

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.

Job 1:1, 2:1-10

^{1:1} There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. ^{2:1} One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. ² The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." ³ The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." ⁴ Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. ⁵ But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." ⁶ The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life." ⁷ So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. ⁸ Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes. ⁹ Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." ¹⁰ But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Commentary

This lection introduces an intriguing story about faith and suffering and our human response to the inexplicable. Job was a man both pious and prosperous, with many children, lands, livestock and servants. Wealthy, respected, and faithful, he was well-known in his region. Here, Satan taunted God by saying that Job was only faithful because so many blessings were bestowed upon him. In one day, everything Job possessed was gone, including his beloved children. God, still believing in Job's uprightness, granted that Satan might touch Job's body but had to spare his life. In his time, material blessings were believed to come directly from God as rewards for good behavior. Curses or hardships, therefore, indicated sin. Job took the perplexing position that all things come from God. Understanding that humanity's gifts of love and devotion come at the risk of heartache and violence, Job managed to recall that God is always present, even in the direst of circumstances. Job's wife felt differently, and her voice was often unheard. Calling her foolish, Job dismissed his one remaining family member, but maintained his integrity.

Reflection

How is living righteously related to blessings in this life? Do bad things happen to people because of their sinfulness? Why does evil come to all persons, good and bad?

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

^{1:1} Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³ He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ^{2:5} Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. ⁶ But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? ⁷ You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, ⁸ subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, ⁹ but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. ¹⁰ It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹² saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."

Commentary

The writer of Hebrews stresses that Jesus is the Word and came from God—a truth believers should constantly bear in mind. Moving from a consideration of God to a consideration of Jesus Christ, the community is reminded to reflect upon Jesus in union with God. Christ is described in many ways, and such images give encouragement to the community. In Chapter 2, the reader finds it heartening that Jesus, though a high priest, exhibited His full humanity and suffered with us. Through the high priest's sacrificial suffering, "many children" shall be brought to glory.

Reflection

Hebrews speaks of Christ as pioneer, sanctifier, mediator, advocate, and sacrificial lamb. Which of these (or other) images of Christ are most meaningful to you? Discuss what it means for you to have a "suffering savior."

Mark 10:2-16

^{10:2} Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" ³ He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴ They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." ⁵ But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. ⁶ But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' ⁷ 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." ¹⁰ Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹ He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹² and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." ¹³ People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Commentary

The church has long struggled with divorce. The ending of a marriage is tragic for all involved. Frequently, by the time couples come to seek healing for their marriage, their estrangement is too vast to overcome. Jesus' response to the Pharisees placed marriage under the grace of God instead of the legal system. In the first century, and often today, marriage was viewed as a contractual agreement between families and individuals. Jesus reminded his hearers that marriage is more than a legal contract; it is a covenant between two people and God. Interestingly, the gospel writer places Jesus' comments on divorce in the context of the needs of children. Both women and children possessed low social status and were vulnerable because of it. Perhaps after the heated discussion about adults with hard hearts and the trauma they produced, Jesus was relieved to be in the presence of persons with such little status and clout. Unless His followers became as nothing on their way to God, they would never enter God's realm. (10:16)

Reflection

Imagine someone who was in a "bad" marriage, one in which the vows of "love, honor, and cherish" have been broken. How do we reconcile the necessity of divorce, on occasion, with the words of Jesus? How is God's forgiveness at work in the lives of those surviving divorce? How does seeing yourself as a child change the way you view these issues presented in this passage?

- ^{26:1} Vindicate me, O LORD,
for I have walked in my integrity,
and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.
- ² **Prove me, O LORD, and try me;
test my heart and mind.**
- ³ For your steadfast love is before my eyes,
and I walk in faithfulness to you.
- ⁴ **I do not sit with the worthless,
nor do I consort with hypocrites;**
- ⁵ I hate the company of evildoers,
and will not sit with the wicked.
- ⁶ **I wash my hands in innocence,
and go around your altar, O LORD,**
- ⁷ **singing aloud a song of thanksgiving,
and telling all your wondrous deeds.**
- ⁸ O LORD, I love the house in which you dwell,
and the place where your glory abides.
- ⁹ **Do not sweep me away with sinners,
nor my life with the bloodthirsty,**
- ¹⁰ **those in whose hands are evil devices,
and whose right hands are full of bribes.**
- ¹¹ But as for me, I walk in my integrity;
redeem me, and be gracious to me.
- ¹² **My foot stands on level ground;
in the great congregation I will bless 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.