

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Acts 16:9-15

^{16:9} During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. ¹¹ We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³ On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

Commentary

The issue before the Jerusalem Council was the status of the new Gentile Christians. Were they equal to Jewish Christians? Did they have to follow Jewish law? The Council heard Peter, Barnabas and Paul recall how the Holy Spirit had inspired signs and wonders to occur among the Gentiles. Then James, the brother of Jesus, reminded the gathered leaders that the inclusion of Gentiles had long been apart of God's plan, and suggested that they should be left alone save being required to observe four purity regulations that had long governed strangers who lived in Israel. The council agreed and sent this word back to Antioch. With that sticky issue resolved, Paul embarked on a second mission, this time with Silas. They went to Philippi, a thoroughly Gentile city in Macedonia. The area where he met Lydia was one where the worship of non-Roman gods was banned. She was a merchant of purple cloth and a Gentile worshipper of the God of the Jews. Lydia responded positively to Paul's sharing of the Gospel, and she and her household were baptized (she was unmarried or a widow of considerable social status, and decision of the head of household was binding on all of its members.) Luke's story of Lydia's conversion is a female parallel to his earlier story of Cornelius' conversion.

Reflection

What kind of response might she have received from her neighbors and fellow merchants?
How does your faith affect your own household and/or people around you?

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

^{21:10} And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

^{21:22} I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵ Its gates will never be shut by day--and there will be no night there. ²⁶ People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

^{22:1} Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴ they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Commentary

Around 1000 BC, King David captured Jerusalem and made it the political and religious center of his reign. He planned to build a temple, and Solomon built it, along with expanding the city's international importance. Over the centuries, different factions struggled to control Jerusalem. Having lost faith in the ability of earthly leaders to unite them under God's reign, the Jews looked to the future. From 3rd century BC on, prophets wrote of visions of a transition from the present age to a glorious new age when God would reign on earth. Revelation, written in the late first century AD, is one such vision.

Reflection

How do you envision God's rule on earth—in both present and future?

John 14:23-29

^{14:23} Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. ²⁵ "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

Commentary

This gospel lection is from Jesus' "farewell speech." In the ancient world, a farewell speech of a well-known person was a common form of literature. This literary type typically included these aspects: a gathering of followers or family; an announcement of imminent departure or death; a review of the person's life; the naming of a successor; prophecies; promises; blessings; final instructions; and prayer. Jesus' farewell includes all these elements. On one level, Jesus spoke of his followers during his last meal with them. However, on another level John spoke through Jesus' voice to encourage late first-century Christians to realize that Jesus' promises, blessings, and commands were meant for them, too. John was assuring his readers that Jesus had not left them orphaned, that the Spirit was with them, that God loved them—if only they would respond with love for one another. Through these words, God also speaks to us.

Reflection

When have you felt the Spirit guiding you to express the right word or deed? How do you distinguish between the Spirit and other voices/influences in your life?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 67

- ^{67:1} May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
² **that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations.**
³ Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.
⁴ **Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.**

⁵ Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

⁶ **The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, has blessed us.**

⁷ May God continue to bless us;
let all the ends of the earth revere him.

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**