

**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.**

**Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25**

<sup>1</sup>Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. <sup>2</sup>And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors--Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor--lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. <sup>3a</sup>Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many.

<sup>14</sup>"Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup>Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." <sup>16</sup>Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; <sup>17</sup>for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; <sup>18</sup>and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God." <sup>19</sup>But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. <sup>20</sup>If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good." <sup>21</sup>And the people said to Joshua, "No, we will serve the LORD!" <sup>22</sup>Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." <sup>23</sup>He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." <sup>24</sup>The people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey." <sup>25</sup>So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

**Commentary**

Today's lection reports how Joshua reminded the people of all God had done for them, beginning with Abraham. While Paul would remember Abraham chiefly for his faith, most

Jewish authors remembered his rejection of idolatry and his decision to serve the invisible God. In verses 3b-13, Joshua continues his recital of God's beneficence from the Hebrew's release from slavery in Egypt through their settlement in Canaan. On the basis of these saving acts, Joshua called the people to make a proper return of gratitude to God. The people acknowledged God's protection and provision, promising to stand with Joshua and his house, proving themselves honorable through a display of fidelity.

### **Reflection**

How has God proven more faithful than other "gods" to which we devote our time and our energy?

### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

<sup>13</sup>But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. <sup>15</sup>For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.

### **Commentary**

The Thessalonian church had lost some members, most likely due to natural causes. If they had been martyred, we would expect to find Paul assuring them of God's vindication of the faithful through resurrection, of God's rewarding them through their faithfulness. Seeing fellow believers die raised an uncomfortable question: If we die before Jesus returns, do we miss the promised rewards? Paul must integrate death—the extreme experience of disintegration—into Christian hope—as we all are called to do.

### **Reflection**

How real is the hope of resurrection to you?

### **Matthew 25:1-13**

<sup>1</sup>Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup>Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup>When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; <sup>4</sup>but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> As the

bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. <sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' <sup>7</sup> Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup>The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup>But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.'<sup>10</sup>And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.<sup>11</sup>Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.'<sup>12</sup>But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.'<sup>13</sup>Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

### **Commentary**

This parable admonishes us to live each day as to brighten the Lord's coming. We are to add to the celebration rather than the grief of that day. It also cautions us to be committed for the long haul, to live for Christ's return. No matter how long he may tarry, we are warned not to fall back into a lifestyle that shows apathy or negligence regarding the things that will honor Christ at the time of his appearing. We are granted the opportunity and privilege to adorn ourselves for the celebration.

### **Reflection**

What act of kindness, justice, or reconciliation would we regret not accomplishing should Christ return today? How are our lives helping the world to welcome Christ?

### **Psalm 78:1-7**

<sup>1</sup> Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;  
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

<sup>2</sup> **I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings from of old,**

<sup>3</sup> things that we have heard and known,  
that our ancestors have told us.

<sup>4</sup> **We will not hide them from their children;  
we will tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,  
and the wonders that he has done.**

- <sup>5</sup> He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel,  
which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children;
- <sup>6</sup> that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn,  
and rise up and tell them to their children,
- <sup>7</sup> so that they should set their hope in God,  
and not forget the works of God,  
but keep his commandments.

### **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.**