

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.

Isaiah 5:1-7

^{5:1} Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ² He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. ³ And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? ⁵ And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. ⁶ I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. ⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

Commentary

Isaiah's parable preserves one of the earlier examples of the use of agricultural imagery as a vehicle for describing the expectations of reciprocal relationships: relationships of patrons and clients, benefactors and beneficiaries. Enriched and kept safe from the enemies outside, the people of Judah had prayed on one another instead of loving and showing fraternal support and care for one another, from the strongest to the weakest. The punishment would be appropriate to Judah's sin. Wild grapes need no protection. So God would remove God's protection and permit Judah to become "wild." Jesus would later appropriate this parable in his own "parable of the wicked tenants" (Matthew 21:33-44). Despite a key change, in which God's own vineyard becomes a vineyard let out to tenant farmers, the message is essentially the same. Failure to bring forth the "fruits of the kingdom" in terms of righteous living, caring relationships, and trust in God, for which purpose God has offered us providence and grace, will result in the forfeiture of God's favor and the resulting encounter with calamity.

Reflection

How have you experienced calamity as a result of decisions you have made in your relationship to others—in work, family, and life? What intentional steps did you take in the aftermath to recover from it?

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

^{11:29} By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace. ³² And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-- ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented-- ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. ³⁹ Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect. ^{12:1} Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Commentary

Hebrews 11:29 recalls the Exodus, a crisis where faith made the difference between deliverance and destruction, just as in Noah's situation and in the experience of readers (10:37-39). Hebrews 11:30-31 reinforces the fact that the most secure structures of this world (city walls and mighty armies) shake and fall when confronted by the people of faith acting in the name and the power of God. So, alignment with the people of God rather than with the ways of the world is a faithful choice, as demonstrated by Joshua at Jericho and Rahab, the Canaanite woman who aided the Hebrew spies. The author's point is quite clear: we best please and serve God by being faithful, regardless of the consequences of status and comfort in this world.

Reflection

What witnesses in this cloud have set a faithful example for you? How have they influenced your life? Who might be looking to you to model faithful living?

Luke 12:49-56

12:49 "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵² From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³ they

will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." ⁵⁴ He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. ⁵⁶ You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

Commentary

This was the beginning of the fulfillment of God's final, redemptive purpose for the world, and Jesus was eager—even "stressed"—to see his work, the inception of the end, completed. Most disturbing, perhaps, is Jesus' statement about what his work will mean for human families. One might think that families ought to hold together in harmony, cooperation, and love, and that God's work should only foster that. Indeed, the text from Micah 7:6 that Jesus quoted in Luke 12:53 is an indictment of the breakdown of trust and cooperation in the family as a result of ungodliness, causing the prophet to be on guard against his nearest and dearest, trusting God alone. Nevertheless, this Jesus saying reflects the reality that natural kinship networks will fail as some members respond positively to the Messiah, while others reject and disown those who follow him. It is likely that the loss of kinship support networks played a large role in the poverty that befell Judean Christians during the decades after Jesus' death and resurrection. In light of this reality, Jesus' redefinition of kinship—his creation of a new family support network among his followers—became essential for the perseverance, support, and survival of individual disciples and the faith community.

Reflection

It is often said that if we could just follow Jesus, we could live in harmony; yet, Jesus causes division. When has it been necessary for you to "make waves" in your family in order to be faithful to your understanding of God's will for you?

Responsive Psalter

From Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19

^{80:1} Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
² before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might, and come to save us!

⁸ You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.

⁹ **You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land.**

¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches;

¹¹ **it sent out its branches to the sea,
and its shoots to the River.**

¹² Why then have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?

¹³ **The boar from the forest ravages it,
and all that move in the field feed on it.**

¹⁴ Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,

¹⁵ **the stock that your right hand planted.**

¹⁶ They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.

¹⁷ **But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.**

¹⁸ Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.

¹⁹ **Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

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.**