

Advent 3

December 15, 2024



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.

[Thankfulness] is the virtue characteristic of real Christians; it is their worship of God at its best. They thank God and do what is unattainable by any other human being on earth...

To thank with all your heart is an art – an art which the Holy Spirit teaches.

–Martin Luther–

Exposition on Psalm 111:1

Zephaniah 3:14–20

Have you ever caught yourself singing for joy after a long period of trial in your life? Perhaps it happened without thinking, a song simply erupting from the depths of your being. Singing is such a natural response for human beings to times of joy and peace. Some of the most content people are ones who seem to break into song at a moment's notice.

In this passage, the prophet predicted the restoration of Israel, both physically and spiritually. The Lord promised to take away all negative judgments against his people. Enemies will be cleared away and the lame and outcast will be gathered together with the rest of God's people. The response to this good news is singing – praising God who restored the fortunes of his people. Fear gave way to praise in the hearts of the people.

- *Have you ever been lifted by the faithful songs of others at a time when you couldn't bring yourself to sing?*
- *What is the effect of singing on your mood? Have you ever gone to worship in a grumpy mood, only to be lifted up by the singing of the congregation?*
- *How can we encourage ourselves and others to sing praises to the Lord as an act of devotion? What might it do for our "fearful" attitudes?*
- *What do you think of when you hear the promise, "He will quiet you by his love" (v.17)?*

Psalms 85

Sometimes in life we wish we could just have a "do-over." We long to have a second chance at things we messed up in the past. With newfound wisdom that comes from our faith in God, we hope that if given a do-over, we might be able to do things better.

- *In a practical sense, when have you experienced the grace of a "do-over" in your life? How did it change you?*

In many ways, when Zechariah and the Psalmist speak of "restoration" they are indicating a gift of God that is much like a do-over, except that this restoration is the work of God. We are not simply given a chance to "try harder" — we are given a new reality, created by God.

- *What is the psalmist asking for when he prays that God would "give us life again" (v.6)? In the context of this psalm, how would you define what is meant by "salvation"?*
- *How does knowing that God is ever-present with you help in your day to day existence? In what sense does this depend*

upon experiencing and knowing the "truth" (v.10–11)?

Philippians 4:4–7

St. Paul urged the Christians in Philippi not to worry about anything. We often say, "don't worry" but we all know just how difficult that can be at times. At the heart of putting aside all anxieties in faith is a deep trust that the Lord has our best interests at heart. Therefore, to not worry doesn't mean we are care-free, it means we have faith in God.

The reality about worrying is that by engaging in this treadmill of the mind, we cannot change a thing. It only serves to make us upset and lose our focus on what we are truly called to do and be in God's kingdom. Thankfulness, on the other hand, reminds us that God does care for us, and that we can count on him. Trusting in God leads to less worrying in our lives.

- *Do you know someone who is a perpetual worrier? Are they a person of faith? What might you say to them when they get stuck in cycles of worry?*
- *Is the antidote to worry an attitude of thanksgiving? How do our hearts change when we focus on the blessings rather than the trials and potential negative outcomes?*

Luke 7:18–28 (29–35)

Jesus said to John's disciples, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (v.23). The Greek word for offended is σκανδαλίζω (*scan-dal-izo*), from which we get the English word "scandal." In Scripture, it is often translated as "tripped by a stumbling block."

People were often scandalized by Jesus' teaching, healing, and casting out of demons. For example, Scripture tells us that even people in his own hometown were offended by Jesus (Mark 6:4). They had never seen such power and authority and it "tripped them up" — shaking them to their very core. Instead of getting to know Jesus, they were struck by fear which manifested itself in taking offense at him. What should have inspired people to faith, repulsed them because they did not understand and did not care to open their hearts to the miracle worker.

- *Is there anything about Jesus that you find offensive? What do you imagine you would have thought of him if you heard he was coming to your town?*
- *When it comes to trusting in the power and presence of God in your life, what are some of the things that trip you up? How might you move these "stumbling blocks" out of the way?*