

Epiphany 7

February 23, 2025 (Year C)



The article of the forgiveness of sins is the most important, and it is of all the most comforting. To Satan it is truly the worst, and it is the most hateful. This is the reason why Paul always has on his tongue: grace, grace, grace! He does this to spite the devil.

– Martin Luther–

Table Talk

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.

Genesis 45:3–15

Joseph was met in Egypt by his brothers who sold him into slavery years before. He recognized them, but the brothers had no idea where he ended up or if he was even alive. As Judah begged for the release of Benjamin, Joseph could no longer keep his emotions in check. He revealed himself to his brothers and inquired about their father. Joseph recounts all that happened since the brothers were together in their father's house. He interpreted their actions against him as God's way of saving lives during the famine. It was God's plan, Joseph proclaimed, that he be sent to the house of Pharaoh to "preserve a remnant on earth." (v.7)

- How was Joseph able to forgive his brothers for the evil they committed against him? Why is it so hard to forgive family for betrayal?

Psalms 103:1–13

The psalmist begins this hymn with a refrain of, "Bless the Lord, O my soul." He praises God for all the goodness he has provided for his people.

- How does recognizing God's goodness in our lives provide great blessings for us? How is it different if we don't recognize the benefits he grants us?
- Luther wrote in his explanations to the petitions of the Lord's Prayer such things as, "The kingdom of God comes indeed by itself, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us." How was Luther trying to help people recognize the goodness of God by saying such things?

The Lord shows compassion to those who fear him, says the psalmist. God is a loving and forgiving God and continually acts on behalf of those he cares for. Rather than dealing with his beloved children according to their sin, he deals with us with lovingkindness and mercy.

- How do the psalms, especially this one, show us the true nature and character of God?

1 Corinthians 15:21–26, 30–42

St. Paul continues his discourse about the resurrection of Christ by explaining how sin came into being in the first place. One man, Adam, brought sin to humanity. Ever since the garden of Eden, humanity has been plagued by sin and death. But through Christ, who is one man, all shall be made alive!

- How are Adam and Christ the same? How are they different?

- How does Paul use this comparison/distinction to make an important point about salvation?

Paul used the Greek word *aparche* to indicate the role of Christ in the life of the world. *Aparche* means "first fruits" or "downpayment." This referred to the first offering of produce that a person would make to the temple as a gift of thanksgiving. It was a sacrifice that benefitted, not only the priests in the temple and the day to day running of the temple, but the people as well. What was left over was given to all to share.

- In what ways is Christ's sacrifice a benefit to all? How is it just the beginning of what God will do for humanity?
- In what ways was the first fruit offering an offering of what was God's own? How is that the same in the offering Christ made for sin? What does that say about the providence of God toward his people?

Luke 6:27–38

As Jesus' sermon on the plain continued, he moved from pronouncing blessings and curses to the hallmark of his ministry: Love. "Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you," he said. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who abuse you. This kind of love is more than simply putting up with cruelty, it is about heaping love on those who are filled with hate, embracing those who seem unlovable, giving to those who only want to take. Jesus lived his life this way and encouraged his followers to do the same.

- What happens to people when we love them even though they act in such hostile ways toward us? How is Jesus the one providing the love? (See 1 John 4:19.)
- Why is this kind of love so difficult? Why do we who know what Jesus expects of us struggle so mightily to follow this command to love?

Jesus continued his teaching by acknowledging that it is easy to love those who love us, "For even sinners love those who love them." (v. 32) It is much harder to love those who act like we are their enemy. It takes complete reliance on Christ to love those who hate us and to do good to those who abuse us. In the same vein, we are called to give generously to those who ask of us, and to not count the cost. We have been given eternity, therefore we have no need to worry about ourselves.

- In what ways do you struggle with Jesus' words about love and forgiveness?