "all your mind" to his answer? (There are only the three aspects of loving God in the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-5.) Is this addition important?*

The scribe agreed with Jesus that these two commandments were greater than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices in the world. Jesus responded, impressed with the man's spiritual wisdom, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

- *Jesus told the scribe he was not far from God's kingdom (i.e. a genuine life of faith). What might the scribe need to give up to be fully a part of the kingdom of God? How is this similar to the rich young man in Mark 10:17-27?*

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