

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 9:36-43

^{9:36} Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. ³⁷ At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay." ³⁹ So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰ Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹ He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. ⁴² This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

Commentary

These two stories of Peter's ministry are significant in many ways. First, both of Peter's acts testify to the continuing work of Jesus through the apostles. Peter's power is evident in the fact that people "turned to the Lord." Conversion takes place through "acts" of the apostles rather than by words. The "acts" of God are part and parcel of the mission of the church. Second, these stories are like Old Testament stories of Elijah raising the widow's son (1 Kings) and Elisha raising the Shunnamite woman's son (2 Kings). Luke firmly connects Peter to Jewish sacred history to indicate the authenticity of Jesus' ministry. These two stories are unusual in that Luke lifts up real people with names and particular situations. Finally, through these stories of the spread of the gospel, Luke prepares his readers for the story of Cornelius, who becomes the first Gentile to be converted to the Christian "way" by the "acts" of God and an apostle.

Reflection

Many in these towns believed in Christ because of the healing "acts" of Peter. What is it that Christian leaders do or say today that causes (or helps) us to believe more firmly in Christ?

Revelation 7:9-17

^{7:9} After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." ¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. ¹⁶ They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; ¹⁷ for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Commentary

John's revelation began with a vision of the Son of Man, who gave him messages to seven churches. It continued with a slaughtered Lamb who opened the first four seals and unleashed the four horsemen who would bring war, famine, and death to the world. When the fifth seal was opened, John saw the souls of those who had been martyred for their faithfulness. They cried out for God's vengeance but were given white robes and told to wait. In Revelation 7, John heard that 144,000 persons from the twelve tribes of Israel would be marked as pure with God's seal to protect them from the coming torment. Then John saw a multitude who had come through a time of suffering that would inaugurate the messianic age. These could refer to a group faithful in their martyrdom but not a part of the "sealed" 144,000, who had been persecuted by dominant culture (called the beast or Babylon). The multitude had "washed their robes" and now worshipped before God. They were seen by the world as troublemakers because they challenged the dominant violent and oppressive culture. Refusing to conform, they offered an alternate way of manifesting God's love, peace, and inclusion. Whitening one's robes means being prepared (as Jesus was) to face rejection and death for the sake of faithful witness to God's word and grace.

Reflection

How do you "wash your robe" as an expression of your faith? Have you faced any discrimination because of it?

John 10:22-30

^{10:22} At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; ²⁶ but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ The Father and I are one."

Commentary

Jewish authorities wanted Jesus to tell them plainly who he was. In modern Greek, this request really meant, "How long will you annoy us?" Jesus' response to this request serves as John's theological conclusion about Jesus' public ministry. While Jesus' "works" include the signs, they are not all restricted to these. John is clear that Jesus' ministry was to do all the works that revealed who God is and what God intends for the world to understand about God's divine ways. His summary statement about the sheep is an example of John's paradox between those who believe they have come to know God by *faith* through Jesus Christ and those who understand their relationship with God to be established by *election*. This paradox is not resolved, Jesus concludes that the Father and he "are one"—God judges, Jesus judges, God gives life, and Jesus gives life. Jesus' response indicates that the *works* of the Father and the *works* of the Son are one and the same, and that together, they make up the larger household of God's faithful.

Reflection

Have you been "elected" to believe, or is this a choice you have made?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 23

^{23:1} The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
² **He makes me lie down in green pastures;**
 he leads me beside still waters;
³ he restores my soul.
 He leads me in right paths
 for his name's sake.
⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
 I fear no evil;
 for you are with me;
 your rod and your staff—
 they comfort me.

- ⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
- ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

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.