

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.

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

^{6:1} David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. ² David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. ³ They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart ⁴ with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. ⁵ David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. ^{12b} So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; ¹³ and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. ¹⁴ David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. ¹⁵ So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. ¹⁶ As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart. ¹⁷ They brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the LORD. ¹⁸ When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts, ¹⁹ and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

Commentary

David had decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Why? Possibly he wished to link his new capital city with the powerful symbol of God's covenant with Israel. God would remind David, however, that God's power could never be made to serve the ends of a human being, but rather the reverse must be true. The ark was the very throne on which YHWH was thought to sit in the midst of Israel. It had been carried ahead of the Israelite armies as they defeated their enemies. After the Philistines captured the ark in battle and took it home as a trophy, God wreaked havoc on the temple of Dagon and the Philistine cities of Ashdod and Gath (1 Samuel 5). The power broke out again against Uzzah, who had reached out with his hand to steady the ark on a bumpy stretch of road. His death on the spot reinforced the impression that danger resided in not treating the ark and the God it represented with the

utmost reverence and on the exact terms dictated by God. When the ark was finally placed in the house of Obed-edom and the family prospered while it was in their care, David was emboldened to take the ark to his own house in an extravagant procession. After the procession, David was reproached for dishonoring himself in the eyes of his maidservants. He responded by saying that he depended wholly on God for his standing, not upon image consultants.

Reflection

Why would God's promise entail both promise and danger? What contemporary parallels to the sacred aspects of this story can we legitimately attribute to God today? What meaning do these two aspects have for you? Since David refused to protect his image where honoring God is concerned, in what forms does this tension between self-image and being faithful to God present itself to us?

Ephesians 1:3-14

^{1:3} Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Commentary

The letter to the church in Ephesus opens with this expansive paragraph celebrating God's favor toward the Christian community. The form of the paragraph is that of "blessing" (*barakha* in Hebrew), a subject familiar from synagogue liturgies and from Hellenistic-Jewish hymns. Noteworthy in this blessing is the emphasis on God's "will," "purpose," "plan," and "pleasure," as well as on the end for which God has "destined" the believers. The author offers an answer to the conundrum of life's meaning and purpose in this outline of God's will for humanity. This purpose is summed up in the word *grace*, which signifies here God's desire to bring benefit to humankind. Also noteworthy is the repetition of the phrase "to the praise of God's glory/glorious favor." In the Greco-Roman world, generosity led naturally and necessarily to the praise of the giver, to the spreading abroad of the virtuous character of the giver by the recipients, and thus to increase the giver's reputation. To fail to respond to favor was to be

ungrateful. Having received so many gifts from God as well as assurance of gifts to come, the believer is obliged to honor God and live in recognition of God's goodness and generosity.

Reflection

What do you think is God's purpose for you? In this season of your life? For your whole life? Given the importance of returning gratitude to match the favor shown, to what extent do our lives (our witness, our service, our worship) reflect the value we place on God's gifts?

Mark 6:14-29

^{6:14} King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him."
¹⁵ But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."
¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."
¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her.
¹⁸ For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."
¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not,
²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.
²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee.
²² When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it."
²³ And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom."
²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer."
²⁵ Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."
²⁶ The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her.
²⁷ Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison,
²⁸ brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother.
²⁹ When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Commentary

The story of Jesus' ministry pauses as Mark turns to describe the end of John the Baptist's ministry. John's death is presented as a possible explanation for Jesus' miraculous powers, but the similarity of John's and Jesus' message (a call to repentance) might have contributed to the confusion felt among those who had not encountered the men personally. John was calling the people of Judea and Galilee to repentance, and in the process, he also indicted the tetrarch Herod Antipas on some serious charges. Antipas and his wife Herodias divorced their spouses and married each other, but Herodias had been married to Antipas' half-brother, Philip, so Antipas had married his half-brother's wife while he was still alive. This was a union explicitly forbidden in Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21. No one, in John's view, was above the law. Antipas recognized the potential John's charge had of creating popular resistance to his rule—a rule already rendered unpopular by Antipas' disregard for Jewish law in other matters. Josephus

records that after John's death, the local population was indignant with Antipas for having John killed, for they regarded him as an honorable and true prophet. John's fate prefigured the Messiah's death as well as the persecution that would befall the disciples who were called to witness for God's truth in a world where it was not welcome by those in power.

Reflection

Why do you think John was led to denounce such powerful people like Antipas and Herodias, when letting it slide might have added years to his ministry? When have you been in a situation where you felt you should speak up for God's standards in the face of those who did not want to hear the truth?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 24

- ¹ The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
- ² for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.
- ³ Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
- ⁴ Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
**who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.**
- ⁵ They will receive blessing from the LORD,
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
- ⁶ Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah
- ⁷ Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.
- ⁸ **Who is the King of glory?**
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle.
- ⁹ **Lift up your heads, O gates!**
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.
- ¹⁰ Who is this King of glory?
**The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory. Selah**

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