

Second Sunday in Lent

February 25, 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.

"The Cross is the shame and the great indignity which Christ innocently suffered... The shame and persecution endured for righteousness' sake is the cross of Christ. This is why true Christians must be dubbed heretics and evildoers. They must be so condemned, despised, and judged by all that everybody wipes his feet on them."

—Martin Luther—

Sermon, October 22, 1522

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Here in Genesis 17, God's covenant with his created world becomes focused on one man and his offspring. The Lord, the God of all that is, chose Abram as the vehicle through whom he would be known in the world. God would now be Abram's God. The Lord chose to shower his blessings on this one man, his wife, and his descendants.

- Does it seem arbitrary that the God of all creation would focus his attention on one family? What does God have in mind for everyone else?

In ancient cultures, a change in name was associated with a change in circumstance, rank, or status. With the covenant of God, Abram's name ("exalted father") was changed to Abraham ("father of a multitude"). Sarai's name ("princess") was changed to Sarah ("noble woman"). God's promises to them gave them greater importance as well as immeasurable blessings.

- How do these new names demonstrate Abraham and Sarah's call and responsibility to be a blessing toward others?
- In what ways are our names important and the source of blessing from one generation to another? Why do we want to protect our "good names"?
- In what ways are we changed through the covenant of Holy Baptism? What new "name" are we given? Why is that name so important?

Psalms 22:23-31

It can be frustrating to try and have a conversation with someone who is distracted and not listening. The psalmist assured Israel that this was not the case with God. The Lord has heard the cries of the afflicted, we can be assured. He has not hidden his face from his children, rather, he has heard and responds. Because of God's attentiveness towards his people's needs, the psalmist urged them to praise him. Those who seek him shall be heard and it is good and right to praise the Lord's name.

- Based on this psalm, what might be your response to a person who is frustrated by life's challenges and assumes that God does not hear their pleas?

Romans 5:1-11

In a beautiful and beloved passage, Paul laid out what Christ accomplished for us on the cross. Through his death and resurrection, Christ made peace between God and his people. The war declared through humanity's rebellion

into sin is over. Despite our enemy status, Christ has given his life for us. This reconciliation is pure gift. It has come about through Christ's initiative, not our own. Its effect is absolute and we can rely on what Christ has done for us.

- Why does Paul emphasize that we were still enemies of God when Christ died for us? Why does that matter?

Paul also spoke in this passage about the effect of suffering. Suffering is a reality for redeemed sinners in a fallen world. But the suffering of Christians is not pointless or without end. Suffering brings us face-to-face with our Savior. It leads us to the hope that does not disappoint.

- Do you know of instances in which suffering has led to despair rather than hope? What is our calling in the face of despair? What is God's word of hope for those in despair?

The Greek word used by Paul to connote suffering or affliction is θλίψις (*thlip-sis*). It has the connotation of being under pressure; it was a wine-making term for the process of pressing the grapes to remove the juice.

Think about this as a metaphor for the life of faith: situations may crush us but there is a finer product that emerges from the grape than simple juice. Likewise, consider how diamonds are made: coal deep inside the earth is crushed under tremendous pressure over a long period of time to create the most valuable gemstone known.

- In what sense does stress and pressure (with Christ on our side) cause us to become something new? In what ways can our suffering lead to a deeper life in Christ?

Mark 8:27-38

There are two distinct episodes and a sermon in our Gospel reading for today. In the first, Jesus inquired of his disciples who people think he is. Among the countless possibilities, Peter, alone, offers up the right response. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus' only response is to instruct his disciples to tell no one what they know.

- How do you think Peter knew the truth about Jesus? Why do you think Jesus wanted his identity kept secret here?

Immediately after this, Jesus told his disciples that he must suffer rejection and death at the hands of the very people he came to save. Peter, who had just made his great confession, cannot accept what Jesus had to say. In his mind, it simply could not be the case that the Messiah was going to be killed. In that moment, Peter revealed that he didn't fully understand what his own confession meant.

- What do you think Peter thought the Messiah ought to do?