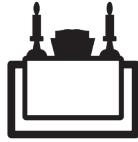


Epiphany 6

February 12, 2023



So God does not want you to avenge yourself out of anger in any form or manner, be it with your heart, with your fist, or with your mouth, and thus do an injury to your neighbor, show him spite, give him unkind words, etc.

*– Martin Luther –
Sermon on Matthew 5:20–26*

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.

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 30:15–20

We are faced with decisions every day. Our decisions have consequences for good and bad. That is why God gave us commandments, to spare us from the negative consequences of the sin and evil we inevitably get ourselves into by pursuing our own will.

Scripture tells us the reality that “none are righteous ... no one seeks after God” (Romans 3:10–11). So what can it mean in Deuteronomy when we are told to “choose life?” Is it that easy? Or is Scripture pointing us to something deeper. Our confidence does not rest in the life we can make for ourselves, but in the One who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:1).

- *In what ways is a life in Christ the only true life? What happens to the life we try to build for ourselves?*
- *In terms of faith, why in the Nicene Creed would we call the Holy Spirit “the Lord and giver of life”? How does the Spirit do this in our daily lives?*

Psalm 119:1–8

Once again the psalmist speaks of the blessedness that comes with being obedient to God’s law. But in a slightly different twist than we have seen so far in the psalms of Epiphany, here in Psalm 119 this recognition of the blessedness of obedience is paired with a prayer that God would make it possible for the psalmist to be obedient. He recognizes that by his own strength he is not capable of fulfilling the law. So he prays to the giver of the law to make him steadfast. Only with the steadfast presence of the Lord with him can the psalmist hope to attain righteousness.

- *Why is the psalmist’s recognition of his need for God’s help in living a life of obedience crucially important?*
- *Does the psalmist still understand righteousness to be primarily a legal status? How does this relate to the righteousness of faith?*

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 3:1–9

When a baby is born, the child goes from being fed by the umbilical cord attached to the mother in-utero, to being fed by the breast or bottle. Even this early milk can be difficult for the child to digest because the body has yet to develop enzymes to break down the lactose. Infants are also susceptible to infection because their bodies have not begun to produce sufficient antibodies to ward off pathogens.

In this passage Paul says that the people in Corinth were

so new in faith that they could not handle the solid food of Christian doctrine. Some, he says, were not even mature enough for pure milk, the simple message itself. The clear evidence of this lack of maturity in faith is the constant bickering and division in the church in Corinth. Despite the promise of the Gospel that has been handed over to them, the Corinthians are continuing to live as children of the world.

Like infants being fed, it takes time and exposure to the Word of God for it to do its work on us. When we are able to ingest the milk, the pure gospel, we begin to learn more about Christ and this faith journey we are on to more difficult solid food.

- *In what ways do you see this metaphor of partaking of the milk and solid food being a reality in your own faith life?*
- *How have you deepened in your ability to handle and take in God’s Word?*

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 5:21–37

In our gospel lesson for this Sunday, Jesus expands our understanding of sin by widening the definition of the fifth commandment. Not only is murder a sin, but insults and anger violate the commandment as well.

- *In what ways is anger destructive to human relationships? What does God expect of us in times of conflict?*
- *Can any of us say that we have fully obeyed the commandment, as Jesus describes it? Do we even take his words seriously?*

Jesus continues his teaching by expanding the sixth commandment to include lust, saying that if one looks at another with lust in his eye then he has already been unfaithful in his heart. The physical act of adultery begins in the heart and mind. Once the violation has occurred there, the deed is already done.

- *In our modern culture, why is the ease and availability of sexual images a serious problem? In what ways are the sins of “virtual reality” still real sins?*

Jesus explains the commandments to those of hard heart who think they can fulfill the expectations of God’s holy law by their own obedience. The reality of their condition is that they are so steeped in sin that fruit of their life would have them enter the kingdom maimed.

- *In what ways does our need to justify ourselves lead us further away from God?*
- *Where do you find the good news of Jesus Christ in this passage?*