

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 2:14a, 36-41

^{2:14a} But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ³⁶ Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." ³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." ⁴⁰ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Commentary

Peter's sermon strikes a contrast between what his audience did with Jesus and what God did with him. As Peter says in v. 36, "This Jesus whom you crucified," "God has made him both Lord and Messiah." Although most of the sermon (vv. 14-41) describes God's exaltation of Jesus to a position of royal authority from which Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit, it also is accusatory. It underscores how the audience's intentions concerning Jesus differed from God's. The sermon had its intended impact – the people pleaded with Peter to tell them what to do, and he did so.

What do Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation demand from Peter's audience? First, Peter calls for repentance – a changed mind or a new understanding. Second, Peter tells his hearers to be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ" so that they may be delivered from their sins. Third, Peter declares that the Holy Spirit is promised to all whom God calls. This is the same Spirit of power that Jesus said God promised (Luke 24:49) and would empower Jesus' followers (Acts 1:8). Finally, the new order of things instituted by Jesus' resurrection and exaltation allows for rescue from all that is debilitating about this corrupt--literally, "crooked"--generation.

Reflection

When have you found yourself “cut to the heart” and left asking, “What should I do?” Did you feel compelled to share this good news with others?

1 Peter 1:17-23

^{1:17} If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. ¹⁸ You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ²⁰ He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. ²¹ Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God. ²² Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. ²³ You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

Commentary

The incentive for holy living is the realization of how much our salvation has cost the Son of God. The image is that of a ransom for the release of a slave—usually done with the payment of money (“silver or gold”) and sealed with a sacrifice (of an animal). But their release from slavery (to sin) was paid not by mere gold but by something far more precious—Christ’s gift of his life. He became the Paschal (Passover) lamb, the sacrifice that sealed the liberation. Jesus himself talked of this (Mark 10:45). This redemption had been God’s intent from the beginning, but he says they are the ones blessed by seeing the fulfillment.

Reflection

What empty (and enriching) ways have we inherited from our forebears in the faith? How do we decide what to affirm and what to reject of what they passed down to us?

Luke 24:13-35

^{24:13} Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” ¹⁹ He asked them, “What things?”

They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.

²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning,²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

²⁵ Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them.³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!"³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Commentary

This is one of the best known and loved resurrection stories. The setting is still the day of Resurrection, not in Jerusalem, but on a dusty road to Emmaus. The circle of disciples was larger than just the twelve. Two of them, Cleopas and a companion, were sadly returning to their homes after the Sabbath and the tragic death of Jesus. Their destination was the village of Emmaus, about seven miles northwest of Jerusalem. (Several possible sites for Emmaus have been identified, including one about 20 miles from Jerusalem; but there is no certainty about which, if any, is the correct one.) Just as their ancestor Abraham entertained angels unawares, so Christ was with them and they did not know it.

Reflection

What tends to block receptivity to Christ's presence in your own life?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

- 116:1 I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my supplications.
- 2 Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
- 3 **The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.**
- 4 Then I called on the name of the LORD:
"O LORD, I pray, save my life!"
- 116:12 What shall I return to the LORD
for all his bounty to me?
- 13 **I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,**
- 14 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.
- 15 **Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.**
- 16 O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.
You have loosed my bonds.
- 17 **I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice
and call on the name of the LORD.**
- 18 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,
- 19 **in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!**

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.