

Pentecost 18 (Proper 23)

October 12, 2025



A penitent heart is a rare thing and a great grace; one cannot produce it by thinking about sin and hell. Only the Holy Spirit can impart it.

– Martin Luther –

March 1521

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.

Ruth 1:1–19a

Go back! That's the resounding theme of the first chapter of Ruth. Naomi should go back to Bethlehem. Orpah and Ruth should go back to their own people. Everyone should just go back where they belong. The sense of this going back is one of repentance, turning around. Elimelech and Naomi had fled Bethlehem, doubting God's providence. They hoped to fare better in Moab, but calamity followed them there, with Elimelech and his sons all dying in this foreign land. And Naomi was driven to repent, to go back.

- *What does it say about Elimelech and Naomi that they left Bethlehem? Is there something wrong with them seeking to find a place not stricken by famine?*

Naomi had no capacity to provide for her daughters-in-law and she recognized that there was still hope for them to remarry and have families. She couldn't see any reason why they would return with her to a land that was foreign to them. But Ruth would not be turned back. She refused to stay among her own people, instead, she committed completely to a life with Naomi. Ruth even vowed to give up the god of her people to worship Naomi's God.

- *What do you make of Ruth's commitment to give up even her religious beliefs in order to remain loyal to Naomi?*
- *How did God work through Ruth to care for Naomi and to extend her line of people through the generations? How was Jesus a "son" for Naomi that could not be taken away by death? (Matthew 1)*

Psalm 111

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." These words from the psalmist have given believers much to consider for millenia. After recounting a series of great works God had done on behalf of his people, the psalmist concluded that fear of the Lord is the proper attitude for the believer. The Lord, who provides food for his people, and who works righteousness and justice in the world, has redeemed his people. Recognizing the power and providence of God is the beginning of understanding who God is and what he is doing in the world. As Christians reading these words, we are moved to marvel that the power of God has been put to work on our behalf to defeat the powers of sin, death, and the devil.

- *How do you understand the word "fear" in this Psalm? In what ways have we sought to ease any fear of God we might have by down-playing his power?*

2 Timothy 2:1–13

Timothy had a rather important job to do. He was tasked with identifying others who had the necessary gifts to become teachers and preachers. He was to find people who were faithful and able to teach. That is still the criteria for those who work for the Lord. Faithfulness and the ability to teach are the gifts that Timothy was instructed to be on the lookout for.

- *How does Timothy's set of criteria compare with what we often look for in leaders of the church? What does Timothy's list suggest about what is important?*

The epistle goes on to explain what people can expect to encounter as they serve the Lord. Witnesses for Jesus can expect to suffer hardship. They can expect to experience persecution. The message they are called to proclaim is the message of the cross, and the preacher should not imagine that they can preach the cross without being touched by it. And this suffering that will come is endured, not for the sake of personal sanctification, however. It is endured for the sake of the elect. The preacher doesn't abandon the gospel in the face of hardship. To do so is to abandon Christ's chosen ones. But the enduring promise is that the suffering of this life gives way to the joy of life everlasting.

- *What are some compromises we are tempted to make in order to avoid suffering for the gospel?*

Luke 17:11–19

Another foreigner plays a prominent role in the Gospel reading. A Samaritan is the only one miraculously healed by Jesus who returns to give thanks. Like Ruth, the Samaritan and former leper "goes back." When he sees what has been done for him, the Samaritan is moved to return, to turn around, to repent and give thanks. The healing creates the repentance. In light of what Jesus actually does for him, the Samaritan can see what he needed in his life.

- *Does this story of the lepers influence how you understand the relationship of repentance and restoration?*

Despite the fact that they did not return to give thanks, we have no reason to believe that the other nine did not receive healing. By continuing on to show themselves to the priests they were doing what Jesus told them to do and what the law required. Any natural instinct they might have to return and give thanks was overcome by their desire to fulfill the law.

- *How does this story contribute to your understanding of the role of the law in righteousness?*