

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 3:7-17

^{3:7} The LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. ⁸ You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" ⁹ Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of the LORD your God." ¹⁰ Joshua said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: ¹¹ the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. ¹² So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³ When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap." ¹⁴ When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. ¹⁵ Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, ¹⁶ the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

Commentary

The Book of Joshua begins the second major division of the Hebrew Bible. Known as prophecy rather than history (like the first five books), it is seen as a product that influenced many of the great prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries BC in interpreting this stage in Israel's history. The books of the prophets, therefore, are not factual records of historical events, but rather a theological interpretation of these events from particular perspectives. Today's lection begins with the assertion that Moses appointed Joshua as his successor. This action of holding back the waters was meant to authenticate Joshua's leadership in the eyes of the people. It is only by God's hand that they are able to pass onto solid ground.

Reflection

God's delivery of the Israelites into the Promised Land reminded them of their release from Egyptian bondage by passing through the Sea of Reeds. What events in your life do you understand as signs of God's guidance, providence and protection?

1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

^{2:9} You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. ¹¹ As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, ¹² urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. ¹³ We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

Commentary

While in Thessalonica, Paul did not rely on the charity of his fellow believers for support. He and his companions worked at a trade in order to provide for his physical needs. In that way, no claim could be made that he burdened members of the church as he shared the gospel with them. This claim also dispelled the attacks of Paul's critics, who often accused him of preaching for personal gain. The Didache, considered the first book of Christian order or discipline, warned against false prophets who took advantage of the hospitality of first-century communities. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he had paid his own way among them and recounts the blamelessness of his conduct.

Reflection

Think of how we conduct our life and business. Do those with whom we work and interact see evidence of our faith?

Matthew 23:1-12

^{23:1} Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; ³ therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶ They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷ and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. ⁹ And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father--the one in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor are

you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Commentary

Jesus' final example of their hypocrisy dealt with power issues in the faith community. The scribes and Pharisees saw themselves as morally and socially superior to others. By virtue of their standing in the synagogue, they felt entitled to places of honor. Titles of honor, however, were to be reserved for God; what earthly rabbi or leader could rival God? By exalting themselves, the scribes and Pharisees—as well as disciples—would only bring themselves down by their own self-righteous claims. The abuses of power, displays of false piety, and the lure of prestige, which ensnared the scribes and Pharisees, are just as real—and dangerous—for all Christian disciples. Only in servanthood and humility before God is true faithfulness expressed.

Reflection

Think about your discipleship. What part of Christ's message most influences actions in your life?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37

- ^{107:1} O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.
- ² **Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he redeemed from trouble**
- ³ **and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.**
- ⁴ Some wandered in desert wastes,
finding no way to an inhabited town;
- ⁵ **hungry and thirsty,
their soul fainted within them.**
- ⁶ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress;
- ⁷ **he led them by a straight way,
until they reached an inhabited town.**
- ⁸ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
- ⁹ **For he satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry he fills with good things.**

^{107:33} He turns rivers into a desert,
springs of water into thirsty ground,
³⁴ **a fruitful land into a salty waste,
because of the wickedness of its inhabitants.**
³⁵ He turns a desert into pools of water,
a parched land into springs of water.
³⁶ **And there he lets the hungry live,
and they establish a town to live in;**
³⁷ they sow fields, and plant vineyards,
and get a fruitful yield.

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.**