

**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.**

**Judges 4:1-7**

<sup>4:1</sup> The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died. <sup>2</sup> So the LORD sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goiim. <sup>3</sup> Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly twenty years. <sup>4</sup> At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. <sup>5</sup> She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. <sup>6</sup> She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, 'Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. <sup>7</sup> I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.'"

**Commentary**

The Israelites cried out for help, and God heard them. Help came, but it came through women, which was unheard of at the time. The story opens with Deborah, the prophetess, engaged in administering justice. Deborah heard God's word and ordered Barak in the name of God to lead tribes into battle against Sisera. Barak refused to go unless Deborah accompanied him. But the hero of the story, and of the more ancient poetic version in Judges 5, was not Barak but Jael, a non-Israelite woman. Her wiles and courage were remembered as providing a turning point in Israel's dealings with Jabin, who was soon after defeated.

**Reflection**

When has a word or timely help from God come to you as a surprising source, someone whom you might not have thought worth listening to?

## **1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**

<sup>5:1</sup> Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! <sup>4</sup> But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; <sup>5</sup> for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; <sup>7</sup> for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup> For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

### **Commentary**

The early Christian's neighbors were pressing them to return to a more respectable lifestyle. Paul encounters that pressure by underscoring the incredible advantages the believers now had over the neighbors and the ways in which their eyes had been opened to God and the world. They could no more turn back to a pagan society than a butterfly could return to the cocoon. Paul's language aims intentionally at reinforcing the boundary between believers and those urging them to conform to society's standards. Paul presents their neighbors as sleeping under the delusion of "peace and security." This is quite possibly an ironic reference to the "Roman peace," which continued to motivate people to worship emperors in Greco-Roman worship. In his eyes, being in league with those gods was not a source of security, but grave danger.

### **Reflection**

In what ways does our faith in God and confidence in the ultimate outcome of history shed light on our day as we establish priorities, choose tasks, and encounter people? In what ways are we tempted to close our eyes and live from the more limited perspective of the world?

## **Matthew 25:14-30**

<sup>25:14</sup> "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup> to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup> The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup> In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup> But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup> After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents;

see, I have made five more talents.' <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>22</sup> And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' <sup>23</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>24</sup> Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; <sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' <sup>26</sup> But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? <sup>27</sup> Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup> For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. <sup>30</sup> As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

### **Commentary**

Here we find the master of a house entrusting his property to his servants before going on a journey of unspecified duration and purpose. Information lacking in Matthew's form of this parable (check out Luke 19 for an alternate view) is that the master gives no explicit instructions concerning the property before he leaves. The fact that the Greek name for measurement of weight (talentum) coincides with an English word for skill or ability (talent) is rather unfortunate, since it tends to have a limiting effect on the application of the parable—use your talents well! We should rather take it as all-encompassing: we should use whatever God has given us—our skills, yes, but also our property, money, position, influence, wits, etc.—to produce increase for God.

### **Reflection**

How do our energy and industry in looking after our own household compare with what we invest in growing God's household?

### **Psalm 123**

<sup>123:1</sup> To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!

<sup>2</sup> As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,  
as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,  
so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until he has mercy upon us.

<sup>3</sup> Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us,  
for we have had more than enough of contempt.

<sup>4</sup> Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease,  
of the contempt of the proud.

### **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.**