

**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.**

**Jeremiah 31:31-34**

<sup>31</sup> The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt--a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. <sup>33</sup> But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

**Commentary**

The Book of Jeremiah is a story of destruction and grief but also of restoration and hope. During the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., both Egypt and Babylon were vying for control of Judah. Eventually, Judah became a vassal state of Babylon, paying tribute in return for protection. When protection turned into domination, Judah rebelled. In response to the rebellion, Babylon invaded Judah in 587 B.C. Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed, the land ravaged and a large portion of the population were exiled to Babylon. Jeremiah prophesied during these troubled times. First, Jeremiah warned of the coming destruction, urging repentance. Then with Babylon in control of Judah, Jeremiah preached submission, claiming Babylon was God's instrument to punish the people for breaking God's covenant. Finally, Jeremiah preached hope: God would restore the covenant with the people. Our passage today is an oracle of comfort, restoration and hope. God's unconditional covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 led the people to a false confidence and growing unfaithfulness to God's ways. Punishment was the result. But now, as the end of punishment neared, God promised a new covenant. This time God's law would be written on the people's hearts so they could truly follow it. Faithfulness, the real foundation for an everlasting covenant, would now be possible because people would no longer need to be taught the law; they would know it in their hearts. The new covenant would hold up because it would bring an inward transformation.

**Reflection**

1. Verse 32 speaks of a long and painful history of disobedience that has led to judgment; yet even though the people break covenant again and again, God sticks with it. What does this say about God? What motivates God's relationship with this covenant-breaking people?

2. What does it mean to have God's law written on our hearts? How is that reflected in our thoughts, words and actions? Are we born with the law written on our hearts? If not, how do we get to that place where God's law is woven into every fiber of our being?

### **Hebrews 5:5-10**

<sup>5</sup> So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; <sup>6</sup> as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." <sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. <sup>8</sup> Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; <sup>9</sup> and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, <sup>10</sup> having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

### **Commentary**

This very pastoral letter by an anonymous writer was sent to a community of second-generation Christians who were experiencing a crisis of faith. In response to their crisis, this letter offers them an image of Jesus as being *of God*, i.e., a Priest, appointed by God, who offers salvation. But since Jesus was not of the priestly line of Aaron, another model of priesthood is suggested: that of Melchizedek who was a Canaanite priest-king during the days of Abraham. But the letter offers an equally important image of Jesus as being *of the people* --a human being who knows intimately the pain, suffering, and fear that we know, because he experienced those things in his own life (note the "loud cries and tears" of Jesus in v. 7). The posture of Jesus is that of one facing death. His identification with humanity was so complete that not even being God's Son (v. 8) exempted Jesus from learning, from obedience, from suffering. The "perfection of Christ" is not a reference to moral flawlessness, but to the completeness of his preparation for his priestly ministry. He therefore becomes the source of eternal salvation, as a model of obedience to God, as the one offering sacrifice for sin, and as the one who intercedes for us with God.

### **Reflection**

1. Hebrews offers a distinctive view of Jesus' identity as both the Son of God, ordained by God to be Priest, and has a human being, intimately familiar with the struggles, fear and pain of the human condition. Which understanding of Jesus has been most significant in your faith journey? Why?
2. We often focus on the cross as the most important act of Jesus for our salvation. What significance does the *life* of Jesus have for our faith and our salvation?

### **John 12:20-33**

<sup>20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

<sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered

them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. <sup>27</sup> "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup> The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." <sup>30</sup> Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

### Commentary

Chapters 11 and 12 of the Gospel of John stand as a bridge between Jesus' ministry and his death, preparing the reader to enter the story of his death and resurrection. These few verses of chapter 12 contain the most concentrated collection of sayings on the death of Jesus in the Gospel of John. The transition from ministry to death begins with the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11, which served as catalyst for the synagogue authorities' determination to kill Jesus. Mary's anointing of Jesus, which happened in the shadow of that decision connected that fateful decision with Passover. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem came the next day. Among those in Jerusalem for Passover are Greeks, who seek a face-to-face meeting with Jesus. Their request confirms the Pharisees' fears that the people were turning to Jesus. Their arrival hints at God's promise of universal salvation and the church's future mission beyond the Jewish world. Jesus responds to the request of the Greeks with a statement about his imminent death, using the metaphor of a single grain which if it dies will bear much fruit (v. 24) "drawing all people" to Jesus (v. 32). Jesus uses the metaphor to show that the salvific power of his death resides in the community that is gathered as a result. Jesus goes on to explain the significance of being part of that gathered community – "those who hate their life *in this world* will save it," i.e., those who declare one's allegiance to Jesus, thereby risking death, will receive his gift of eternal life. Although there are echoes of the Gethsemane agony scene in these verses, in the Gospel of John Jesus *willingly* lays down his life; he embraces his death as an expression of his love for God. There is no internal struggle in the face of his death, because Jesus recognizes his death as the ultimate purpose of his ministry. It is the final revelation of his relationship with God. Jesus' death is the decisive event through which both positive and negative judgment are enacted. "This world" will be judged in its response to Jesus at his hour of death. His death will drive out the power of evil in the world, depicted as the "ruler of this world."

### Reflection

1. This Gospel depicts Jesus' death as both necessary and life-giving because it results in the formation of life-giving community: a single dying seed bears much fruit. Nurtured by this community, disciples "serve Jesus" by following him, leading to restored relationship with God. Thus, the saving power of Jesus lies not in the cross, but in us – the community gathered as a result of his death. Have you experienced the saving power of Jesus in the gathered community of believers, the Church? How?

2. John's emphasis on the death of Jesus is on restored relationships with God and Jesus. Jesus understands his own death as the final revelation of his relationship with God. He also instructs his disciples that those who serve him must follow him...and his example of relationship with God. How do you and your church serve Christ in ways that lead to restored relationships with Jesus and God?

## Responsive Psalter

## Psalm 51:1-12

- <sup>51:1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
**according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.**
- <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.
- <sup>3</sup> **For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.**
- <sup>4</sup> Against you, you alone, have I sinned,  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are justified in your sentence  
and blameless when you pass judgment.
- <sup>5</sup> **Indeed, I was born guilty,  
a sinner when my mother conceived me.**
- <sup>6</sup> You desire truth in the inward being;  
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- <sup>7</sup> **Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**
- <sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- <sup>9</sup> **Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.**
- <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.
- <sup>11</sup> **Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.**
- <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

## 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.**