

Epiphany 3

January 21, 2024 (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.

Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying: “Repent Ye,” wanted the entire life of believers to be a repentance... He does not, however, mean inward repentance only; in fact, such inward repentance is not real at all if it does not outwardly produce various mortifications of the flesh.

– Martin Luther –

95 Theses

Jonah 3:1–5, 10

The Ninevites responded to God’s warning spoken through Jonah. They put on the symbolic garment of repentance, sackcloth, and covered their heads in ashes to show their remorse at grieving God. They publicly showed their sorrow for their sinful ways and God saw their newfound humility and forgave them. And, Jonah didn’t like it!

If you know the whole story of the Book of Jonah, you know that there was a lot more going on in the life of this reluctant prophet than our lesson for this morning lets on. Yes, Jonah did eventually go preach the message that God sent him to bring to the Ninevites. And yes, God did accomplish his purpose through the prophet. But there was a whole lot that happened to Jonah to bring him to that point. Isn’t that always the case? Things are not what they seem on the surface. We don’t always know why people act the way they do, but we can always count on a back-story that led to their behavior.

- From what you know of the story, was Jonah enthusiastic about sharing God’s message? How did he react to the call of God? What does this tell us about whom God can use to serve his purposes?
- In what ways do we show our repentance to God? Is it ever a public process? When might it be a congregational action?
- When have you misunderstood a person’s lack of zeal for something godly and came to find a deeper story? How did that help you to understand the person, and God, even better?
- Why is it essential for us to remember that faith and repentance is God’s work in people’s lives, including our own? As we proclaim the Word to others, in what sense do we ourselves need to continue to hear it?

Psalms 62

The psalmist proclaimed that the Lord God is his rock and salvation; for him alone does his soul wait. Even though he was being crushed by his oppressors, he waited for the Lord God to act on his behalf. Though he was in pain, the psalmist knew and confessed that God is his rock and salvation, and that with the Lord he would never be moved.

- In what sense is “waiting on the Lord” an essential aspect of faith? How is waiting an act of trust and confidence in God?
- How does the psalmist’s faith counteract the assaults of his enemies? How have you found that to be the case in your own life?

1 Corinthians 7:29–31 (32–35)

St. Paul instructed the Corinthian Christians that the world as they knew it was passing away and the time of the Lord’s return was very short. Paul wanted the Christians to whom he was writing to be more focused in their mission. He encouraged the Corinthians to be steadfast in their faith, and to be single-minded in their devotion to God.

- Almost two thousand years have passed since Paul wrote these words, and yet Paul said, “the time is short.” In what sense was this true for Paul’s first listeners and for us?

It’s fairly easy for us to get distracted. There are so many things to claim our attention and to draw our focus away from our life in Christ. Even in the church we get involved in too many things and our focus on mission becomes increasingly diffuse to the point that, sometimes, we aren’t doing anything very well.

- How are you “doing” in your church? Are you focusing on a few things and doing them thoroughly? Or are you trying to do too much? How might you tell the difference?

In this text, Paul points out the anxieties caused by family responsibilities and how they can stand in the way of practicing our faith. He is not making a statement that is anti-marriage or family, he is simply being realistic about the cost of discipleship.

- What sorts of things cause you to get distracted from your faith disciplines? How can family obligations get in the way of faith? On the other hand, how can family activities help support our faith?

Mark 1:14–20

Follow me, Jesus said to the fishermen, and I will make you fish for people. In their travels around Galilee with Jesus, God used them to reach out to many people in need.

- Did the disciples themselves ever “catch” anyone? In what sense was Jesus the true Fisherman, and they simply his net?

Think of other ways we use the word *caught*. We “get caught” when we have been found out, exposed, or busted for doing something wrong. We also use the word “caught” in the sense of being rescued or saved.

- In what sense does the Law of God serve to catch us in our sin? Why is understanding our sinful human condition essential to hearing the promise of Christ?
- Has anyone ever caught you in a fall? How does the Gospel of Christ “catch” us in this sense as well?