Sola Lectionary Text Study

Ash Wednesday

February 10, 2027 (Year B)



"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

– Martin Luther –
The 95 Theses #1

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.

Joel 2:12-19

The Almighty had promised and commanded, "I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me." Here the prophet echoes that same promise and command, saying: "Return to the Lord your God" (v. 13).

The Lord will not tolerate divided devotion from his people. The consequence for idolatry is ruin. Yet, even in the face of Israel's false worship and impending doom, God calls them back to him urging them to repent of their sin.

- *What things or idols cause us today to have divided devotion to the Lord? Why is this so hard to recognize?*

The people were called into assembly where a fast was proscribed. All members of the community were summoned, even children and those newly married. God was coming among them in order to show them his love and mercy once more. God did not want them to be disgraced by their neighbors, so he sent them great gifts so that they would be satisfied: wine, oil, and grain. All of these actions by God signified his never-ending devotion to his chosen people.

- *How does God act toward us even though we fail to worship and praise him for his righteousness? Why does he do this?*

Psalm 51:1-13 (14-19)

In this psalm, King David makes his appeal based on God's reputation for being steadfast in love. He makes no excuses for his vile behavior in taking a woman who was not his own wife and impregnating her, and murdering her husband (see 2 Samuel 11). David acknowledges having been born into sin which is the human condition of us all. None of us are exempt from this age-old curse, but God has even greater power. David knows this to be true and so in humility, he asks for God's forgiveness, mercy and a clean heart.

- *Trusting in God's mercy, David said, "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you." In what ways are we all witnesses to God's grace in our lives? How does that witness encourage others to seek his forgiveness?*

2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10

St. Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth that they were ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador is one who goes forth in the name of another and is meant to be treated with the same dignity and respect as the one who sent them. They have the same mission, values, and directives of their Lord — which, in this case, is the ministry of reconciliation.

- *In what sense are Ambassadors' words and deeds both <u>empowered</u> and <u>limited</u> by the one who sends them?*

As ambassadors, we are not the ones who make reconciliation happen, it is Jesus Christ who does this. Paul explained how this worked: God sent Jesus, the one who knew no sin, who was perfect in word and deed, to be sin for the world. God regarded the sinless one as guilty, for the benefit of those who were truly sinners. In this way he took upon himself their the guilt and shame, and in return he gave what was his own — righteous and life.

Martin Luther called this transfer of situations, "The Happy Exchange." Christ who was perfect became sin for the imperfect humanity. Humans, plagued by sin, were granted holiness by the sinless Jesus.

- *How does being an ambassador for Christ give us great responsibility but also great joy and privilege?*

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Jesus explained to his disciples about the proper way to express their personal piety — in secret! Don't pray in the streets where everyone can see you and hear you and be impressed. Don't make a show of your almsgiving. Don't make a spectacle out of caring for the poor. When you do it like that, Jesus said, you have already received your reward. Unfortunately that reward is not the best reward. There is one greater and it comes from the Father who sees in secret and rewards in secret.

- *In what ways have we failed to practice our faith in secret? On the other hand, how do we sometimes keep our faith too secret? Where is the balance?*

Jesus went on to instruct his disciples about not laying up their treasures where they would be moth-eaten, rusted, and destroyed.

- *Why do we get so attached to the things that are fleeting and of this world? Do these things really matter in the grand scheme of God's kingdom?*

Luther often used the word "treasure" to describe the gifts of God, including the Sacraments and God's Word. Jesus knew that our choices and actions in our lives were shaped by what we cling to — be it money, material possessions, or faith in him. That's why he said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart with be also."

- *How do we discern where our hearts truly are as individuals and as a congregation? If we find that to be off-track, what can we do about it (if we have the courage)?*
- *From what you read here, what is the most basic connection Jesus sought to make concerning piety and possessions, actions and faith?*

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