

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.

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

^{2:10} Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. ¹¹ The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ¹² So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

^{3:3} Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. ⁴ The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." ⁶ And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷ And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸ And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹ Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" ¹⁰ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹ God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹² I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. ¹³ I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. ¹⁴ If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

Commentary

To understand today's verses, we must look at events surrounding David's death. In 1 Kings 1, when David's eldest surviving son Adonijah declared himself king even before David's death, the prophet Nathan intervened. Nathan urged Bathsheba to remind David of an old promise he

had made that her son Solomon would become king. Real or not, David acknowledged the promise and declared Solomon his successor. In the ensuing power struggle, Solomon spared his half-brother's life. However, when Adonijah continued to scheme to obtain the throne, Solomon finally killed him and his supporters. At this, the narrator then firmly concluded that David's dynasty was secured, implying God's promise had been fulfilled. In a dream, Solomon humbly requested wisdom to govern (judge) rather than selfish, worldly things. We often interpret Solomon's request as an admirable model of faith, but in his day people believed that acquiring wisdom led to worldly benefits. This story has no character to be emulated. The message underlying the story is theological: God's purposes are worked out in human events, sometimes even through plots and scandals.

Reflection

Who was responsible for bringing Solomon to the throne? What do you think about the narrator's point that God was active in events that brought Solomon to the throne? How do you understand God's role in history, and what meaning does it have for us today? How is wisdom defined in chapter 3? What was Solomon really asking for when he requested wisdom? When have you felt God was working through surrounding events in spite of your shortcomings?

Ephesians 5:15-20

^{5:15} Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts. ²⁰ giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Commentary

This passage offers a third set of instructions for Christian living. Believers are urged to live "wisely, making the most of their time" (literally buying up the time—human historical time, which is labeled as "evil"). The admonition refers to a common New Testament apocalyptic perspective that historical time would soon be replaced when Christ returned. The writer's feelings were clear: Nothing was more important than living a Christ-like life until Christ came again. Ephesians offers two more rules: do not be foolish; do not get drunk with wine. These specific "don'ts" are then rephrased as more positive, general actions: try to discover God's will, and give thanks. The writer of this letter was reformulating familiar Pauline ideas to motivate his Gentile Christian audience to live as renewed persons in Christ. He was urging them to live so they did not harm but rather benefited other people, both fellow Christians and outsiders. We may now have different ideas today of time and Christ's return, but these words are still relevant as we try to relate our beliefs about new life in Christ to practical ways of wise living in our 21st century world.

Reflection

What does the writer mean when he urges Gentile Christians to live wisely? How is one to be filled with the Spirit? How should we respond to what God has done for us? How does “wise living” relate to being “imitators of God” and wisdom in Psalms 111? What does this mean for us?

John 6:51-58

^{6:51} I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." ⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵ for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

Commentary

The authorities indicate that they were still missing the rich symbolism of the bread metaphor Jesus was presenting to them. John's readers would not have misunderstood “eating flesh” and “drinking blood.” They had already been sharing a ritual meal based on Jesus' words and acts during his last meal with the disciples. They would have heard his words as a reference to the Eucharist where flesh and blood were symbolized by bread and wine. Besides using “flesh” to refer to Jesus' body, John uses the word “eat” in two different ways: eating sacramental food—the bread and wine of the Eucharist—and hearing and receiving the Word (Jesus), the bread of life. For John, word and sacrament are inseparably related. John was writing fifty to sixty years after Jesus' death to a community of Jewish Christians who were being persecuted by the authorities for their belief in Jesus. The holy meal separated them from their synagogue and their Jewish heritage. D. Moody Smith notes that the Eucharist, like Baptism, would have indicated “a clear confession of faith in Jesus, a break with the synagogue, and adherence to the new community of Jesus' disciples.”—which John was no doubt urging his Jewish Christian community to do.

Reflection

How are your ideas about communion changing or being renewed as a result of our August Renewal focus on “Bread for the Journey?” How are flesh and blood understood by the crowd? By John? How is the word “eat” used? What is the message of John to Jewish Christian readers throughout this whole discourse?

- ¹ Praise the LORD!
**I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.**
- ² Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.
- ³ **Full of honor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.**
- ⁴ He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.
- ⁵ **He provides food for those who fear him;
he is ever mindful of his covenant.**
- ⁶ He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the heritage of the nations.
- ⁷ **The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.**
- ⁸ **They are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.**
- ⁹ He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name.
- ¹⁰ **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever.**

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.**