

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.

Genesis 18:1-15

¹ The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³ He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵ Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on – since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." ⁶ And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." ⁷ Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." ¹⁰ Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" ¹³ The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁵ But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

Commentary

Sarah is finding it ridiculous to think of bearing a child at her advanced age. She declares that she is 'old' and the writer of the text gives the reader information about her having ceased menstruating. One might remember that God had spoken such an 'outlandish' promise to Abraham in which he also laughed to himself, asking essentially the same questions (Gen. 17:16-17) as Sarah has in verse 12. But God makes the promised future possible. God serves as

the source of hope in situations where the way into the future seems entirely blocked off. God gives shape to possibilities when all around us seems impossible. The active engagement of God in the midst of the problems of daily life opens up the future rather than closing it down.

Reflection

Have you ever faced a difficult situation and thought that it was bigger than God? Have you ever experienced God at work in your life bringing about impossible things?

Romans 5:1-8

¹ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Commentary

In this letter to the Romans, Paul seems to present a benefit inherent in justification as peace with God. The concept of peace includes the idea of our human soul's health, happiness and well-being in God. Peace with God is our status of reconciled relationship with God through Christ.

In Christ we have entered into a reconciled state of grace in which Christians rejoice in hope of the glory of God. The concept of reconciliation as a paradigm of being at peace with God is central to the Bible, primarily the action of Jesus on the Cross and restoration of divine human relationships with God. Thus in Christ, reconciliation is known as the fulfilment of God's will, communion and harmony. This is entrance and access of God's grace having been redeemed or sanctified. The unavoidable participation in the suffering and afflictions of life cultivates true Christian faith in patience and hope. This suffering is understood in the context of events and interactions designed to show the profit of justification. Believers therefore rejoice in suffering as a show of their love for God and participation in the justification experiences of Christ.

Reflection

What does living with 'God's peace' mean to you? Would you say you have this peace? Where and when in your life has suffering produced good, lovely and faithful characteristics becoming of a Christian?

Matthew 9:35 - 10:8

^{9:35} Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.

³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

^{10:1} Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment."

Commentary

The harvest is a frequent symbol for eschatological judgment, used elsewhere by Matthew and other writers in early Judaism and the New Testament. The disciples' mission is seen as an eschatological event. As such, it is God's act, through involving human workers rather than the angels as God's agents. The disciples' mission is not voluntary activity initiated by them; rather, they are chosen, authorized, and sent by God through Christ. Matthew regards Jesus' mission as continuing in the work of the disciples, who are given the authority to speak and act in Jesus' name, to continue doing the same deeds of power Jesus himself has done. Like the Gospel as a whole, these words of Jesus frustrate efforts to make neat distinctions between the past of Jesus' historical ministry and the present of Jesus' continuing ministry and presence in the work of his disciples.

Reflection

Do you believe you are a part in Jesus' ongoing ministry? Why or why not? How do you live out your discipleship? Do you speak and act in Jesus' name? If so, where and when? If not, why not?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

116:1 I love the Lord, who has heard
my voice and my supplications,
2 and has inclined his ear to me
whenever I called.

12 What shall I return to the Lord
for all my benefits?
13 **I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord,**
14 I will pay my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.
15 **Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his faithful ones.**
16 O Lord, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the child of your handmaid.
You have loosed my bonds.
17 **I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the Lord.**
18 I will pay my vows to the Lord,
in the presence of all his people,
19 **in the courts of the house of the Lord,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise 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.**