

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.

Exodus 32:1-14

^{32:1} When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." ² Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." ³ So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" ⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD." ⁶ They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel. ⁷ The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; ⁸ they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" ⁹ The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. ¹⁰ Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation." ¹¹ But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" ¹⁴ And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

Commentary

How quickly they had forgotten! In their impatience and forgetfulness, they turned to Aaron to create gods they could see, in direct violation of the first two commandments. Moses

intervened on behalf of the rebellious people. These are “your people,” he reminded God, “whom you brought out of the land of Egypt.” He also reminded God of the promise made so long ago to Abraham: “Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind.” Besides, he argued, what would the Egyptians say? And God was persuaded. However, today’s disciples are just as susceptible to the lure of the “golden calf.”

Reflection

Can we conceive of any loving person, human or divine, who would not budge in response to a plea from a loved one? Can we affirm that both “God is love” and that “God never changes?”

Philippians 4:1-9

^{4:1} Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. ² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Commentary

This final chapter of Philippians reiterates many of the epistle’s themes. Despite his imprisonment and separation from his beloved church, Paul expresses his joy and calls the people to “rejoice.” The cause for rejoicing even in the midst of all of their dissent: the nearness of God. Paul may not be present, but God is always at hand. For Paul, this is always a present reality and a future promise. The presence of God negates the need to worry (again, addressing the present as well as the future); God, their peace, is in control. Finally, Paul offers himself as an example of Christian steadfastness in the faith. The list of virtues he presents is unique to this letter, although the use of such a list is common in Paul’s writings.

Reflection

What things tend to worry you? What would help to relax and let the peace of God “guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus?”

Matthew 22:1-14

^{22:1} Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.'⁵ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.'¹⁰ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹² and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen."

Commentary

A similar parable is told by Luke (14:16-24), but with a decidedly happier outcome. The invited guests in Luke's account all offered acceptable excuses (according to the law), along with their regrets, to the founder of the feast. The house owner (angry, but not enraged) responded by extending the invitation to the "poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." The house was filled, but the invited guests would find no place. Luke's rendering exemplifies the inclusion of the outcast and dispossessed in the all-embracing good news of Jesus Christ. Matthew's account is more allegorical, emphasizing the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and the opening of God's realm to the Gentiles. The brutality of Matthew's version is as startling for us as it undoubtedly was for its original audience.

Reflection

Has anything prevented you from responding fully to God's invitation?

Responsive Psalter

Psalms 106:1-6, 19-23

^{106:1} Praise the LORD! O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

² Who can utter the mighty doings of the LORD, or declare all his praise?

³ Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times.

- ⁴ Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people; help me when you deliver them;
- ⁵ that I may see the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may glory in your heritage.
- ⁶ Both we and our ancestors have sinned; we have committed iniquity, have done wickedly.
- ¹⁹ They made a calf at Horeb and worshiped a cast image.
- ²⁰ They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.
- ²¹ They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt,
- ²² wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.
- ²³ Therefore he said he would destroy them-- had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them.

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.