

Pentecost 9

August 2, 2020



*Our strength must come from God's Word
alone as our daily bread.*

- Martin Luther -

Luther's Catechetical Writings

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.

Isaiah 55:1-5

God asks of his people why they waste their money and labor on that which cannot truly help them. He has provided for them wine and water without price; it's theirs for the taking. To his people, Israel, is given an everlasting covenant.

- *What are some ways that we focus on or devote our resources to things that don't really matter, things that can't really satisfy us? What drives us to this?*
- *How does God's Word bring us back to the main thing?*

Within this covenant blessing is an understanding that Israel will be a light to the nations. God's glory will be revealed among them, not only for their own sake, but for the sake of the Gentiles (that is, the unbelievers outside of the covenant). Through Israel, God will extend his blessings to all the world.

- *How does Israel become a light to the nations? How is this prophecy fulfilled?*
- *How does the church fill this role of light to the nations? What are some ways we carry God's light into the world?*

Psalms 136:1-9 (23-26)

God's love for his people is rooted in the covenant he made with them before Israel was even a people. His love is steadfast and faithful which is a product of his very character and nature. This psalm focuses on God's work in the heavens and on earth. He made all there is and sustains it. The constant refrain of the psalmist is to show his devotion and awe for the God of all gods, "for his steadfast love endures forever."

- *What does the psalmist's confession about the Lord's steadfast love point hearers to do or think?*
- *In what way does this Psalm remind us of all that God has done throughout history? When we see, hear, and say this refrain, what does it do for our faith in the God of hesed (steadfast love)?*

Romans 9:1-5 (6-13)

Paul's lament for his people reminds us that God's saving work in history first belonged to a people that did not include us. When the decisive moment of salvation comes in Jesus Christ, God's work is extended to all peoples. While the early church quickly shifts from a focus on God's covenant with Israel to the new mission to the Gentiles, Paul's own people are, seemingly, left behind.

Paul is not willing to declare that they have been left behind. God's covenant with Israel, his promises to them, have not been nullified. One of our defining beliefs about God is that he is faithful to his promises, despite the sin of his people. Paul's desire for his kindred, however, is the same desire he has for all peoples — that they would know Christ and his benefits.

- *How is our understanding of God's relationship with Israel shaped by our understanding of God's enduring faithfulness?*
- *Does holding on to the belief in God's covenant faithfulness undermine our conviction that Christ, alone, is the source of salvation? What theological problems arise when speaking faithfully of Israel? How does Paul reconcile those questions?*

Matthew 14:13-21

Five loaves and two fish. That's not a lot to work with. Surrounded by thousands of people and nearing suppertime, that's all the disciples could come up with. From their perspective, the situation was hopeless. They wanted Jesus to send the people away.

But Jesus does not send people away empty. When you are in his presence, he doesn't say, "It's getting close to suppertime. You should probably go home." He doesn't say, "You are a sinner. Come back when you've taken care of that problem and we can talk." He says, "Come in. Sit down. Let me get you something to eat."

So Jesus took those five loaves and two fish, and with them he fed the multitude until everyone was full. He would not send anyone away hungry. Jesus created a feast where there had been hunger. He created abundance where there had been want. Everyone went home full that night.

At times, you may be tempted to think God would give up on someone like you, or on a world like ours. By all rights, he should send us away as not being worth his time and energy. But he doesn't. He will not rest until you are safely home, until you are fully fed, until you have been made completely new.

- *What are some of the ways we doubt God's ability to provide for our needs? Where have you seen God bring something out of nothing?*
- *How does this abundant meal connect with the parables of abundance that have led up to it? Again, who is the actor?*
- *In what way was Jesus teaching the disciples something about his power? Do you think the number of leftover baskets of bread (12) was a coincidence?*