



For to those who meditate on the Law the very rock of Scripture gushes forth abundant streams and flowing waters of knowledge and wisdom, and grace and sweetness besides. This is the promise: "Seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7)."

— Martin Luther —
Lecture on Psalm 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.

Ezekiel 17:22–24

As Israel was exiled to Babylon, the seed of God's people was taken far from home. The Lord said through the prophet that even though King Nebuchadnezzar had taken his people and planted them in a foreign land, God himself would do the same thing, only better. He would take and plant a mighty cedar back in Jerusalem. God promised to take a twig from the lofty cedar — the tribe of Judah — and replant it on a high mountain, which represented replanting the remnant Jews back in Zion. In this tree will be a place for all the "birds" to nest in safety and security.

God is always bigger than human authorities and power, and he is always ready and willing to restore his people to life and salvation under his holy wing.

- *As Christians, how do we interpret who this "twig of Judah" is?*
- *Even though the exiles were returned to Jerusalem, fulfilling this prophecy in their own time, how was the prophecy further fulfilled in Christ? Is there still something more to be done?*

Psalm 1

Blessed are those who walk in the way of the Lord, not the way of the wicked and disobedient. The psalmist made it clear that by meditating on God's word, we become like trees planted next to a flowing stream. Trees that are planted near a constant water source grow tall and healthy, as they always have the nourishment they need to live. In the same way, we who stay firmly engaged in God's Word are filled with wisdom and insight, and are spiritually connected to the source of all goodness and mercy.

- *How does this psalm remind you of Luther's explanation to the Third Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy?"*
- *How have you found this to be true in your own life, that when you are consistently dwelling in God's word you are like a tree planted next to a water source?*

2 Corinthians 5:1–10 (11–17)

The human body is a remarkable machine that we often take for granted. Unless we are feeling poorly, we often don't even think about the condition of our bodies. St. Paul made an interesting observation about our bodies: that, just like the tents of the wandering Israelites, our bodies are our earthly homes. We inhabit these dwellings made of flesh, bones, and blood, yet we yearn to dwell in heaven with God. While we are on earth we inhabit perishable bodies.

When we leave this earth, Paul taught his friends, we will shed the mortal self and live in the Spirit with Christ. In the meantime, Paul says we are "absent" in the Lord. The Greek word here is *ek-dem-ay-oh* which means "emigrated from" or "departed from."

- *In what way are we separated from Christ, even though he is with us always, as we are reminded in Matthew 28:20?*
- *When a person emigrates, they go far from home to live in a foreign country. How does the word "emigrate" help you understand our separation from Jesus?*

Paul reminded his listeners that "We walk by faith, not by sight." Someday we will see clearly all that God has done for us when we wondered what he was up to in our lives. For now, we live by faith because we cannot see the details we yearn for. Faith is a gift given to us by the Holy Spirit, and it is what gets us through each day as we live only in part of the fullness of God.

- *Even though it's not something we can measure, in what ways would you say faith grows? How have you seen this in your own life? In the life of your congregation?*

Mark 4:26–34

Jesus told his disciples a parable about the mysteries of a seed. A seed is planted in the ground, and then the farmer goes about his business, going to bed at night and getting up in the morning, and soon the seed has sprouted. He doesn't know how it happened, only that it did and that it can be counted on to happen again.

Jesus told them another parable about the tiniest seed of all, the mustard seed, and how it can be compared to the kingdom of God. Even though it is very small, Jesus said, it produces a shrub that is big enough to provide shelter for a flock of birds.

If you've ever watched a time-lapse photograph of a seed growing, you realize just what a miracle it is for a seed to grow into an adult plant. Even the moment-by-moment images don't fully explain the mystery of growth. There are still elements of faith and awe that must be present in order to appreciate what's taking place.

- *What do these parables tell us about the gradual growth of the kingdom of God? How do we know we can count on its existence?*
- *A mustard seed grows to provide shelter for a flock of birds. God brought the Israelites back to Jerusalem from Babylon and made a nest for them. Why are these images so powerful?*