

### **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.**

### **Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23**

<sup>22:1</sup> A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.  
<sup>2</sup> The rich and the poor have this in common: the LORD is the maker of them all. <sup>8</sup> Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of anger will fail. <sup>9</sup> Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor. <sup>22</sup> Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; <sup>23</sup> for the LORD pleads their cause and despoils of life those who despoil them.

### **Commentary**

Wisdom writers believed that fear of God was foundational to life. Fear meant awe, reverence, obedience, and proper relationship. Without such fear of God, people walked the way of death. Wisdom or death were people's choices. Wisdom writers believed actions invariably produced certain consequences (life or death), so the wise person should always consider the consequences before acting. The Book of Proverbs was intended to persuade persons to engage in certain behaviors and attitudes, either to maintain the existing social order or to refine and restore it. Ancient Israelites were urged to maintain the existing economic order so that each person had a share of the land and the wealth it produced. Today these proverbs on wealth reminds us that when some of us (persons or nations) accumulate excessive goods or use more than our share of natural resources, we deprive others of what is due them and what they need for their livelihood. These verses remind us that all wealth gained by wrongdoing, injustice, or excessive accumulation stands condemned by God.

### **Reflection**

What are wise and foolish ways we act regarding wealth? Power? Personal conduct? What guidelines do you follow for the responsible gaining, spending, saving, and giving of material resources? Even though these proverbs were written for people who lived twenty-five hundred to three-thousand years ago in a very different culture, what wisdom might they offer us in the twenty-first century?

## **James 2:1-10, (11-13), 14-17**

<sup>2:1</sup> My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? <sup>2</sup> For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, <sup>3</sup> and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," <sup>4</sup> have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? <sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? <sup>7</sup> Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? <sup>8</sup> You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. <sup>11</sup> For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup> So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup> For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. <sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup> So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

### **Commentary**

Even though Jesus is mentioned only twice in James, the Letter of James is unmistakably Christian in its moral instruction. First, James urges inclusivity. He addresses the people's worldly tendencies to play favorites by giving special honor and favors to the wealthy and powerful and argues that discrimination is incompatible with faith in Christ. Believers are urged to obey God's law: love your neighbor as yourself. Although he specifically mentions "the poor," James really speaks to all forms of discrimination, strongly forbidding favoritism within the Christian community. Second, by highlighting the inadequacy of faith without deeds, James urges faithful living. Traditionally, scholars have argued that James' emphasis on works is a response to persons who misconstrued Paul's emphasis on justification by faith. James emphasizes works of charity that emerge out of faith. In contrast, Paul objected to works of obedience to the Jewish law to gain faith. Paul would have agreed with James that true Christian faith results in ethical behavior (see Galatians 5:16-26 and Romans 12).

### **Reflection**

To whom is James speaking? Who is a believer's neighbor? What, for James, is living faith?

## **Mark 7:24-37**

7:24 From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,<sup>25</sup> but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.<sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.<sup>27</sup> He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."<sup>28</sup> But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."<sup>29</sup> Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go--the demon has left your daughter."<sup>30</sup> So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.<sup>31</sup> Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.<sup>32</sup> They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him.<sup>33</sup> He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue.<sup>34</sup> Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."<sup>35</sup> And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.<sup>37</sup> They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

### **Commentary**

To fully understand the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, we must look not only at Israel's strained history of coexisting in Gentile land but also at the socioeconomic fact that Jewish peasant farmers in upper Galilee produced food for Gentile coastal cities such as Tyre. In periods of famine or crisis, Jewish farmers probably resented that the food they produced was going to those wealthy Gentiles instead of to their own children. Galilee itself was a largely Gentile region with the Jewish population in the minority. Thus, hospitality and prejudice existed on both sides. These barriers made it very hard for the Gentile woman to approach a Jewish teacher for help. In this reading is also a miracle story, but later accounts Mark writes reveal finally that Jesus is the Messiah.

### **Reflection**

What can we learn from the outsider woman, and what can we learn from Jesus' responses to her? What new insight is Mark trying to convey to his readers? How does our normal way of life lead to automatic exclusion of others? How does this story call you to examine your acceptance of others?

## Responsive Psalter

## Psalm 125

<sup>1</sup> Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

<sup>2</sup> **As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time on and forevermore.**

<sup>3</sup> For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, so that the righteous might not stretch out their hands to do wrong.

<sup>4</sup> **Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts.**

<sup>5</sup> But those who turn aside to their own crooked ways the LORD will lead away with evildoers.  
Peace be upon Israel!

## 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.**