

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 5:9-12

^{5:9} The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal to this day. ¹⁰ While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹² The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

Commentary

This brief passage describes the first Passover feast celebrated in the land of Canaan, looking back to the Exodus from Egypt and looking forward to the renewal Passover that King Josiah would keep (2 Kings 23:21-23). The feast followed a mass circumcision of the male children born in the wilderness. "Gilgal" is related to the Hebrew word, galal, meaning "to roll." However, exactly what was "rolled" that day was unclear. The area does have many boulders that look like large balls and may be the origin of the name. After they crossed the Jordan River at Gilgal, Joshua told the elders to bring twelve stones from the bed of the river and erect a memorial to remind everyone of their safe crossing over the Jordan, which was like the miraculous delivery of the Egyptians at the Sea of Reeds (Joshua 4:19-24). It was fitting, then, to celebrate a Passover feast as they recalled the first Exodus of God's guidance through the years of wandering and the day of crossing.

Reflection

What symbols do we use in our churches to remind us of God's presence and activity in our lives? How do we use these to tell others our stories of faith?

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

^{5:16} From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if

anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Commentary

Paul regarded the crucifixion as the central event in history. Everything was changed by the death and resurrection of Christ. Though Paul's scope was cosmic, his application of the words he said to the congregation in Corinth was intensely personal. Each Christian, too, is a new creation; therefore, we should judge no one from "a human point of view." Before his conversion, Paul had regarded Christ by human standards, zealously persecuting his followers as defilers of Judaism. Christ eventually changed all of that—for him and for the rest of the human community in all time. In writing about the "new creation," Paul also hoped that the Corinthians would regard him differently. Too often they had judged him by human standards, saying "his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is contemptible" (2 Cor 10:10). Paul wanted them to be reconciled to God, and to also recognize his apostolic authority. He wanted them to treat one another more charitably—that "we might become the righteousness of God."

Reflection

Describe a public figure as she or he might be known from a "human point of view" — appearance, wardrobe, house, car, credentials, status. Now describe the same person as he or she might appear to Christ. How might our assessment of people become more closely shaped by Christ's view?

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

^{15:1} Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ So he told them this parable: ^{11b} "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against

heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. ²⁵ "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' ³¹ Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

Commentary

Jesus' acceptance of sinners seemed to convey an apathetic view about obedience to God's laws. So the Pharisees and scribes "grumbled" about him. Their phrase, "this fellow," succinctly conveyed their distance and distaste. Jesus responded to their criticism with three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal and his brother. In each parable, Jesus clearly intended the lost item to represent sinners who repent, the outcast and rejected ones who are welcomed into the heart of God. In this parable, His depiction of the sibling rivalry between the two sons would have rung true to his hearers who knew the stories of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers. Faithful to the gritty dynamics of family life, the parable's open ending forced Jesus' listeners to consider how the story applied to them. The remainder of the Gospel, however, provides the real ending for this parable. Far from rejoicing at the return of Israel's "lost sheep" who have gathered around Jesus, the scribes and the Pharisees conspire to have Jesus killed. Yet, God had the "last laugh" and the great celebration. Like the prodigal, Jesus "who was dead" came to life again, and those he came to save have found new acceptance and status in God's loving presence.

Reflection

With whom do you identify most in the story? Why? Is there any person or group whom you regard with distance or distaste? How can we be restored to right relationship with them?

- 32:1 Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
- 2 **Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.**
- 3 While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
- 4 **For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.**
- 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
**I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.**
- 6 Therefore let all who are faithful
offer prayer to you;
**at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters
shall not reach them.**
- 7 You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.
- 8 **I will instruct you and teach you
the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.**
- 9 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle.
- 10 **Many are the torments of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.**
- 11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

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.